

AUSTRALIAN ABUSE REPORT DEEPLY FLAWED

The following analysis is the work of Catholic League president Bill Donohue and Catholic League director of communications Rick Hinshaw; Donohue has a Ph.D. in sociology and Hinshaw has an M.A. in political science:

On October 6, Cardinal George Pell will appear in a Melbourne court on trumped up sexual abuse charges. The media will no doubt turn its attention to a report issued in August by the Centre for Global Research at RMIT University, Melbourne, "Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church." It offers what it calls an "interpretive review of the literature and public inquiry reports" on the subject. Its reach is wide: it offers biblical and historical analysis, and covers many nations.

By any measure, the report is deeply flawed and highly politicized. It is also poorly edited—the exact wording on various subjects is repeated several times. Quite frankly, it is one of the most sophomoric attempts to deal with the issue of clergy sexual abuse ever published.

The authors of the report are two embittered ex-priests. Their goal, it is plain to see, is to justify a state takeover of the Catholic Church.

Desmond Cahill is lead author. In 2012, he testified before a committee of the Parliament of Victoria on the subject of sexual abuse. His agenda includes many reforms, ranging from an end to mandatory priestly celibacy to a fundamental restructuring of the priesthood. Most of all he wants to neuter the Church's authority. "The church is incapable of reform," he declares, "so the state will have to do it."

Co-author Peter Wilkinson was one of the founders of the dissident Australian group Catholics for Renewal. Writing in

the online publication *Catholica*, he expressed “a growing conviction that the Church must now rely on outside secular authorities to give it moral guidance.”

In this report, the two authors use similar language. They state that “Catholic bishops around the world have been found to be incapable of addressing the problem of clerical sexual abuse on their own.” They also argue that the Holy See “has never committed itself to resolving the issue of child sexual abuse within the ranks of the Catholic Church.” Furthermore, the “Code of Canon Law has not been and remains clearly not up to the task of dealing with the sex abuse scandal.”

All of this is done to justify state control of the Church.

There is much about the Church they find objectionable. For example, they oppose the autonomy of diocesan bishops and the “monarchy” of the pope. They find the seal of the confessional extremely problematic, and manage to link it to the abuse scandal. Ditto for celibacy. In both cases, the link they establish is pitifully weak, if not non-existent.

This is particularly telling given that just recently Australia’s Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended that the government overrule the seal of the confessional when it comes to reporting sexual abuse of minors. “Clergy should not be able to refuse to report because the information was received during confession,” the Commission stated. Both of the men were consultants to this Royal Commission.

The Commission’s final report is due in December. It will be interesting to see if the enthusiasm these two consultants have for a state takeover of the Church is one of the recommendations.

To make its case against the seal of confession, the authors seize upon the 1962 Vatican document, *Crimen Sollicitationis* (the Crime of Solicitation). “Priests often identified

potential victims and their vulnerability in the confessional, leading them to begin the grooming process.”

This interpretation is beyond flawed: there is absolutely no support for it in the document. In fact, the policy that was crafted not only did not give a priest protection if he engaged in sexual solicitation, it allowed for him to be thrown out of the priesthood. It also made it clear that if the penitent were to tell someone what happened in the confessional (perhaps another priest), he or she had 30 days to report the incident to the bishop or face excommunication. If anything, this proves how serious the Vatican was about an offense—it threatened to punish the penitent for not turning in the guilty priest.

The authors know that if celibacy were the cause of sexual abuse, there never would have been a sudden increase in offenses beginning in the 1960s, so the best they can do is to say it plays a role “when combined with other risk factors.” The truth is their opposition to celibacy reflects their politics, not the data.

In fact, Cahill’s push for ending mandatory priestly celibacy goes back more than 40 years; he links it to his demand for “a fundamental restructuring of the (priestly) ministry.” He made this statement in 1976 in a letter explaining his resignation from the priesthood. Thus, it had nothing to do with the sexual abuse of minors. Of course, if the Church doesn’t make this change, he is quite content with the state authorizing it.

