



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM
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BISHOP GEOFFREY ROBINSON
CONFRONTING POWER AND SEX IN THE CHURCH
CHANGING THE CULTURE
MERCY CENTER
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Introduction

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

[Applause] Thank you all. And it is certainly a privilege for me to be able to introduce Bishop Geoffrey Robinson to all of you who are here today. Bishop Robinson was born in Australia, 1937 - I am sure he doesn't mind my telling that - and he attended Catholic elementary school and Marist High School in Australia, and then he got his philosophy degree in St. Columba College, but went on to the seminary and received all of his philosophy and theology training in Rome, and also, besides getting a licentiate in each of those fields of study, he obtained a doctorate in Canon Law during his time in Rome. He was ordained then in December of 1961 and returned to Australia, where he functioned in a very effective way as a parish priest for almost 20 years in three different parishes.

But at the same time he worked as a parish priest, he also lectured at the seminary in Canon Law, and was also during that time, secretary and then subsequently president of the Canon Law Society of Australia. He also, somehow, managed to publish during these times, these years, when he is engaged in parish work, and in teaching, and among his publications he has articles on divorce and nullity in the Catholic Church, an interesting book: *Travels in Sacred Places*. Also, wrote a book about the Gospel of Mark, *A Change of Mind*. In 2010 he published a book called *Love's Urgent Longings*, and, finally, although it was sooner than that, it's the last one, I want to mention is, 2007 he published this book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*.

And the publication of that book was brought about because of an experience that he had with the Bishops' Conference of Australia. Because of his pastoral experience, and his keen ability, very great ability, to minister to people, but also because of his skills in Canon Law, he was appointed the Chair of the Bishop's Conference in Australia of their Committee for the Protection of Children, and led that committee very diligently; and they prepared their procedures for the care and of children, as has happened in our country with our own bishop's conference. But Bishop Robinson was more concerned than just to develop procedures for identifying and dealing with the perpetrators of sexual abuse. He wanted to get down to the heart of the problem, because as Pope John Paul II had said, "This abuse in our Church is a cancer on the body of the Church, and we have to cut it out somehow." The only way we can do that is by discovering some of the root causes. And it's that which brought him, well after the bishops of Australia refused to pursue it this way, and to go to the heart of the problem, he resigned as the chair of that committee, and then he began to work on this book that I mentioned, and again, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*.

And it's that message that he's going to bring to us here this afternoon. And for that I am very grateful to him for taking the time to be among us, to share this message with us; and I am sure you will feel very grateful as you hear him proclaim this afternoon. And so I now present Bishop Geoffrey Robinson. (Applause)

Confronting Power and Sex in the Church: Changing the Culture

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson

It's good to be here. As your friend, Tom Gumbleton has said, I'm going to address the issue of abuse, but I'm trying to look at the deeper causes. In responding to abuse there are three things to do:

- Firstly, you have to reach out to the victims.
- Secondly, you have to confront, remove, and, whatever you need to do with the offenders, to make absolutely sure that they don't offend again.
- There's a third thing you have to do then, is to study what are the causes of this? How can we prevent it in the future? And that's what my talk today will be about.

Allow me a few preliminary remarks. Firstly, there are some factors that are true of all offenders, not just priests but all offenders in this field. There are some factors that will be unique to each individual, but in between, there can be factors that are true of a particular society, a particular group of people or in our case, a particular Church. And we need to look at the culture as it were of that church and we need to find anything within which is unhealthy, and could contribute to the problem of abuse. And there is such a thing as a Catholic culture, which has its very good and beautiful things but it also has some things in it which are not healthy. And we need to identify them and to change them.

Abuse is most likely to occur, I believe, when three things come together:^{1/}

1. Unhealthy psychological factors
2. Unhealthy ideas
3. And unhealthy living environment

And it's when those three come together, that they can create a murky world out of which abuse arises. Now there have been vast quantities of studies of the first factor, unhealthy psychological factors, not necessarily crystal clear conclusions, because it's a difficult field, and there's no one single psychological profile of the offender. There are indications, things to look for, but anyway, there's a lot of material on it. There's far less material on identifying unhealthy ideas and unhealthy living environment. And so I am going to concentrate in a particular way on those two in what I say today.

I suggest that the major fault of the Church in this field is that it refuses to look at any teaching, particularly but even any law that might contribute. We can approach the problem in one of two ways. We can either start from the fact of abuse, and try to study it, and then follow the argument wherever it leads - wherever; and if it causes us to query, and to question certain laws, or even certain solemn teachings of the Church, then we must be free to do so. The other approach is to say these teachings were given by councils and by popes; they cannot be changed; therefore, even in studying abuse, you may not question them. And this I suggest is the major difference between the approach I adopted in the book I published, and in some of the responses that I have had to that book from authorities in the Church, a refusal even to look at the teachings, or even in some cases, the laws.

So I am going to identify twelve factors that contribute either to abuse, or that we must do at the same time, contribute not to abuse, but to the response to abuse, because as everyone here knows, that has been a massive part of the problem. Indeed many query where the greater scandal is to be found: in the abuse itself, or in the way the Church has responded to the abuse. So we must look at some of those factors too.

