Chapter 16
Institutional Moral Failure: Emotional Intelligence and Practical Reason Serving Justice

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Abstract The Catholic Church in Australia emerged as an instance of gross moral failure in the final findings of a *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* of December 2017. The profound damage to thousands of innocent victims has rightly demanded steps to understand and address the causes of this shocking tragedy at the personal, organisational, leadership and cultural levels of the Church. There is an associated imperative of re-evaluating the Church's life, self-understanding and culture, particularly in relation to leaders and religious ministers. This specific case study in moral failure can be approached through the interplay of psychology and moral science. Emotional intelligence and practical reason converge with a common concern for the appreciation of, and response, to values and persons. This can be done, first, by examining culture (here, ecclesial) and how it underpins and shapes attitudes, values, practices and structures. Second, we consider the extent to which moral failure (with error and mistakes) can be seen as cultural constructs and how these three elements can be embodied in social and structural evil. Finally, there is learning from moral failure (with mistakes and errors) in terms of their potential for growth. Such a task can be approached as a four-pronged exercise in emotional intelligence and practical reason serving justice: from human sciences about the valence of shame; from history and the wider community; from victims; and from within the Christian story. Such an approach offers grounds for hope in the task of cultural change.

Keywords Mistake · Error · Failure · Catholic Church · Culture · Emotional intelligence · Justice · Moral · Practical reason · Sexual abuse

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16.1 Introduction

It is virtually impossible to be unaware of events internationally over the past two decades about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. The many thousands of perpetrators have been principally clergy and religious. This has been compounded by the reprehensible failures of Church leaders to respond appropriately, even to the point of widespread denial and 'cover-ups'.

The Catholic Church in Australia emerged as an instance of gross moral failure in the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse of December 2017 (henceforth, Final Report). The profound damage to thousands of innocent victims has rightly demanded steps to understand and address the causes of this shocking tragedy at the personal, organisational, leadership and cultural levels of the Church. There is an associated imperative of re-evaluating the Church's life, self-understanding and culture, particularly in relation to leaders and religious ministers.[1]

The above Abstract can serve as a suitable introduction since it distils the key elements and basic structure of this chapter.

16.2 Culture

The moral failure concerning sexual abuse and responses to it by the Catholic Church in Australia was, clearly, 'institutional'. Consequently, strategies to address the past and plan for the future must be institutional in nature. A central issue raised by the Royal Commission was the Church's 'culture' that helped to foster, deny and 'cover-up' the evil with its widespread and profound damage to the innocent. In that sense, the culture contributed to the abuse; hence, a working definition of culture is a helpful guide.

Browning defines culture as 'a set of symbols, stories (myths), and norms for conduct that orient a society or group cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally to the world in which it lives' (Browning 1976, 73). It is captured succinctly by Gerald Arbuckle (2019) – the 'felt meanings' by which we direct our lives, in society or as a faith community. 'Meanings' is used here not just in an intellectual sense. It also connotes a deep emotional attachment. Arbuckle emphasises that:

> through a culture people feel an affective sense of belonging, but also depending on the context other emotions, for example, shame, anger. (Arbuckle 2019, 13)

As we shall see, such emotional responses can occur with sexual abuse, in itself and, most especially, when it is ignored or victims are not taken seriously.

[1] 'Church' in this discussion refers to the Roman Catholic Church, unless otherwise indicated.

Like the air we breathe, we take our culture for granted, whether it be our everyday 'secular' lives or within a religious group, such as a Church. Only when the 'air' supply is cut off (e.g. the traveller's homesickness) or is toxic in some way does culture get our attention. Disruptive events, for instance, can force us to reflect on the beliefs and values we take for granted (e.g. ecclesial). Importantly, such incidents can impel us to address why and how 'professed' beliefs and values are in conflict with the real or operational 'belief and value' system implicit in individual and group behaviour. This is particularly true when resultant actions (or failure to act) damage rather than promote personal and communal well-being and belonging.

The Final Report guides us here. It points to the 'disturbingly similar' pattern of response by Catholic Church authorities to complaints of sexual abuse. The common concern was to avoid public scandal and to maintain the Church's reputation. 'Loyalty' to priests and religious overrode serious attention being given to allegations (Final Report, Executive Summary, 61). The Royal Commission focussed on three closely interrelated factors: theology, governance and culture. Its report captured the linkage between the sacred, power and abuse. Ministers, in the Catholic tradition, work in a context of sacred power (authority) that expresses itself in the sacramental, liturgical and leadership aspects of the Church's life. The concern is not to reject such power but to learn how it can be exercised in a more responsible (and life-giving) manner (Ormerod 2012, 222).

