

## Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – The Theological Task Ahead.

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### Introduction

The findings of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse must cause churches and Christians in any group or organisation, at any level of formality or spontaneity to reconsider practices of power, sexuality, violence, care and supervision. The Royal Commission provides evidence that this is not just a church problem, or religious problem, other groups that are formed around the purposes of sport, the arts, service or education were found to harbour systemic dangers and abuses. Each organisation, whether evidence was brought before the Royal Commission about them directly or not, must rise to examine the ways in which their operations and culture make participants not only susceptible to abuse, but may facilitate the perpetration of abuse by nurturing favourable conditions for transgression of respect, personal boundaries and propriety.

Thus, churches and denominations are not alone in this work.

This study supports the call to the church in all its expressions to re-examine past and current practice and culture. We identify a significant gap in church responses so far – review and re-evaluation of theologies that create an ideological milieu in which abuse flourishes. Where a number of other levels and processes of church polity and community have acted in commendably vigorous response to the findings of the Royal Commission and the similar, if smaller exercises that came before it, the theological academy of the church has been largely silent.

There are various ways to measure theological engagement with an issue, but the litmus test of the academy is publication. Publishing is how theologians and colleges are assessed, accredited, and ultimately funded. The topics on which we find published works demonstrate the work that matters most. Published material represents the work of theology that academics consider important, give their time to seriously, and will give their name to. In the few years since the conclusions of the Royal Commission hearings, a number of Melbourne theological colleges and the auspicing University of Divinity have created research co-ordinator posts, filled by high profile, high output personnel, evidence of the importance felt for meeting publishing quotas. We would hope that this injection of energy into research and corresponding publishing would bear some fruit for the serious reconsideration of the theological implications of the revelation of the church as systemically abusive, morally corrupt, and devouring its own children.

This study reviews a sampling of articles in theological journals that have been published addressing the concerns of Royal Commission. We note first of all the paucity of material published by Australian theologians on this issue. We therefore appreciate the publication that has been done; of particular note is

the September 2018 edition of *St. Mark's Review* which was wholly devoted to this issue. We will consider this material as a case study in greater detail below. However, we do note that for all the pages in this edition given to writing about the Royal Commission, very little of it takes a theological approach. Most of what is written is practical sociology, policy and pastoral care. Editor Michael Gladwin must be commended for allocating a whole edition of a theology journal to the Royal Commission. He articulates his editorial vision in the range of voices gathered:

*There is a range of voices and perspectives here: from theologians and ethicists, both local and international; from a barrister who has worked extensively with the Anglican Church of Australia; from a clinical counsellor; and from an Anglican bishop.<sup>1</sup>*

Thus, our critique is twofold – firstly the lack of material published at all; and secondly the propensity for theologians writing on this issue to avoid theology.

### **The Character of Articles Published**

*“We are unprepared for innumerable aspects of life, and in particular for evil.”<sup>2</sup>*

These are the words of Anglican Bishop John Harrower, in ‘How Australian Churches Might Respond Individually and Collectively to the Royal Commission and Its Findings’, a tacit confession that the Anglican church as a whole, right through to the Primate – his own position – are ill-equipped for the fundamental task of ensuring that communities of faith might do no harm to the most vulnerable. His article skirts around clergy formation, speaking of ‘training events’ which fail to engage the clergy because of speakers who are not compelling enough – as though the epidemic of institutional abuse and the care of children and parishioners was not a compelling issue for clergy. One must ask, what are clergy concerned about? Harrower goes on, rightly, to affirm initiatives adopted at the General Synod, and concerns himself with the role of Bishops and the overlap, or competing responsibilities of pastoral care for Clergy and as a place of recourse for reporting abuse by parishioners. Harrower further cites the lectionary cycle of readings, the liturgy, the season of lent, the role of the media, and of course, his own publications, as agents that can support a safer culture in the church, preventing further abuse and healing the abuse that has happened.