1. THE ANGRY GOD

The very first factor - and I put it first - is this: The Angry God. Now that may seem far away from abuse, but in any religion at all, everything depends on the kind of God that is being worshipped. It's the single most important fact about any religious system, because every aspect of the system will depend on it. And within the Catholic Church there has been a long history of the Angry God. The Inquisition is probably the most extreme example, but it's far from the only one; and it's something that still around today. And this created a Church in which, despite the talk of love, practice was based too much on fear rather than on love; and authorities always have the support of the Angry God for their work, words and actions. Some people received a horrendous God; others not. For myself, I received something of both in my childhood, a bit of a schizophrenic God in that sense, sometimes angry, sometimes loving; and I

received in particular what I've called since, the God of the high jump; that is, I was told that there was a moral level that I should attain, a moral of goodness; and that if I worked hard and practiced, I would clear the bar. Problem! When I did work hard, and practiced, and cleared the bar, they put the damn thing up on me. (Laughter) Now that, when you think about it, is a very unhealthy spirituality. No one should ever make young people, children, feel a failure that they are not measuring up; and when I look back there was too much of that in my own life: "You're not measuring up. If you worked harder, you would clear the bar." The ultimate power of course was Jesus; and I could never, never jump that high; and that could leave you feeling: it's bad spirituality and it's bad psychology.

Spirituality was then too often seen in terms of self denial, self abasement, rejection of the world. And the Christian life was too often seen as consisting overwhelmingly in right behavior before a judgmental God. And so, a constricting guilt could play too great a part in the Catholic life. I'll come back to this, because I think that the Angry God is behind many of the factors that I will talk about.

2. MORAL IMMATURITY

But the second one follows from it: it's moral immaturity. Before a judgmental God the all important consideration was to avoid doing wrong things. But if human beings are to grow, then two things are necessary. First of all you must - yes - avoid wrong things. You do not grow by murdering, and stealing, and all sorts of other things. You do not grow that way. So, yes, you must do right things; but you must also take responsibility for your own actions.^{2/} Morality does not consist solely in doing right things; even moral, it consists in working out what is the right thing to do, what is the best thing to do, what is the most loving thing to do in any particular situation. If a 40 year old man is still, in all things, doing what his mother tells him to do, we know something is radically wrong. He hasn't grown up, he hasn't learned to take responsibility, and his growth has been seriously impaired. A one-sided insistence on doing the right thing to the detriment of actually thinking for oneself, and taking responsibility, produces immature human beings; and yet, in this Catholic culture, I feel there was too much of this: do the right thing; do what the pope tells you; do what the bishop tells you; do what the priest tells you; but don't think too much for yourself. That element could be missing in this culture that I am describing. Moral immaturity does not prepare people to cope with the many and varied temptations that will come to them during the course of their lifetime. And so it must be added to the list of factors contributing to the unhealthy climate in which abuse can occur. And the same immaturity has not helped authorities to respond to abuse.

3. Sex and the Angry God

Three follows from this: Sex and the Angry God. For centuries the Church taught that every sexual sin is a mortal sin. There are no venial sins in that field; they are all mortal sins.^{3/} According to that teaching, even deliberately deriving pleasure from thinking about sex was a mortal sin. You think I invent this? I can give you the places in the moral books that taught that two popes said that anyone who denied that should be reported to the Inquisition back in the Middle Ages.^{4/} (Laughter) It's a teaching that the Church, as it were, has gone a bit quiet on recently. (Laughter) Well it has! You don't hear it terribly often from the pulpit. I don't know. I don't go to all the churches you do, but even from the pope you don't hear it so often; but it has never been retracted. It is never been said that's not true any longer. It is never been said, "Sorry, we got that one wrong." And so it's been there particularly for an older generation; and particularly for that generation that we've seen, time and again on television, as offenders in this field of sexual abuse. Now this teaching fostered belief in an incredibly angry God. Remember, if God - take the case a man, lives a blameless life, and then one day, he deliberately takes pleasure in thinking about sex for five seconds, and then drops dead. (Laughter) Now it's a fictitious case, but hell, eternity of punishment in hell.

Now I do not believe in that God. I reject that God. If that were the only offer, I would be an atheist. But it's the logical conclusion from that: mortal sin. It's an incredibly angry God; and it's the teaching on sexual morality, more than anything else, that has kept alive the idea of the angry God within the Church. Belief in a so horrendously angry God, specifically in the field of sex, has been most significant in the unhealthy culture I am seeking to describe. It can lead to unhealthy attitude of sexuality being seen as dark, secretive and troublesome. It's plain unhealthy; and yet, so many of the priests who became offenders grew up with this teaching instilled into them from sister in the classroom, from the priest in the pulpit, and most certainly in the seminary.