The Final Report pointed out that, theologically, the Church's self-understanding was hierarchical, centred on bishops and priests, autonomous and self-sufficient, with its own system of law. Underlying these was an 'idealisation' of the priesthood and the Catholic Church. Such qualities capture the 'tightly interconnected' elements that can be described as 'clericalism' (68).

Such a theology had systemic repercussions. It meant that matters such as sexual abuse by its members were dealt with internally and in secret. The 'sacredness' of the priest and religious person led to 'exaggerated levels of unregulated power and trust which perpetrators of child sexual abuse were able to exploit' (68). The hierarchical nature of Church organisational structure and governance meant that the power of individual bishops was not subject to 'adequate checks and balances', with insufficient accountability and lack of required transparency (68). The need was highlighted for more accountable and transparent Church governance and, drawing on modern forms in the secular world, for greater participation (lay people) and consultation (Final Report, 69).

The Final Report gave a clear picture (supported by compelling evidence) of grave systemic dysfunction in the Catholic Church. The report, rightly, raised serious questions about the Church's 'operational' culture that led to such widespread damage to innocent children. In other words, how can this form of 'cultural' deformity be viewed in terms of moral failure, structural sin and evil?

16.3 Moral Failure as Construct

Mistakes, errors or failures are part of life. They can result in shame or embarrassment but can also be occasions for learning. Their incidence across cultures will be shaped by the form of cultural arrangements at work, such as predominantly collectivist or individualist. In the former where shame/honour is the dominant framework, modes of address or bodily posture (e.g. the bow in Japan) are foundational in daily and formal relationships. Failures in these areas can have bearing on personal interactions and, for instance, business negotiations in a manner that may not be such a pressing issue in a more individualist-based culture. More broadly, in organisations, such as the Church, certain types of mistakes, errors and failure can have serious consequences for individuals and for the community itself. But they can also trigger new learnings and improvements and, if needed, a shift in the culture.

This brings us to 'moral failure'. What the term means here is not a lapse in decorum or social practice. One sense of the term 'moral failure' is as the equivalent of 'deliberate wrongdoing'. The working assumption of our discussion is that there are certain forms of behaviour that are viewed, across cultures, as gravely damaging to individuals or the group, such as treason, murder, slavery and rape. These capture key moral boundaries that guide human life. Such come under the umbrella of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which every adult and child without exception is entitled. Relevant here are the rights of a child to 'develop in a healthy and normal manner' and to be 'protected against neglect, cruelty and exploitation' (Declaration of the Rights of the Child 1959, preamble and principles, 1, 2 and 9). This is our context and brings us to the next consideration.

In this discussion, 'moral failure' has a specific focus. It can refer to deliberate sexual abuse or exploitation of a child (wrongdoing). In that sense, it concerns perpetrators, criminal proceedings and the processes of law. The concern for us is the second sense of 'moral failure', namely, neglect in addressing instances of such harmful, often criminal, activity by denial or cover-up ('culpable error'). This may well be a matter of legal process. For our purposes (as also of the Royal Commission), there still remains the question of moral fault and associated responsibility – concerning both past events and preventative measures in the future.

16.4 Social Sin and Structural Evil

This raises the issue of social sin and structural evil. These are examples of moral failure concerning situations or practices that can involve or promote harm both individually and collectively. They can, at times, be grounded in mistaken or erroneous beliefs made 'in good faith'. In religious terms, the category of deliberate wrongdoing is described as 'sin' – an offence against God. But this can tend to view sin simply as an individual or 'spiritual' matter. Human sinfulness (being prone to

evil) is conditioned by the social and cultural world in which we live. As mentioned above, culture is part of the air we breathe. The Church, like our cultural and social world, is the 'backdrop' that shapes our attitudes to situations and the options available in any response that is made (Ormerod 2007, 50). If a culture is deformed in some way (e.g. by racism), it influences individual decisions. 'It is only through the attentiveness to the voice of society's victims that we can begin to recognise the very evil we take for granted' (Ormerod 2007, 52). The sexual abuse issue in relation to the Church's culture is a striking example of this very point.