Likewise, in a survey of Australia-wide Anglican church responses to the issues of abuse that had already come to light prior to the turn of the millennium, Garth Blake details the breadth of the Child Protection Committee report to the General Synod of the Anglican Church in 2004, *Making our church safe: A programme for action*. Blake points out that the report brought twenty-six recommendations to the Synod, and addressed what

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<sup>1</sup> Gladwin, Michael. “Remembering Our Future: The Response of Australian Churches to the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.” *St Mark's Review*, no. 245 (2018): 3

<sup>2</sup> Harrower, John. “How Australian Churches Might Respond Individually and Collectively to the Royal Commission and Its Findings.” *St Mark's Review* 245 (September 2018): 59

might seem like the whole Anglican Communion, from top to bottom, calling on every area and level of Anglicanism to respond in some way:

*The report...dealt with the issues of safe ministry policies and structures, recruitment, standards of behaviour, formation for pastoral ministry, safe ministry training, pastoral support for the abused, pastoral support for and supervision of abusers, ministry support for clergy, joint church action, government action, and Anglican Communion action.*<sup>3</sup>

Keith Rayner, also speaking from the high office of Bishop in the Anglican church in Australia addresses, writing in 2002 following the Hollingworth the challenges in cases of allegations of child sexual abuse that have exercised his integrity and wisdom.<sup>4</sup> His article, to be commended for its personal transparency, wrestles with the ethical tensions of the role of Bishop in instances of allegations of clergy perpetrating abuse. Rayner carries the mantle of pastoral carer for the clergy as well as the rod of discipline. His article anguishes over the conflict of obligations he understands these deliver. Rayner has chosen one aspect of responding to child sexual abuse. It is telling however that the child, or the abuse victim is not most sharply in focus for him. For Rayner the primary relationship is with the clergyperson, whether it be to support or heal or forgive or censure or punish. This is, perhaps how hierarchies work, but this is the very modality of response that is cited by frustrated, damaged, survivors in the hearings. Their common refrain is that Bishops were more concerned with the welfare of priests or brothers, than with taking responsibility for repentance and seeking restitution and reconciliation.

*Alanna's mum believed what her daughter said and immediately reported it to the Archbishop. In response, he attacked. 'The Archbishop spoke very abruptly to my mother saying that little girls make up stories like that all the time. He accused me of being an attention seeker and a liar.'* – Alana's Story<sup>5</sup>

Rayner's article provides insight into the Gordian knot of hierarchy in the Anglican system. He points out that Bishop's power to remove a priest who has come under suspicion of abuse is limited, that the tribunal process takes time, and that it is difficult to find a suitable alternate role for such a priest. It is important for regular lay members of the public to hear how a bishop wrestles with this. Not that a victim, or victim's family should have sympathy for the Bishop, but that we might recognise the large distance between the way a bishop construes the problem at hand, and the way one who is suffering abuse, injustice and its potent toxic half-life, construes the situation. Rayner does give a paragraph to discussing forgiveness, potentially a theological category.<sup>6</sup> Yet, even here the work is construed around the perpetrator and the institution of the church, with conciliation with the victim as a secondary concern. Rayner writes as though the primary offence of an abusive clergy is against the

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<sup>3</sup> Blake, Garth. "The Anglican Church of Australia under the Spotlight of the Royal Commission: Its Systemic Failure to Protect Children and a Catalyst for Its Transformation." *St Mark's Review* 245 (September 2018), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Rayner, Keith. Pastor and disciplinarian: the bishop's dilemmas, *St Mark's Review*, No. 190, 2002: 5-11.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/alanas-story>

<sup>6</sup> Rayner, 10

church, and their holy orders, rather than recognising abuse as an act of violence firstly and centrally against a vulnerable human victim.

*Forgiveness does not mean that the temporal consequences of the sin are done away with and, depending on the seriousness of the offence, those consequences will sometimes require the cancellation of a priest's licence or even deposition from holy orders. There is also the question of whether the victim is able to forgive. This is why conciliation procedures may play a significant part in dealing with complaints of this kind.*<sup>7</sup>

Rayner also invokes a theology of grace:

*It is easy (and can be popular) to slip back into being a religion of law, not of grace. That would be disastrous for the gospel. This is, however, a difficult message to proclaim in an environment of high community emotion. The church needs to avoid the kind of defensiveness that would subvert the gospel of grace.*<sup>8</sup>

Such a small dose of theology in a predominantly procedural approach exacerbates the sense that thin brittle theologies are in part responsible for the widespread systemic moral collapse of the church. Rayner's ambivalence and problematisation here heightens our conviction that much deeper theological discussion and rethinking is required. We note that Rayner is nervous that leaning into theological imperatives may be 'disastrous for the gospel'.<sup>9</sup> To be very frank, the unchecked epidemic of child sexual abuse in faith communities has already been and continues to be disastrous for the gospel. Abuse is not good news. Failure by the church to prevent abuse is not good news. Abuse perpetuated through the 'pastoral care' of dangerous, broken, reoffending clergy is not good news.