Furthermore, this teaching helped to place the emphasis on the sexual sin against God. That was the mortal sin, rather than on the offense against the abused minor. And all too often, bishops and other authorities looked at the sexual sin - the mortal sin - and saw what had been done to the minor as somehow less important, because of this teaching behind it. It helps to explain both why the Catholic Church has had such an obsession with sexual matters, and dare I say it, still does in certain things that have been happening, even while I have been on tour here. And it has also helped to explain that attitude of moving priests around, because what do you do when there is a sexual sin? repentance, confession, absolution, total forgiveness; and then you start again. Quite insufficient attention was given to the harm caused to the minor. The preoccupation was with this MORTAL sin that had been committed.

I'd love to see, therefore the Church move away entirely from all of that teaching on sex, abandon it completely, the whole concept of natural and unnatural acts,^{5/} and all that's involved there, so that contraception is equally a mortal sin etc., etc. I'd love to see them move away from that to where, I believe, that Jesus was. Now, of all founders of major religions, Jesus said less about sex than any of the others. The Church has not exactly followed Him in that particular area. (Laughter) But He did. What did He say? Nothing directly on the subject. What He said was, "Love one another." And that was the basis for morality across the board: the sexual morality, the morality in all our dealings with other people. Love one another! And if we applied that principle to all sexual relationships, would we not have a far better sexual morality? Would we not have gotten rid of that horrendously angry God? And would we not have a basis on which to dialogue? (Applause) In other words, I see sexual morality as being about the growth of persons and of relationships. Sexual desire can cause harm, we all know that: rape, pedophilia, plus all the psychological violence, the deceit, the using of another person, all those many ways of sex hazards - real dangers. But it also has its beauty; and it can be used to do immense good. And if we had our whole sexual morality based on the growth of persons and the relationships, we could get somewhere.^{6/}

Last Tuesday, one week ago, I spoke at Temple University in Philadelphia - sorry, there was a film once called *If it's Tuesday it's Belgium*, and I feel very much like that but it really was last Tuesday, and it was in Philadelphia - and I had about 100 young people, and I taught some of these ideas, and then we had a lengthy discussion. Now, needless to say, they didn't agree with everything I said - I didn't expect them to - and I didn't try to convert them, I tried to get them thinking. And yet, on the basis of the growth of persons and relationships, we could talk, not with perfect agreement, but we could talk. Whereas, if I'd tried to give them the traditional teaching of the Church: everything's mortal, natural, unnatural, I would have gotten nowhere. They would have laughed me out of the room. And I believe that we can have that conversation with modern society, once we move to persons and relationships; and that fundamental principle of Jesus: love one another in everything you do.

4. THE MALE CHURCH

The fourth point: The Male Church. Well, (Laughter) the sexual abuse of minors is overwhelmingly a male problem. Yes, women have offended; I hope you are aware of that. Women have offended; so they can't afford to say it doesn't concern us; it does. But, the vast majority of offenses have been by men - something like over 95%. In relation to the response to abuse then, the temptation to subject all other matters to the overriding importance of one's own good name and honor, with the consequent hiding of anything that would bring shame, is also a largely male concern, with a long history behind it in many so-called honor, shame societies. Again, I am not going to let women off the hook entirely. They too can be very keen on preserving their own name; but overwhelming that too is a male problem. Sexual abuse has arisen in a Church in which all power is in the hands of men; where all the dogmas, teachings, laws, customs and even attitudes are those of men; all authority is in the hands of men; and all the imagery is masculine. For after all the talk, God is still fundamentally seen as male. Indeed, even men's ways of being human beings have been seen as normative for all human beings. Women have had no voice in articulating the Church's doctrine, morals, or law. Banned from the pulpit and the altar, their wisdom has not been permitted to interpret the Gospel, nor their spirituality, to lead the Church in prayer.^{7/} It is surely reasonable to assume that if women had been given far greater importance, and a much stronger voice, the Church would not have seen the same level of abuse, and would have responded far better to this overwhelmingly male problem.

5. A CULTURE OF CELIBACY

Fifth point: A culture of celibacy. The predominant culture has not just been male, it's been celibate male; for all power is in the hands of celibate males. In the atmosphere created by this fact, celibacy was always held up as some kind of ideal; and the only concession made was that in the words of Paul, "It is better to marry than to burn," which is not a very great consolation for anyone, is it? (Laughter) So that marriage was seen to involve, somehow, an element of failure to strive for perfection. Anyway, I'll leave that. (Much laughter) I'm not suggesting that this preference for celibacy is the sole or even predominant cause of abuse. You know out there in the popular domain - yes, it's seen as almost the sole cause. It is not! There is abundant evidence that you can't possibly say that. But, having said that, I do believe it's made a significant contribution, both directly and indirectly. It's suddenly been a major contributor to the other massive problem that the Church has not yet begun to face, and that is the sexual abuse of adult females. In all the years I've worked in abuse, I met many who had abused as minors; but I also met many - and it was true abuse - many women who had been abused by priests.