In 2012, Cahill’s politics were featured again when he described the Church as “a holy and unholy mess, except where religious sisters or laypeople are in charge, for example schools and welfare agencies.” He called for “a religious sister with expertise in psychology and religious formation” to chair a group that would “review the selection and education of candidates for the priesthood.” He also called

for a national or archdiocesan synod, “with full lay involvement...to deal with the theology and practice of the Catholic priesthood in and for the new millennium.” Anyone but the bishops.

Wilkinson also wants more lay involvement in the selection of bishops, as well as “full gender balance” in running every aspect of Church governance. Indeed, the dissident group he helped found, Catholics for Renewal, sent an “Open Letter” to Pope Benedict XVI in 2011 deploring the “patriarchal attitude towards women within our church.” The group even went so far as to challenge papal infallibility.

All of this background information is necessary to evaluate how the authors explain the causes of the sexual abuse scandal. Given their ideology, it is not surprising to learn that nowhere do they confront the overwhelming evidence which shows that *most of the sexual abuse of minors was committed by homosexuals*. This is typical of dissidents in the U.S. as well as Australia.

We know from the best data in the United States that 81 percent of the victims were male and 78 percent were postpubescent. When men have sex with men, that’s called homosexuality. Furthermore, the 2011 report by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, cited by Cahill and Wilkinson, showed that in the United States *less than five percent* of the sexual abuse was committed by pedophiles. In short, there never was a pedophilia scandal in the Catholic Church—it was driven mostly by homosexuals.

So how do the authors get around the obvious? The Church’s “terrorisation” against masturbation, they contend, caused offending priests and religious to forego masturbation and opt instead for sexual abuse of minors; this reflected their “struggle for sexual purity.” But if this bizarre explanation were true—the “If I can’t masturbate, I’ll settle for raping a minor” thesis—why does it apparently apply mostly to

homosexual priests, and not, by and large, to heterosexual priests?

In several parts of the report, Cahill and Wilkinson seem aware that homosexual priests are the real problem, but they don't have the courage to say so. So they blame the Church's "homophobic environment," which they say is especially prevalent in the seminaries. It is homophobia, they claim, which denied "those with a gay orientation the moral and psychological space to successfully and maturely work through their sexual identity."

But if homophobia accounts for the sexual abuse of minors, why didn't the scandal take place in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s? After all, would not everyone agree that that would be the most likely time, in recent history, for so-called homophobia to balloon? Similarly, why did the explosion in priestly sexual abuse take place when sexual norms in the seminaries were relaxed, if not abandoned altogether? Paradoxically, even the authors offer evidence that makes our point, not theirs.

Citing the 2011 John Jay report, they readily admit that "Men ordained in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s did not generally abuse before the 1960s or 1970s. Men ordained in the 1960s and the early 1970s engaged in abuse behaviour much more quickly after their entrance into ministry."

Apparently, Cahill and Wilkinson have a hard time connecting the dots. Prior to the sexual revolution of the 1960s, which hit every institution in the Western world, including the Catholic Church, sexual abuse was not a major problem. Why? Precisely because of the reigning ethic of sexual reticence. It is when the lid came off that the rate of sexual abuse soared.

In other words, the more tolerant the Church became of homosexuality, and the less "homophobic" it became, the more homosexual priests began preying on young men. Not to

acknowledge this is intellectually dishonest.

The authors are so thoroughly compromised that they make the positively absurd statement that “the majority of offenders were heterosexual even if they abused young boys.” This is twice wrong: (a) most of the victims were not “young boys”—they were adolescents, and (b) it is delusional to say that same-sex acts are acts of heterosexuality.

Finally, the authors take an unfair shot at Cardinal George Pell. “One reason why the Australian Church was never able to develop a national strategy accepted by all bishops was that the largest archdiocese of Melbourne, headed by Archbishop (as he then was) George Pell,” they say, “was determined to develop its own strategy and policies.”

In fact, Pell had developed the Melbourne Protocol because he was impatient with the failure of the Australian bishops to develop an effective national response. He was proactive in meeting his responsibility as a diocesan bishop to deal with the crisis.

It is not hard to conclude that Cahill and Wilkinson are not objective researchers. They have an agenda: They seek to destroy separation of church and state, allowing the government to police the Catholic Church. Only when the Church’s teachings and governing structure are changed to meet secular objectives, will these malcontents be satisfied. But not to worry, the Church has survived these power grabs before, and it will survive this one as well.