The lack of theological engagement by officers of the church at any level in instances of abuse has inhibited helpful and healing responses. The suffering person is at the edge of the existential coherence. Theirs is not primarily an administrative conundrum, but a crisis of whole personhood, of human spirit in relation to the world and its meaning. Is God not loving? Does the Word of God made flesh bring life and grace and truth or destruction, degradation and death?

Therefore, the mass of policy and protocol responses is to be commended, but a glaring omission in what is otherwise an attempt at a comprehensive and holistic response, is any consideration of the impact of theological education and theological formation of ministry candidates. Every suggestion by Harrower and the recommendations reported by Blake attribute the problems and envisage the solutions of abuse as entirely sociological. There is much merit in this attention being given to the social structures and trenchant asymmetries of power that have enshrined generations of abuse in privilege and protection. Indeed, there is much overlap between the characteristics of abuse reported in churches and other kinds of social organisations that were named in the Royal Commission – swimming clubs, dance schools, state government foster services. There are

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<sup>7</sup> Rayner, 10

<sup>8</sup> Rayner, 10

<sup>9</sup> Rayner, 10

no doubt sociological reasons for abuse, but sociality is constructed of many factors. And one of the key elements of sociality is the architecture of belief and shared ideologies.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to interrogate not only the practices of power and processes of protection, but to hold our ideologies and theologies, and the language we use to communicate them open to deep scrutiny.

We must listen to the numerous testimonies of the Royal Commission that tell of how theological material was enmeshed in the mechanisms of abuse. Survivor statements tell how theology and faith language was explicitly present in incidents of abuse, and how the implicit wallpaper of belief normalised unthinkable and horrendous experiences.

From reading over 300 of the private hearings - merely 10% of more than 3000 statements collected by the Royal Commission – I place a few examples here, alongside the silence of Harrower on the theological formation of many perpetrators.<sup>10</sup> The most honouring, intelligent, and moral response to the Royal Commission is to listen to the voices of the victims of abuse; to hear them in their own words, on their terms; to listen and learn from them. Below are excerpts that demonstrate instances of theological abuse enmeshed with sexual and physical abuses. In even these few select quotes, many theological themes are implicated: sin, love, the identity and presence of God, sacrifice, guilt, forgiveness, absolution, spiritual debt, pastoral/spiritual care, (un)worthiness, prayer, God's will, truth and blasphemy.

*“While the priest was abusing him he would say ‘this is love, this is God’ and when he was done he would moan over and over, ‘Oh my conscience’.” – Aidan’s Story<sup>11</sup>*

*“He’d do a ritual which was supposed to make us feel God, because it was all about being able to touch God. He’d make cuts on my back so I’d bleed, then he’d smear the blood and have sex with me.” – Eric’s Story<sup>12</sup>*

*[Anglican Investigator] Day then told Tomas to seek forgiveness and absolution. He and Reverend Hughes knelt at the altar and were anointed with oil. Tomas was told that both he and Hughes had ‘sinned’. – Tomas Steven’s Story.<sup>13</sup>*

*“The only thing I didn’t like was when the Anglican bishop said to us, “Whatever money you take from the Church today, you’ve taken away from children. That made us feel guilty. That’s always stuck in my throat, that has.” – Kevin’s story<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> These survivor statements have been selected from the plethora of examples that testify to the influence of belief or doctrine their experience of abuse; for consistency these all occurred in Anglican contexts. We note that an abundance of similar testimony exists across the denominational spectrum.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/aidans-story>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/erics-story>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/tomas-stevens-story>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/kevins-story>

*“The Church also offered him a ‘pastoral care package’, trying very hard to dissuade him from making a legal, and public, claim for compensation.” -Lonny’s story<sup>15</sup>*

*Brenden’s mother, Sue, reported the abuse to one of the Church leaders. The Church did not report [clergy] Smith to the police. Instead ‘they moved him on to the next church’ where he continued to abuse boys. When Sue complained again, the Church leaders told her that Smith had been ‘forgiven’. – Brenden’s story<sup>16</sup>*

*Margo asked herself over and over: why is he [a Sunday school teacher] allowed to do such awful things to me? Eventually she found an answer, and it’s stuck with her like a ‘disease’ ever since: ‘I believe that I am unworthy of God ... that I’m unworthy of safety and protection, that I’m unworthy of love’. – Margo’s story<sup>17</sup>*