Actually, celibacy itself is not the problem: it's obligatory celibacy, the law of celibacy. A celibacy that is freely embraced out of a passionate love for God is not unhealthy. The celibacy of a Mother Theresa, of a Francis of Assisi, of many other people, is not unhealthy, because it's embraced out of a passionate love for God and for people. What is unhealthy, I believe, is that celibacy that is unwanted, unaccepted and unassimilated. What happens is a young man, we have to say, is filled with an ideal of priesthood as a means of helping people, of serving God, helping people, and embraces it, and goes through the seminary and is ordained. And it's all presented to him as one package. And it's only a couple of years after he's ordained that he actually unwraps the package, and has a good look at what's inside, and then discovers that some elements are not as attractive as others. And one of those which can then be quite unattractive is the obligation of celibacy.

It's a common place among priests that they're swept up in the ideal throughout the seminary; and it's only afterwards that they sort of realize, "Good God! What have I done?" and find themselves in this situation. Now, you're well aware of the many, many priests who then left the priesthood for this reason. But, believe me, there are many, many who have remained, but whose attitude is very similar. Celibacy for them is something that they've got to do; but it's unaccepted, unwanted and unassimilated; so that's it's always something of a negative factor. Now, that is an unhealthy factor in this culture that I am seeking to describe. It can contribute to unhealthy psychology, for example, it can cause depression; it can contribute to unhealthy ideas, for example, misogyny; and can create an unhealthy living environment, for example, loneliness.

The preparation for a life of celibacy in the seminary and novitiates was negative: "Don't do this! Avoid that!" and there was little assistance in building healthy friendships, especially with women. The only answer given to the problems that this creates was that God would provide all the love and friendship they could ever desire. And yet, it was not enough for authorities to say that priests and religious freely took on the obligation of celibacy, that divine love is abundant, and that all I need to do is pray harder. This undervaluing of the importance of human love and friendship contains serious dangers. Given sufficient motivation, some young people might be prepared to embrace a life without genital sex. But no young persons in their right mind should ever embrace a life without love. Sadly, many priests and religious are living lives with a minimal sense of loving and being loved; and that is unhealthy. It can lead not only to some form of abuse, but also to other problems, such as alcoholism, misogyny, or the seeking of power and career. And the seeking of power and career can very easily be a substitute for sex.

Properly understood, celibacy is a gift, and it must be seriously be questioned whether it is possible to institutionalize a gift of God in the way the Catholic Church has through the law of celibacy. At the very least, if obligatory celibacy is to continue, it is essential that authorities should know far more about the lived reality of celibacy in the lives of priests and religious. Now, I've been a priest for 51 years. I've lived throughout Vatican Council, post Vatican Council. I've lived throughout the abuse crises. No one has ever, ever asked me how do you live this celibacy? "What does it actually mean in your life?" "Would you mind filling in this questionnaire," you know, "with all these questions, and give answers anonymously?" "No one will ever know who wrote it, but let's ask all priests and religious for a real assessment of how they have lived this, and we'll have a good look at it." I suggest that no one's asked that, because no one wants to know the answers. (Laughter) And I think if celibacy is to continue, this to me would be an

absolute prerequisite. Let's know the reality, not talk about, you know, the greatest jewel in the crown. you know, that's the language that two popes have used. Let's look at the absolute reality here.

I must mention the response to abuse in this same context. It seems obvious to me that celibate males taken as a whole rather than as an individual will not respond to the abuse of children with the instinctive fierceness and passion of people who have their own children. So celibacy has also contributed to the poor response.

6. ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXIS

Number Six: Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis. Far too often, orthodoxy, that is, right beliefs, has been put before orthopraxis, which is, right actions. So that, if a priest is loyal to all papal teachings, his moral mistakes can be easily forgiven; but if he is not loyal to even one teaching, no amount of good actions will redeem him. A pedophile priest can be forgiven, but not someone who is unsound on contraception, or the ordination of women.^{8/} (Laughter and then loud applause) I'm thinking there in a very particular way of the case of Sister Margaret Mary McBride; and she was jumped on from on high by a pack of pachyderms. (Laughter) - not these ones - while a pedophile priest in the same diocese received none of the same condemnation as she did. Orthodoxy comes before orthopraxis; and it's part of the unhealthy culture. It reflects the unhealthy idea that faith is intellectual ascent to propositions rather than a response of my whole being to God's love. We need to remember that Jesus said, "By this shall all people know that you are my disciples; that you love one another." He did not say, "By this shall all people know that you are my disciples that you all recite the same creed." When I die and go to heaven, God will not ask me, "Did you get all the answers right?" God will ask me, "Did you love people? Did you reach out to them? Did you try to help them?" I think God can forgive all sorts of things in wrong belief; but it's our actions that God is more interested in. And yet, there has been this emphasis on orthodoxy and a far lesser emphasis on orthopraxis.

7. THE MYSTIQUE OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Number Seven: The mystique of the priesthood. Now I'm getting to really interesting things. It will change things in this way. I understand there are a lot of priests in the audience here. Now they will perhaps have some difficulty with number seven and number eight. I don't think the laity present will. Let's see! The mystique of the priesthood.