In an institution involving many persons, moral responsibility is shared, yet, in some ways, diffuse. A category such as 'social sin' tries to recognise the wrongness of a situation 'without exaggerating the personal responsibility of individuals complicit at various levels' (Duffy 1993, 910). Social sin also puts the focus on social relations and power. When this happens, the focus shifts to the victim. Social sin takes embodied form in the structures, policies and practices of any group or culture that privileges those with power. In other words, we are talking about institutionalised injustice (structural evil). Such is the expression of a culture whose 'felt meanings' are either totally deformed or are distorted in some areas. Those warped meanings and values emerge through the policies and accepted practices that influence individual actions.

This was evident in the Catholic Church in its handling of such grave matters as sexual abuse. As an institution, it was, for the most part, blind to the plight of victims. This pointed to a serious defect at the cognitive level in the level of appreciation of something that involved grave harm. Consequently, at the affective level, there was a pattern of not being 'moved' by the victim's situation. There was a resultant lack of, or inadequate response to, the plight of the victim. What emerged was often a reaction of self-preservation and protection of the Church's good name.

In view of this gross moral failure on the Church's part, what is there to learn? Central is the protection of children and those most vulnerable in the future. This will influence the Church at the institutional level of governance (along the lines suggested by the Royal Commission noted above). It will also entail a gradual change in the Church's culture, in the configuration of its 'felt meanings' – our next concern.

16.5 Emotional Intelligence and Practical Reason

These terms, central in our discussion, need to be clarified. Adequate for our purposes is the original definition from Salovey and Mayer of emotional intelligence (EI) as 'the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions' (Salovey and Mayer 1990, 189).[2]

[2] In recent times, EI has morphed into other forms, e, g. cultural intelligence (CQ) and social intelligence (SQ).

Allied to such developments is an increasing awareness of the key role of emotions in intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviour (with their psychological and moral implications). This is particularly evident across disciplines such as psychology and moral philosophy (e.g. Narvaez 2014; Helm 2001; Stocker and Hegeman 1996). There is an inherent correlation between EI and positive social outcomes, e.g. healthy social relationships, behaviours and communication, altruism, empathy and the 'personal coherence essential to moral and ethical behaviour' (Keidar and Yagoda 2014, 163).

In a recent review of relevant literature, concerns were raised about the ethical limitations of a range of ECI ('emotional intelligence competency') theories. The authors outline a range of 'competencies' and their components (variable in view of the range of theories). It suffices, given our purposes, to note that the main categories for 'competency' in leadership and management seem to be self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and social skills (Segon and Booth 2015, 791).

These authors propose the inclusion of an ethical management cluster and a number of competencies based on virtue ethics (Segon and Booth 2015, 789). Their concern is not that ECI frameworks are not successful in upholding ethical practice. Rather, these writers consider there is a failure to appeal directly to morality in the various competencies that were surveyed. Their concern is the risk that 'managers and leaders [are] open to potential decision-making and actions that are unethical' (Segon and Booth 2015, 792).

To address this, after weighing up the relative value of utilitarian and duty approaches to ethics, the writers turn to virtue ethics with its emphasis 'on purposiveness that defines human endeavour that transcends the realm of business and defines its place in larger society' (Segon and Booth 2015, 797). Such an approach entails a focus on the conformity between right thinking and desire. Central here is the virtue of practical wisdom (phronesis) that is needed for deliberation and the good judgement that guides choices and actions such that one finds the mean between extremes (Segon and Booth 2015, 796).[3] As noted earlier, emotional intelligence is about how to use our emotions intelligently. But it also concerns how to find intelligence in our emotions – how are they conveyors of truth and value and helpful as wise guides. We consider this matter further.

Drawing on Aristotle's approach to virtue ethics, two forms of knowledge can be distinguished. Theoretical or speculative knowledge (episteme) seeks understanding of the truth whether concerning facts, science or discipline such as mathematics. For instance, we know the London is the capital of the United Kingdom or that two plus two equals four.

Alternatively, there is practical knowledge (or reason, phronesis) that seeks the wise judgement needed about how to act and 'the behaviours to be developed through practice and habit' (Segon and Booth 2015, 798). The object of this form of knowledge is the truth apprehended from the perspective of the 'good', namely, a

[3] Practical wisdom (prudence) is one of the four cardinal virtues in virtue theory, with justice, fortitude and temperance.

value to be pursued and embodied in action. It is an apprehension of a value that is an objective reality (e.g. respect human life, keeping promises) but has a personal significance. In other words, it is best described as 'appreciation'.