*McLaren also wove their mutual faith into the relationship, in one instance telling Joann to think of him at particular times, which is when he would be praying for the two of them ... McLaren wrote to her over this time. [The letters] are full of sexually explicit material mixed with promises about their future together, the will of God, and McLaren’s need for a baby with her. – Joann’s story<sup>18</sup>*

*‘When I was about 14 I finally got the nerve to tell my Mum. And she called me a lying, blaspheming little bastard: “How dare you say that about Father Bastin.”’ – Gregory’s Story<sup>19</sup>*

Confronting as we should find these quotes, by far the vast majority of survivor statements make no reference to a theological interpretation of their abusive encounters within the church and with clergy or powerful members of faith communities. The infrequency of theological references in the survivor statements in no way should detract from the strength of presence when theology is named as a component of the structure of abuse.

Furthermore, as a christian faith tradition that is necessarily incarnational, in which scriptures and creeds and foundational rituals and liturgies ground theology in the bodily human life, theological work must address the

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/lonnys-story>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/brendens-story>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/margos-story>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/joanns-story>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/gregorys-story>

experiences of the body, whether there are words of testimony or not. The bodily lives of survivors speak, recounting – as Trauma psychiatrist Bessel Van Der Kolk says ‘The Body Keeps the Score’.<sup>20</sup>

### **Listening to the Voices that matter; knowing why they matter**

I have chosen in this paper to use statements from the private sessions. Each of these stories comes with a disclaimer:

*“This is the story of a person who spoke with a Commissioner during a private session of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Real names of individuals have not been used, except of public figures in a public context. The information the person provided was not evidence, the person was not a witness, and did not need to take an oath or affirmation, although they were expected to tell the truth. Nothing in this story is a finding of the Royal Commission and any views expressed are those of the person, not of the Commissioners.”*

Some commentators, seeking to defend the church and minimise the impact of the Royal Commissions findings for the church, see this disclaimer negating the veracity and value of the private session hearings, pointing out that this material does not stand as part of the official ‘findings’ of the Royal commission, and was not ‘tested’ legally in the way that the public hearings were with legal counsel. Virginia Miller’s contribution in the same edition of *St Mark’s Review* that Harrower’s article appears in, takes this view.<sup>21</sup>

*The allegations made in these private sessions were untested and therefore, in legal terms, unsubstantiated; as such, they cannot simply be accepted as true. Yet the Royal Commission published the findings of the private sessions and created media releases which did not have a clear warning that these claims were unsubstantiated.*<sup>22</sup>

Miller invests deeply in the notions that unsubstantiated testimonies are “potentially false” and that “others are in fact false or, at least, highly likely to be false.”<sup>23</sup> Citing the controversial ‘false memory syndrome’<sup>24</sup> as

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<sup>20</sup> van der Kolk, B, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Penguin, 2014, 2015

<sup>21</sup> Miller, Virginia P. “Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph. 4:15): An Analysis of the Findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.” *St Mark’s Review* 245 (September 2018): 72–98.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, 73

<sup>23</sup> Miller, 74

<sup>24</sup> Invoking ‘False memory syndrome’ here is puzzling in terms of credibility and relevance to the context. There is a movement of false memory syndrome activists, most energetic in the 1990s. However the reputation of this group among the general professional mental health community is similar to the cohort of scientists who are climate change deniers, among the broader scientific profession. Secondly, false memory syndrome typically deals with abuse of children by parents, and seeks to support and exonerate parents whose children claim they were abused by a parent. In the investigations of the Royal Commission, survivors are often supported by parents, have corroborating stories from fellow children or staff at the time. The term ‘False Memory’ itself draws critique and qualification, as research differentiates between different kinds of memory. While some stories may have errors, dismissing them as a whole under the rubric of false memory is ‘linguistic convenience’, not a solid psychiatric diagnosis. See Bernstein, Scoboria, Desjarlais, “‘False Memory’ is a linguistic convenience” *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice* Vol. 5: 2, (Jun 2018): 161-179.

method and financial compensation as motivation, Miller disparages the voices of the private sessions, she moves on to question the relevance of the Royal Commission, suggesting that because of the focus on adult survivors of child sexual abuse in the Royal Commission's hearings, the threat of sexual abuse of children and the challenge of forming robust and right institutional responses, is a largely historical problem.