The letter to the Hebrews, 5:1 says, "Every high priest, chosen from among human beings, is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf." Now in the Greek original, it's every high priest taken from among human beings.^{9/} The implication is you have a hundred human beings here; you take one to be a teacher, one to be a bus driver, one to be this, one to be that, and one to be a priest. And he's one like all the others. But along came St. Jerome, who did the *Vulgate* translation into Latin of the Bible; and he translated that phrase, which simply says *taken*, and he translated it as *taken up*, as *ex iminibus assumptus*, taken up from human beings; implying taken up to some higher level, taken out of humanity somehow, and taken up to this higher level. And this helped to create this mystique of the priesthood, and to a lesser but real extent, of religious life as well. Countless Catholic people have experienced this attitude in the priests they have dealt with. One or two of you may have even experienced some priest's thinking. (Laughter) Now it's exactly the kind of unhealthy idea that can contribute to abuse. And sexual abuse is only one of the ways in which it can make priests or religious think that they are special, unlike other human beings, and so not subject to the restrictions that bind others.^{10/} Furthermore, the privileges of this mystique will always be attractive to many inadequate personalities. It also gives priests and religious privileged access to minors. Only a priest can knock on the door of total strangers and expect to be invited in in the same way. It gives them privileged access and the powerful spiritual authority making it much easier to abuse.

Can I tell you one little story? Why am I wearing a gray suit? Well, it came from my work in sexual abuse. I've met with as many victims as I could; and one of the things they told me, "When a priest goes out to abuse, he puts on his full black suit, because it gives him the greatest possible authority." That's not a criticism of any priest here wearing a black suit; it's my story; and it explains why I haven't worn a black suit since, and don't even possess one now, because, you know, I was working almost full time in this field; and I really didn't want to appear in front of whole groups of victims in the very suit that, in their mind, triggered the abuser.

It's never easy to change an ethos or a mystique; but this one must change, for it denies the essential humanity of the priest, and so it establishes a whole series of false relationships at the heart of the community. Priests and religious are ordinary human beings. This ought to be a most obvious statement; but authorities, priests, religious and Catholic people, all have much work to do in this field. I find that wherever there are priests or religious, trying their very best to climb down from the pedestal, there are always, not just Church authorities, but also Catholic people, telling them to get right back up there again. (Laughter)

Very shortly after I was ordained a bishop, I had a game of golf with this very upright Catholic gentleman; and I hit off on the first tee, "Good shot, my lord." (Much laughter) I said, "We're on a golf course; my names Geoff." "Yes, my lord." (Laughter) And that went on all the way around; and among other things, it was the most brilliant gamesmanship: put me off my game entirely. (Much laughter)

There is a most dangerous insistence that priests and religious must be perfect; and if they can't manage that, which they can't, then they must at least appear to be perfect. And that's getting really dangerous when you've got to appear to be perfect. I mean, some really bad things are going on at that point. An extraordinary number of people believe the naive idea that priests and religious are celibate, so that can't really have sexual desires and feelings the way that the rest of us do. I have news for you: they do and always have, even in the good old days. One of the really worrying factors for me in the Church today is young, some, not all, some young priests who seem to love this culture. It seems to be one of the big attractions; and that I find very unhealthy and disturbing.

Now all priests have a task here. There's none of us who can say, "We've got this all overcome. There's nothing of clericalism in me." We all have a job, and so does each diocese, you know, to really look at this within the diocese and help priests to understand. You know, these days, I would love to see every younger priest do a course, you know, we do a course for absolutely everything, and courses don't solve problems, but nevertheless, I'd like them to see them do the course simply on how to work with people, rather than about them, (Applause) to do a course on the way to work with people, to accept their ideas. (Applause) You know, it's almost sad that you need a course to do that; and yet, there are things that one can learn; and I'd love to see it happen.

8. PROFESSIONALISM

Number Eight: Professionalism. Over several decades there has been a strong move towards greater professionalism in most fields of human activity; but priests and religious have limped a long way behind. Their attitude has often been one symptom of the idea of being above other human beings, and so not needing the same ordinary human assistance and controls that others do. In the light of all that has happened, there is a crying need that priests and religious should rapidly catch up with the wider society in this field of being truly professional in all they do.

Among the elements that need serious and immediate consideration are:

- Better selection of processes of candidates, with a selection panel wider than just clerics, and with full use of a psychological assessment.
- A training that places as much emphasis on human development as on religious and priestly development. If you want a good priest, first find a good human being. But if you don't give me a good human being, then I can't really build a good priest on top of that. Over all the years I worked as a bishop, I received many complaints about priests, some justified, some, I believe not; but what struck me was that very few were about the priest's priestly duties; all the criticisms were about the human being, you know, "He's rude! He's late! He's this! He's that," you know, ordinary human things. Or, "He relates to us only as a superior to an inferior." All, even not the nasty things, but simply he's an inadequate human being, and can't really relate to people, or in a particular way can't relate to women. So that I would want to see in the seminary a real attention given to what sort of human beings have we got here, and a complete abandonment of the idea that we can take almost any human being, teach him theology, teach him some prayers, and ordain him. You know, we've got to give more attention to the human being.^{11/}
- Then, under this heading of professionalism, a proper professional appraisal every five years. Oh yeah! (Laughter) Isn't this done now in most professions? Teachers, for example, I know most

