



From the Editor

Washing our Hands in Innocence: The Churches and Sexual Abuse

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The Pope and the President

Pope Francis has inspired many in and beyond the Roman Catholic Church with commitments including his compassion for refugees and advocacy for the environment. He has also disappointed his audiences from time to time, including many Chilean Catholics and others with his response to a case of child sexual abuse.

Juan Barros, bishop of Osorno in Chile since 2015, is under scrutiny because of his association with influential priest Fernando Karadima, removed from office after numerous allegations were found proven in 2011. Barros and his case have now become something of a touchstone for the issue in Chile. Although Barros is not alleged to have caused active or physical harm to minors, he is alleged to have been aware of Karadima's abuse, and to have failed to act. Such inaction by onlookers, and especially by those with authority, has often become a cause for concern second only to actual abuse. However, Francis has appeared unwilling to address concerns about Barros; when ending a visit to the country early in 2018, the Pope walked into the familiar but dangerous territory of invoking a principle of presumed innocence, claiming that, without more concrete evidence, the charges against Barros were 'calumny'.²

Francis' own apparent tone-deafness is strikingly like that of a very different character. A few weeks after the Pope's comments, Donald J. Trump, who had campaigned in 2016 with glib calls to 'lock up' his opponent, complained at the lack of due process for a White House staff

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2. <http://time.com/5109212/pope-francis-sexual-abuse-chile-barros-karadima/> (accessed 12 February 2018).

member who had resigned in February 2018, after details emerged of his alleged physical abuse of two ex-spouses. The similarity of the responses from the two leaders is instructive, if dispiriting. While these two actors are not otherwise moral equivalents, the institutional significance of their comments has more in common than not. The fact these are men, and men of a certain generation with the attendant trappings, cannot be ignored. Yet there is more to this problem than the views or failings of the individuals, or of categories of individuals. Their statements reflect how something cultural and not merely personal is often at work in the ways many leaders are likely to respond to issues of abuse.

In both cases the leader seems to have failed to adjudicate adequately between personal sympathy for an individual, and the demands placed on their office by an issue to which adequate responses are only beginning to be made. In both cases the inadequate response and its jarring tone outside the echo-chamber of the leader's world reveal a disconnect between the ecclesial or political subculture used to dictating its own terms, and a wider world which demands more, and different, for those affected directly and indirectly by abuse.³

While different legal systems are involved in these two cases, leaders, officials, or policy-makers should not imagine that action which disadvantages those accused can only be taken when something like 'reasonable doubt' has been demonstrated, or that a 'presumption of innocence' should protect the accused from all disadvantage, at least when others would remain vulnerable through lack of action. The question remains nevertheless: what principles must be observed, when abuse is alleged? While a basic shift in assumptions about the needs and rights of complainants is under way, in the Churches as well as elsewhere, it is not always clear how justice is genuinely to be done.

Two Young Ladies

This number of the *Journal* contains an account of one case among the many associated with the conduct of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. The experiences of young teachers Victoria Ketcheson and Patricia Watson in the 1950s, as recounted by Dr Jonathan Lofft

3. It remains to be seen whether the appointment of a new investigator represents a new approach, or more of the same: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/advocates-welcome-investigation-abuse-cover-claims-chile> (accessed 14 February 2018).

based on research in archival material from Trinity College, Toronto, included not only harrowing instances of abuse of young indigenous people, but systemic oblivion by local school leadership, and an inadequate response to reports of the truth by the highest Church authorities, whose precise character warrants further reflection.

Walter Barfoot, then the Canadian Primate, seems to have shown a dispiriting mixture of perception and defensiveness in the face of allegations brought by the two teachers. Barfoot was not sufficiently naive or uncaring to imagine there was no basis at all for the claims made, but in his case a familiar prelatical tendency to eschew extremes found specific form in an unwillingness to confront the extreme character of the truth. His contemporary and colleague Philip Carrington of Quebec adds another stock character trait to the mix with his sense of world-weary impotence. If anything sympathetic can be said for this pair's seemingly inadequate responses, it is that a whole institutional culture was at work, and these two were its products rather than its architects. Yet their privileged position entailed at least some capacity to confront the truth and seek change; as so often more recently, this was not taken up. This paradox of leadership remains a challenge as Churches and other institutions confront the reality of abuse; those called on to address problems are products of the systems that produced them.

The response made to Watson and Ketcheson, including threats of litigation, seem again to have involved a perverse invocation of the presumption of innocence; given that the claims made by the two teachers were grave and could have damaged careers and reputations, the Church stepped heavily into the fray with a real but very limited sense of what was right. This selective focus may continue to plague ecclesial leaders dealing with issues of abuse and protection.

George Bell and the Carlile Review

In 1995 a woman wrote to then Bishop of Chichester, Eric Kemp (1915–2009), accusing his predecessor George Bell (1883–1958) of sexual abuse. The response made reflected the custom and culture of the time; while some attempt at pastoral support was offered, the more evident feeling seems to have been suspicion, and a hope 'the matter would be dropped entirely'.⁴ The Church there was probably incapable of

4. Lord Carlile of Berriew, CBE, QC, *Bishop George Bell: The Independent Report*, 15 December 2017. Section 88.

handing such issues with the proper rigor, as later experiences in the same diocese were to reveal.⁵

While the desultory response was all too typical of how allegations of abuse were handled as recently as the 1990s, in Churches as well other institutions around the world, the fact that this allegation involved Bishop Bell made it more problematic. George Bell had already been dead for a long time, which would have made investigation and any form of just decision making difficult. Just as importantly, Bell was something of a hero. His uncompromising witness to peace before and during the Second World War, including his close relationship with Dietrich Bonhoeffer as well as principled and unpopular opposition to area bombing of Germany, gave many a stake in preserving his reputation, and has made some unwilling even to consider any possibility he had committed grave misdeeds.