Those who serve in contemporary pastoral contexts directly with children, and those who work in social support systems such as Human services, would contest this. In 2015-16 the years in which the Royal commission was conducted, there were 5,559 cases of substantiated child sexual abuse in Australia. This figure constitutes 12% of all substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect, and does not represent the larger figure of reported cases in which substantiation was not ascertained. Furthermore to the concerns of this paper, the proportion of cases that are located in churches and faith communities remains obscure.

Do we know what is happening in churches and church-auspiced agencies currently in order to acquit or deny Miller's claim that child sexual abuse in the church was a historical phenomenon of a bygone era?

The burden of providing information does not fall only upon Government services. Church Agencies and denominations have a responsibility to know what is happening within their communities. Searches of denominational web pages yield many reports on the activities of the church, but little, if any, mention of addressing the incidence of abuse. When observers like Miller express scepticism about the veracity of survivor testimony and the prevalence of abuse in churches still today, it is in part sustained by the lack of information available about our current situation.

Theological colleges must account for the outcomes of their teaching, research, publications and formation programs. The actual ideas of theology must be held up to scrutiny. Luther saw the need for a rereading of the epistles of Paul in the light of the abuses and exploitation of theologies of guilt, debt and appeasement that propelled the practice of indulgences in late medieval Catholicism. Structural and cultural reformation was necessary but not enough. Theological rethinking and re-voicing was also required.

Information gathering in this field is sensitive and difficult, and issues of care for the vulnerable remain imperative. 'Vulnerable' is a broad category, which complexifies approaches to this task. Children, young people, people with a disability, and clergy are all examples of vulnerable persons. Reform in this area may need moving attention away from seeing some kinds of humans as vulnerable and others as powerful, and directing understanding towards recognising that it is situations and systems that expose the vulnerabilities inherent in all of us. Ideologies and theologies are tensile structural fibres within these systems, that support some actions, and obstruct or tug against others.

## **Theological Challenges**

In all areas of human society we understand that our individual and collective thought-lives are not ornamental abstractions of philosophical indulgence, but powerful engine houses of motivation and motion that drive action and transfer energy and power in various, preferred directions. Our ideologies matter. Our inherent beliefs are not only revealed in our actions and systematisations, but also reinscribed and reinforced by our living. It is impossible for us to detach the actions of the church from the theology it teaches, without de-activating one or the other. If we hold a theology, for example, of love and justice, then when clergy and church processes fail a child or family in love and justice, we must say that the church is no longer the church – and that any consciousness of being the church and acting as if it is still the church is preposterous. Many consequences, including the presumption that those within the church speak with spiritual insight and authority, that the church is the body of Christ, that the work of the church is altruistic and deserves tax-exempt status, must be accepted as forfeited. Secular commentators, survivors and their advocates often express the disintegration of the church via these kinds of remarks. Churches and theologians must listen. We must hear that we have not two words left of credible theology left to rub together and that the theological tasks ahead are large.

We must develop essential and central anthropological work on theologies of child as revelations of full, God-bearing humanity. We must articulate more biblically grounded alternatives to the idiosyncratic doctrines of original sin heritage of Augustine and Calvin. We must return to thinking of the roles of ministry and leadership biblically, and against the now anachronistic privileges of Christendom. Ecclesiology must breathe again outside the institutional walls, in the Cathedral of the Cosmos in which spirit can be de-commodified and power redistributed among all of God's creatures, not just an elite clergy. Sexuality must be redescribed with theological nuance, incarnationally and not simply morally or animalistically.

The Irish Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Ryan Report, 2009) yielded similar findings and also named theology as culpably complicit in the construction of a culture in which clergy abuse proceeded unrestrained. Australian theologians have much to learn from and alongside their Irish counterparts. We must be careful not to defend scholarship or theology that enables evil. The notion of 'defending the faith' might be added to theologies that need interrogation and revision.

### **Precious and Prophetic voices: a starting point.**

Miller put sharply what others imply. That the evidence of the private hearings, is negligible and untrustworthy. I take a different view. I believe, having read hundreds of these stories, that whether they are 'true and reliable accounts' of what happened – though I believe they are – they are a significant starting point for the theological tasks ahead.

These words are precious and prophetic. The beliefs they reveal show us the bitter and indigestible fruit of the 'ministry' and theology of the church.