We can see practical reason collaborating with emotional intelligence in terms of nurturing personal relationships. Our specific concerns are the damage done to victims from sexual abuse and the associated shame and disgrace on the part of the Church. How can one be discriminating about shame (and humiliation) such that we can use such an emotion to guide future thinking, appraisals, responses and actions? I suggest through the interplay of emotional intelligence and practical reason – which guides later discussion.

So far, we have clarified 'moral failure' through recourse to ideas such as culture, construct, social sin, structural evil, etc. Beginning with the historical context, we now consider the 'hidden potential' of such failure as realised in forms of 'learning' for the Church that concern the past (remedial) and, importantly, the future (preventative).

16.6 Historical Context

For the Church, theological developments since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) opened up possibilities built on the autonomy of the secular realm within the divine economy. 'Secular' does not, in itself, connote antireligious. The sacred and secular are not, by definition, in opposition but complement each other and have points of intersection. The secular, symbolised in the city, is the public space for the interaction of the various philosophical and religious traditions within a community. The Church is called to have a dialogical relationship with the wider global community. As noted already, this has taken on a more urgent, if not, imperative quality with the incidence of sexual abuse and its implications for the Church as an institution and its culture.

Further light is thrown on our discussion by Rowan Williams (2000). He suggests that 'we are systematically misled, even corrupted, by a picture of the human agent as divided into an outside and an inside – a "true self", hidden, buried, to be excavated by one or another kind of therapy', whether it be in philosophical or psychological form, as the quest for the 'authentic' self (Williams 2000, 29). Rather, Williams argues that, from the start, personal identity comes into being through human communication and interaction. An unbalanced rhetoric of interiority has serious moral consequences because it suggests that our social or public life is of secondary importance.

Such an insight can be applied analogically (and aptly) to the Church and its self-understanding. This has particular reference to the Church as a sign and instrument of God's presence in the world and its associated holiness. Rather than the Church's self-understanding and holiness being primarily (if not solely) of the interior realm, it must also be viewed as a process. In other words, the Church as a community evolves in its understanding of itself, of its mission and of its moral responsibilities.

This can only occur in a historical setting, hence from a relational and interactive context both vertically (with God) and, importantly, for our purposes, horizontally, namely, in social and public life.

Further, it is recognised that, within the western democratic systems in the past two decades, there is an increasing crisis of trust, an issue addressed by Onora O'Neill's Reith Lectures (O'Neill 2002). The lightning rod for this 'crisis' is primarily around institutions, whether political, governmental or ecclesiastical but also in professions. The erosion of trust in these spheres is often accompanied by a means to replace it, namely, greater transparency. While this may be healthy in some areas, it may also be symptomatic of a wider problem. It is trust that is the glue that holds a community or social group together. Given the context of the discussion here, such a consideration is very relevant to the Church's understanding of, and response to, the sexual abuse issues and the findings of the Royal Commission.

Having clarified the current historical context in which the Church is functioning, we now consider the various modes of learning 'for the sake of justice' prompted by the moral failure under consideration. Justice is another form of the four cardinal virtues, whereby one is disposed to give what is due to others. Determining what is 'due' is set against the overarching notion of justice as right relationships amongst people. The Church, as a historical and human reality, grows in moral wisdom and, specifically, in its appreciation of justice and its scope – a process that embraces both past and future. On that basis, we proceed to the first sphere of the Church's learning, namely, the insights from human sciences into shame.

16.6.1 Learning from Human Sciences About Shame

A task facing the Church is learning from and for healthy relationships and, in particular, through moral emotions and the associated ability to identify and appreciate what is salient in situations and relationships. Given the Church's failure, such an approach involves a readiness to engage with disgrace and the accompanying shame.

Shame can have destructive, even toxic, forms. But this is not always the case. Recent studies in positive psychology and other human sciences have made advances in taking a more constructive approach to shame. Shame, properly engaged, can be transformed and transforming – psychologically and morally. Such a process brings not only a reconnection with one's true self but also for one's vulnerabilities and limitations and those of others. Shame named, embraced and shared leads to greater understanding of both oneself and others, greater empathy and compassion and a heightened appreciation of injustice. In other words, shame can be a positive health resource – personally, culturally and across cultures (Vanderheiden and Mayer 2017).

Shame is a fear of failure to observe an expected standard – of oneself or of others. Rather than a form of conformity, it is argued that, if one participates with others in a life of shared moral practices, then, we need the approval and support of

others. To be ashamed over moral failings is essential to being a morally mature person (Calhoun 2004, 129). In the moral failure we are discussing, the Church is being confronted with the question 'have you forgotten what you stand for?' Shame is a prompt to self-examination and to explore various modes of learning which offer specific ways in which practical reason and emotional intelligence are at the service of justice – our next concern.