When the complainant revived her claims in 2012, the tide of ecclesial opinion had shifted in significant ways, but perhaps not significantly enough. Genuine concern about child sexual abuse had certainly increased, and the new presumption that a complainant needed to be taken profoundly seriously was appropriate. Yet concerns about liability and publicity – familiar from the earlier Canadian story – were sometimes as or more evident than substantial concerns for truth and justice.⁶ A public statement was made by the Church of England, treating the allegations as fact, and effectively condemning Bell *in absentia* and *post mortem*. In fact this was arguably not such a radical change at all, but a superficial one; Bell now became the one who could be treated without proper care, and in a way that still reflected an institution's self-interest and resort to problem-solving. The apparently different result still reflected a tendency to fix problems rather than to reflect on the pain and complexity of the truth. Decisions about responding showed signs of still being made in an echo-chamber, one with a different shape to that which had prevented Kemp from proper action two decades earlier, but one nonetheless without sufficient breadth or perspective.

There were a number of reasons this was wrong, as reflected in the more recent independent review of the case by Lord Carlile.⁷ The accusations against Bishop Bell, which remain significant and are in fact difficult to explain away, are criminal in nature. While Bell is not affected by them personally, his relatives and his reputation remain

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/13/bishops-peter-ball-arrest-chichester-child-abuse> (accessed 13 February 2018).

6. See the Carlile Report, 142.

7. See n. 4 above.

witnesses to and victims of any potential injustice done to the dead. For that matter, the Church makes its own claims about the communion of saints, and the persistence of God's love and justice in life and in death. Bell still matters, in other words, and not only because he was a courageous leader. Further, given Bell's death in the quite distant past, the 'safeguarding' side of the issue was not acute (granted the continuing needs and rights of the complainant, and of others who might have come forward). The proper concern that might indeed lead authorities to disadvantage someone even when not proven guilty – as in the cases over which the Pope and the President stumbled – did not apply here at all.

This issue goes beyond a general concern for justice and fairness to all parties, including the accused. The effectiveness of a changed approach to sexual abuse in the Churches actually depends on processes and outcomes that are sufficiently robust to withstand critical independent scrutiny. It is unfair to complainants, and trivializing of their concerns, if an alternative default position, resorted to as a reflex, is the best the Church can do. Real listening and effective action will never be easy in this area.

While Bell's supporters had understandably taken up the Carlile Report as vindication, the Church of England's national safeguarding group chose to issue a further press release, referring to some unspecified new item of information about Bell, again preferring publicity as a tool before circumspection. Lord Carlile's astonishment was predictable; these actions seemed to reflect either ignorance of, or contempt for, the content of the independent report and its concerns about due process.⁸

For all the 'good faith' acknowledged in the earlier actions regarding Bell and his alleged victim by the Carlile review, cultural and institutional practices that confuse genuine commitment to truth and justice with ecclesial self-interest thus seem to many still to hold sway. The change between Bishop Kemp's inadequate response and the immediate past is only skin-deep, and the Church which acts this way still resembles that of Canada in the 1950s more than its leaders seem to realize.

Moving Forward

The Church has not solved its problems with child sexual abuse and related issues, past or present. While some, but not all, structures and processes have changed markedly, swinging the considerable weight of

8. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/2-february/news/uk/lord-carlile-says-new-statement-about-bishop-george-bell-is-unwise-and-foolish> (accessed 12 February 2018).

institutional self-interest in a different direction will not be a sufficient answer to many years, centuries we must assume, of abuse. The cases noted here come from a small sub-group of national situations, where there is at least the merit of increasing honesty and changing practices.⁹ Other Anglicans face very different circumstances, and children in other settings may face additional forms of risk, but do not seem to have had the same protections emerge. The ways issues of gender and power have led to danger for women and children in particular remain too difficult for many national and local Churches to address.¹⁰

One of the most difficult messages for the Churches may be the recognition that their own resources are not well suited to the work they have been trying to do, even when in Lord Carlile's generous terms, done 'in good faith'. More successful, or at least more promising, initiatives in recent years have involved strong involvement by the state and by others in civil society, whose presence and participation may break open the various ecclesial echo-chambers. The Australian Church has discovered this in a painful but productive way, as a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse probed a variety of religious and other institutions, including the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle, and uncovered shocking actions and equally shocking omissions.¹¹ As this number of the *Journal* goes to press the Archbishop of Canterbury, his predecessor and others are expected to go before the UK's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. The Bell case will come under scrutiny there too.

Canada's experience, particularly with regard to indigenous young people and the Residential Schools, led to the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which completed its work in 2015 but gave rise to a National Research Center, whose work is ongoing. Those two dimensions, the unflinching self-examination not only of and by the Church but of the wider society within which it works, and the acknowledgement that the work of protection and justice is not exhausted with any single process but requires ongoing research and continued reflection, will be necessary elements of any better approaches to the protection of children by Churches of the Anglican Communion.

9. Note the Anglican Communion's 'Safe Church Network' Initiative: <http://acscn.anglicancommunion.org/> (accessed 4 March 2018).

10. Gunnur Karakurt and Tamra Cumbie, 'The Relationship between Egalitarianism, Dominance, and Violence in Intimate Relationships', *Journal of Family Violence*, 27. 2 (2012), pp. 115-22.

11. <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/final-report> (accessed 4 March 2018).