The people who came forward gave witness to their experience, and in many cases carrying in themselves still thwarted lives of brokenness, trauma. In the private sessions, they did so at their own expense, bearing the emotional cost, in some cases making known what they had previously kept hidden from family and loved ones,

fully knowing that there was nothing to gain – financially or legally or publicly by their doing so. Their testimony would not even count as part of the official findings of the Royal Commission. Their only gain would be that they had privately spoken their long held, and suppressed truth to a representative of the people of Australia.

There are numerous remarks among the statements that underline that this outcome – simply being heard – was of immense value to the survivors. Financial payouts, limp handshakes, backhanded apologies and patronising platitudes from senior church officials were not what mattered. Listening mattered.

In the words of survivor Ethel Joan, “Listen to the child.”<sup>25</sup>

Virginia Miller’s response fails to listen to the child. It is astounding after such a thorough-going process as the Royal Commission we are still struggling in to face up and see and listen. Miller justifiably critiques the hyperbole and hysteria of media reporting. Media cannot afford to give attention to the nuance and complexity of the situation, but must by nature of the fast news cycle and its intrinsic link to commercialism focus on sensationist focus on single recognisable high profile grotesque characterisations. Sadly, the media neglects and even obscures survivors and their stories, in favour of celebrity perpetrators, betraying an investment in scandal, and little interest in healing, redeeming, reforming or preventative practices.

John Harrower’s response also fails to listen from another direction. He does not heed the theological voices that speak in the testimonies. Some, to be sure, are only a whisper; they are the still small voice that Elijah must hear. If a Bishop does not wrestle afresh with the deepest of theological foundations when with the existential crisis of a child suffering abuse at the hands of the church, what is all the theological formation in our colleges for? I imagine that Harrower, a man of compassion who writes personally of tears and emotional devastation at the revelations of abuse, did in fact wrestle theologically. But that theological deconstruction and revaluation is not what he holds out to us.

Rayner’s response skirts theological work that is necessary, with caution lest we disrupt what is, for him, a ‘gospel’ under threat.

This study has used St Mark’s Review as a case study and focused on the articles of Harrower, Miller and Rayner. Although there has been much to critique, we highlight and acknowledge that no other Australian journal of theology has published an article on this very present and urgent issue. We contrast this with numerous other theological articles published about other public issues of concern. For example from Colloquium: Environment<sup>26</sup>, Peace<sup>27</sup>, Immigration<sup>28</sup>, Asylum Seekers,<sup>29</sup> Voluntary Assisted dying<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/narratives/ethel-joans-story>

<sup>26</sup> Pederick, E. ‘Sacrifice and Creation: An Ecotheological Perspective’ Colloquium 51:1 June 2019, 59-78

<sup>27</sup> Darragh N., Ecotheology and Politics for Peace: How does ecotheology deal with violence? Colloquium 50:2 December 2018

<sup>28</sup> Tulud Cruz, G. ‘Migration as Locus Theologicus’ Colloquium 46:1 May 2014, 87-100

<sup>29</sup> Brett, M. G. ‘Forced migration, Asylum seekers and human rights’ Colloquium 45:2, Nov 2013, 121-136

<sup>30</sup> Goroncy, J. ‘Dying Without a Script: Some Theological Reflections on Voluntary Assisted Dying’ Colloquium 51:1 June 2019, 23-37

We cannot claim that Australian theologians are not interested in public issues or disengaged from the implications of theologies in Australian life, or shy of political hot potatoes.

I have focussed here on publishing as the touchstone of academic viability. But theological colleges and formation programs must integrate a spiritual-abuse informed ethos across all the aspects of academic and ministry formation programs. The connection between theology and abuse must be viscerally understood. Teaching, publishing, research, curriculum, assessment, library collections, exhibitions and events, speakers, in all these facets of academic life, we must participate in this conversation.

We must examine ourselves for where and why and what we lack in theological responses to the findings of the Royal Commission. We must embark on the tasks that have been named for us by the precious and prophetic voices of suffering children, held sometimes for years, in the pain-ridden lives of the adults they have become. As we begin this work, no doubt we will discover that we are doing this work not just for a list of three thousand de-identified voices enshrined in the private session hearings on the Royal Commission Website. We will discover that we, Theologians, Registrars, Deans, Librarians, Tutors, Professors are part of these stories too. Many of us have been abused. We must do this work.

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