certainly in my country, all Catholic teachers have this sort of appraisal every five years. I've had one that I set up for myself. No, sorry, I didn't pick them; it was set up properly. (Laughter) It was a bit scary. It was, I mean, they didn't just tell me nice things. They had some truths to tell me; and yet, it was one of the best things I've ever done in my life. The support it gave was far greater than any superior coming around, and patting me on the head, and saying, "Good boy," or something. You know, this was real assistance; and yes, it needs to happen. Priests, these days, is it true here too, they are appointed for a six year term in the parish? Okay, I'd make it once every six years. I'd do it in the fifth year of their appointment, so that there was a year to follow, in which they could attend, and there could be a little bit of follow up, and then you'd have the decision to reappoint them or not at the end of the sixth year. But a proper professional appraisal. A spiritual director, but in addition, a supervisor, a different person, that is, a person with who the priest or religious can discuss their work, and how they have dealt with problematic situations. You know what I mean? "Someone came to see me. This was the problem she presented. This is what I said to her." The supervisor cannot say, "You stupid idiot! You should have done something different." That would be bad supervision, but can, you know, suggest ideas to me about problems that might arise that can help me to improve professionally, so that next time round I will do things better.

- In service training, with promotional renewal of an appointment, for example, as parish priest, dependent on regular attendance.
- A code of conduct that sets out expected and acceptable modes of conduct in various circumstances.
- A form of dress, for example, a distinctive tie that serves to identify the priest or religious, but is in conformity with modern usage, rather than go around in a full black suit, which sort of speaks to people of another age; why not something contemporary, but distinctive, so that people know that this is a priest, or this is a religious.
- And finally, attention to living conditions, such that a healthy social life is facilitated. You know, it is not healthy for a priest to live alone year after year. They can get cut off. It depends on the individual. Some will always live in the middle of the community, and relate to everyone, but others become loners, and that's dangerous.

Now even priests can have difficulty with what I have just said under these two headings. I know that I worked hard to introduce the appraisal in my own diocese in Sydney. The inevitable result: those priest who least needed it were very keen on doing it; (Laughter) those priests who most needed it would never borrow it. It has to become one day obligatory until its part of the furniture, just something you do, and something you're expected to do; and something that if you don't do, then you will not get an appointment. These sorts of things must come in.

A further consideration needs to be added. It is not healthy that any group of people should believe that they have a job for life no matter what they do. The Code of Canon Law makes provision for the removal of a parish priest when his ministry "has for some reason become harmful, or at least ineffective, even though this occurs without any serious fault on his part."^{12/} In the same way, there needs to be provision for the removal from the priesthood or religious life altogether of the person who, even without fault, has shown a radical unsuitability for that life. Indeed, there can be serious scandal in keeping such a person within the priesthood or religious life. Yes, there would need to be stringent safeguards to prevent injustice, but the good of the people must come first.

9. A POPE WHO CAN'T MAKE MISTAKES

Nine: A pope who can't make mistakes. Now I'm moving, in the next few, up to number nine. I am moving to things that got in the way of a decent response to abuse. I've named eight things that I feel contributed to the abuse itself. Some of them also contributed to the response, but now deal with things in a particular way affected the response. And the first, and the most important of them, I've listed as: "A pope who can't make mistakes." In theory, infallibility covers only a very restricted number of teachings solemnly proclaimed by the pope. In practice the mantle of infallibility extends to many other things in a phenomenon known as *creeping infallibility*. (Laughter) It extends to cover all teachings, all laws, all practice in which a significant amount of papal energy and prestige has been invested. So, if a pope has constantly talked about something in practice, you can't be against it, you can't question it. A classic example is the teaching on birth control. The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of 1968 lacked the technical requirements of infallibility; and yet, so much papal energy and prestige have been invested in this teaching that, for many people, it's quite unthinkable that the pope could be wrong; for such an admission

would seriously undermine all papal prestige - and that can never be allowed to happen. This makes it extremely difficult for a pope, or those whose own position is dependent on papal prestige, to admit that a pope has made a serious mistake on any serious matter. In a particular way, whether it be a solemn dogma, or an ordinary teaching, or merely an ancient law or practice, it would be extraordinarily difficult for a pope of today to state that most of his predecessors had been wrong. I've always think when a pope is elected, and he goes into the papal apartment, and he goes to sleep that night, and it's almost as if all the other popes are on the ceiling looking down, and "Don't you dare change anything that I said." (Laughter) It actually would require great courage for a pope to say, "Well, yes, all my predecessors were wrong." But this gets in the way; and as I said, it's my great problem, as in power and sex, with the question of infallibility. I see it, and I say it in the book, as the prison of the past; and that it wasn't evil people who put the Church in prison, the Church built the prison, put itself inside, locked the door, and then threw away the key. And it's that inability to be wrong. Now I can give up many rights, and still live a decent life, but I could not surrender my right to be wrong. I need that right ten times a day: "Sorry, I was mistaken; sorry, I was insensitive; sorry this; sorry that." We've got to have that right. If we had to be right all the time, it would be the almost impossible burden; and that is true, not only of the individual, it's true also of any society, any country. It's true of a Church. If we can't say we were wrong, we are bound to the past.

Think of, for example, the question of the ordination of women. Now, if infallibility weren't there, we could look at it. We could go back to the biblical evidence and see what it says. We could look at the early Church, the very interesting history there, the women deacons, and what have you, that you had. We could look through history. We could look at arguments today. We can see how it was a cultural thing in the past that excluded women. We could see how times have changed. And we could make an intelligent decision. But you can't do it, because of the prison of the past, because papal infallibility is there. And you're all aware of how that document crept up into being infallible. I'll leave that out and maybe later in questions.

This is a major force in preventing a pope from making admissions that there have been serious failures in the handling of abuse, or from even allowing discussion of an issue such as mandatory, obligatory, celibacy. If we are looking at the causes of the poor response to abuse, this one must be given a very high place.

10. LOYALTY TO A SILENT POPE

Ten: Loyalty to a Silent Pope. Before ordination as a bishop, every candidate - listen to this - is required to take an oath of loyalty to the pope, not God, not the Church, the pope. Every bishop is meant to be a pope's man. Bishops take this oath seriously, and, if they don't, believe me, they are kept on a very short lease. (Tom and I would both talk to that.) (Much laughter) Now imagine this: that say in 1988, Pope John Paul had stood up in St. Peter's Square one Sunday morning and had said, "I've just read a report prepared for me on sexual abuse by priests of minors, even children. It's the most horrendous thing I have ever read in my life; and we're going to combat this. We're going to reach out to every one of these. We're going to set up so they will come forward, and tell us their story; and we are going to answer to each of them. And we're not going to let anything get in the way. And I demand that every bishop follow me in this." Now if the pope had done that, I can't guarantee for a second that every bishop would have acted perfectly. What I can guarantee was that, this extraordinarily powerful loyalty that bishops have to the pope would have worked in favor of victims; but as it was, his silence meant that this loyalty worked against victims. (Applause) If the pope is silent, we'll be silent. He's the one we are following. He's the one to whom we are supposed to be loyal.

Accusations of abuse first came to public notice in the early 1980's; and for the following 20 years, the pope was Pope John Paul II. And it gives me no joy to say that he responded poorly.^{13/} You know, he called it a cancer; I know, he wrote a letter to the American bishops; I know, in 1993, I think it was; but he did very little. And he did not face the two cases that were put solidly on his desk alone: the case of Cardinal Groer, the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, and the case then of Marciel Macial Delgollado, the founder of the Legionaries of Christ. They were his. No one else could deal with them; and he didn't; so that for 20 years, loyalty, this powerful loyalty of bishops, was loyalty to a silent pope.

11. A CULTURE OF SECRECY

Number Eleven: A Culture of Secrecy. Within Italy, there is a powerful culture of what is called *la bella figura*.^{14/} Any Italians here will know exactly what I mean. Yes, someone's waving, they are familiar with it. It literally means the beautiful figure. But what it really refers to is always presenting a good external appearance to the world. And the other side of that is avoiding *la brutta figura*, which is the ugly figure. And now, this is an extraordinary powerful thing in Italy. I am told by historians that it goes all the way back to the Roman Empire; so it's two thousand years old. It's very, very deep. The best example I ever saw of it, I was a student in Rome in 1960, when Rome had the Olympic Games. And they weren't nearly ready when the time came; so what they did was, just before all the athletes started to arrive, they sent out an army of people with big buckets of white paint; and they painted everything, so it all looked good. You know, *La bella figura* was there; and as long as the athletes didn't jump too hard on things, it would survive. But it's a very, very deep thing within the culture, and outside is like ourselves, we can't fully appreciate how profound it is. Those imbued with that culture would have serious difficulties in ignoring it, and in speaking out openly about faults. For many centuries secrecy has been an important part of the culture of the Vatican, and still is. Wrong actions can be easily pardoned. The unpardonable sin is that of making those wrong actions public. And I can speak there from personal experience, because there was one case of a bishop, guilty of sexual abuse against an adult female that I spoke out about; and I got all the blame, he was promoted to be an archbishop, not in Australia, but it happened. Whereas by making the matter public, by making the scandal public in any way. I didn't go to the media; I drew people's attention to it.

The Acts of the Apostles show that Peter, the first pope, was not above criticism and had to answer to the Church for his actions. (Acts 11:1-18.) Today, on the contrary, the pope is held above criticism, is not answerable to the Church, and must be protected and defended in every way possible.^{15/}

Now this culture of obsessive secrecy has been a powerful factor in the mishandling of abuse. And it's a sad fact that, if the entire Church has been slow to respond properly to abuse, the slowest part of all has been its central bureaucracy in the Vatican, because that's where this culture of *la bella figura* is most powerful. In being so defensive, blaming the media regarding the fairness of the way the Church has been treated as the central issue, protesting that the Church is better than other organizations would have got off lightly, defending the pope at all costs, and associating the Church from wrong doings within it, various members of that Roman Curia have shown that they have missed what truly matters.

12. THE SENSE OF THE FAITHFUL

Number Twelve, the last one: The Second Vatican Council spoke of the *sensus fidei* or the *sensus fidelium*,^{16/} that instinctive sensitivity and power of discernment that the members of the Church collectively possess in matters of faith and morals. And it's surely simple fact that the people of God as a whole would never have got us into the mess we're in, for their *sensus fidei* would have insisted on a far more rigorous and, dare I say it, a far more Christian response. (Applause) It's their children who've been abused; and it is they who have had their faith weaken or destroyed. They have even, in one way or another, had to pay for the mess. The pope and the bishops have lost credibility; and it is only the people of God who can restore it to them. If the Church is to move forward, these painful lessons must be learned; for this is an issue on which to lead out the people of God has been positively suicidal.

CONCLUSION

Now it will be seen that most of the factors I've mentioned largely find their origin in the first, the angry God. They're all applications of it, ways in which that angry God has come through. A beautiful paragraph in the papal document about God's love will not be enough, and it will take immense effort to eradicate the angry God from all aspects of the Church. Ultimately, you cannot think yourself out of the angry God; it's only by the experience of God's love that you can succeed in leaving that idea behind.

How much individuals are affected by the factors I have mentioned will vary greatly from one person to the next. Not even all of the factors considered together take away responsibility from the individual. I am always conscious of the saying of John Henry Newman, "There is nothing on this earth so ugly as the Catholic Church, and nothing so beautiful." Despite all the ugliness, there is also great beauty, and I would never wish to abandon that beauty.

There's still a long way to go before we fully understand all the causal factors involved in regressive pedophilia in priests and religious. We must not wait for convincing proof that the particular factors I have mentioned have in fact contributed to either abuse or the poor response to abuse; but rather, because they are unhealthy we must remove them now. And if there were a concerted effort on these matters, for example through a council called for this specific purpose the Church would at long last be seen to be truly confronting abuse. Thank you. (Applause)

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- 1/ David Ranson, "The Climate of Sexual Abuse," *The Farrow*, 53 (July/August 2002), pp. 387-397.
- 2/ "The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1738. See *ibid*, no 1731 and *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 17.
- 3/ See Noldin-Schmidt, *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, Feliciani Rauch, Innsbruck, 1960, Vol. I, Supplement *De Castitate*, p. 17, no.2. The technical term constantly repeated was *morale ex toto genere suo*. The sin of taking pleasure from thinking about sex was called *delectation morose*.
- 4/ For example, Clement VII (1592-1605) and Paul V (1605-1621) said that those who denied this teaching should be denounced to the Inquisition.
- 5/ "Such teaching ... is founded on the unbreakable connection, which God established and which men and women may not break of their own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning." Pope Paul VI, encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, 26th July, 1968, no. 12. A conjugal act that contained both of these meanings was seen as natural, one that did not was seen as unnatural.
- 6/ For a fuller explanation of this point, see chapter 9 and 10 of my book, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*, John Garratt Publishing, Melbourne, 2007.
- 7/ See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *The Quest for the Living God*, Continuum, New York, 2007, Ch. 5, *God Acting Womanish*.
- 8/ The recent case of Sister Margaret Mary McBride is a good example of this, for she is condemned far more swiftly and harshly than the worst pedophile. My information concerning this case comes from an article in *The Tablet*, 5 June 2010, pp. 4-5.
- 9/ The Greek verb *lambano* means simply "to take," and does not imply "to take up."
- 10/ Since the time of Constantine the priesthood became "a distinct professional unit, ultimately synonymous with 'officialdom' In the Middle Ages this was to develop into a definition of ministerial priesthood in terms of the conferring of power. Yet, as Yves Congar explains, the defect of this approach is that it translates into a linear scheme: Christ makes the hierarchy and the hierarchy makes the Church as a community of the faithful. Such a scheme, even if it contains part of the truth places the ministerial priesthood before and outside the community." David Ranson ocsa, "Priesthood, Ordained and Lay," *Australasian Catholic Record*, Vol. 87:2 (April 2010), p.152.
- 11/ As a bishop I received many complaints about priests, some justified, some not. I could not help noticing that overwhelmingly they were complaints about human failures (e.g., rudeness) rather than priestly failures. All of the best priests I have known have first been good human beings.
- 12/ Canon 1740.
- 13/ I do not make this statement lightly, but no other statement is possible. The extreme examples were his handling of the two cases of Cardinal Groer and Maciel Macial Delgollado.
- 14/ *Bella figura* literally means *beautiful figure or image*, while *brutta figura* means *ugly figure or image*, and the two phrases are much in use in Italy.
- 15/ The latest symptom of this statement from the Vatican press Office (28 June 2010): "It must be reiterated that, in the Church, when accusations are made against a cardinal, competency falls exclusively to the Pope." The words of cardinals reflect on the popes who appointed them, so no one else may be allowed to criticize them.
- 16/ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12.