16.6.2 Learning in the Past: Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is, historically, relatively recent. This statement is representative of the developmental trajectory across societies globally in the acknowledgement and articulation of human rights. The Church's resistance to human rights' movements must be understood in its historical context and the movements inimical to the Church, particularly in the post-Enlightenment period and in nineteenth-century Europe. In the changing context of the new world and of post-revolutionary Europe, 'freedom' and 'secular' took on less antagonistic meanings. For all that, the historical record clearly indicates how the Church's thinking on, and attitude to, human rights in a more secular context gradually evolved from rejection to discernment, to dialogue and, finally, to proclamation (Cornish 2002).

Looking back, theologian Walter Kasper notes that explicit talk of 'human rights' is peculiar to the modern period but that the associated ideas are as old as Christianity. Rather than the 'image of God' confined to the king or ruler, it was 'democratised' to include every person 'irrespective of race, people, sex, or culture' (Kasper 1990, 49 & 55). Rights can be traced back to the 'dignity' of the human being created in the image and likeness of God (Gen, 1:26) and strengthened by the covenant between God and humankind. On that basis, human dignity is inviolable and inalienable, no matter how much it may be violated by oneself or others. This (and the evolving Hebrew and New Testament ethos) offered a starting point for a secular theory of human rights. It is only in modern times that the legal and political implications of this were systematically elaborated (Hoppe 1994, 455–6).

The Declaration on Religious Freedom (1966) from the Second Vatican Council was emblematic of the shift in Church's own self-understanding, particularly in its stance towards the modern world, shaped by the Enlightenment and post-revolutionary Europe. This applied, most especially, to human and political rights. There was a growing awareness of the Church's need to engage with, and learn from, democratic institutions since there was increased appreciation of how self-government was a mark of social and political maturity. This brings us to the second sphere of learning.

16.6.3 Learning in the Present: Victims

We recall here Ormerod's comment earlier that 'It is only through the attentiveness to the voice of society's victims that we can begin to recognise the very evil we take for granted'. This is made more specific by Pope Francis (2018) in his response to the suffering endured by so many minors due to sexual abuse:

> Crimes that inflict deep wounds of pain and powerlessness, primarily among victims, but also in their family members and in the larger community of believers and non-believers alike…the heart-wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet or silenced.

The Pope moves on to consider the implications (past and present) of how 'we showed no "care for the little ones: we abandoned them"'. It entails coming to grips with the 'extent and gravity of all that has happened' in a 'comprehensive and communal way'. Acknowledging the truth of all that has happened is 'not enough'. If omission and denial were the pattern in the past, now the task is one of 'solidarity, in the deepest and most challenging sense. As the People of God, we are challenged 'to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and spirit'. This is the groundwork for 'forging present and future history' (Pope Francis 2018, par. 4).

If victims are to lead us about suffering, with any hope of healing and recovery, it demands that victims are heard, taken seriously, understood and acknowledged with responses of regret and repentance. When criminal activity is concerned, the processes of justice need to be invoked. A comprehensive treatment of strategies to achieve these goals (and for establishing structures and procedures needed to protect the innocent and vulnerable) is found in the Final Report of the Royal Commission. These strategies are being diligently applied to the governance structures of the dioceses and Church organisations throughout Australia. Our concern here is to consider the role of restorative justice in the learning process and how it enhances growth in wisdom.

On this matter, there is much to be gained from drawing on legal initiatives such as circle-sentencing and similar trauma healing programmes used amongst Indigenous peoples in Australia and Maori in New Zealand. In collectivist cultures and close communities, to shame an offender can be more effective than retributive sanctions since individuals place great weight on how they are seen by family and friends. When brought face to face with those they have harmed, they can better appreciate the impact of their actions (Probyn 2005, 90–98). Such an approach aligns with Pope Francis' emphasis on solidarity. Listening to victims and the need for retributive justice (and punishment for guilty actions) are paralleled by processes of restorative justice. Here, justice is concerned with identifying harm and how to heal the harm done to relationships. Justice, here, is focussed on restoring right relationships.

In discussing harm and restorative justice, Eli McCarthy draws on the work of Harold Zehr (2002) and points to basic needs involved for three groups – the victims, offenders and community (McCarthy 2016, 71; Zehr 2002, pp. 14–18). As

noted above, victims need to be informed about what happened and why it happened, to be able to tell the truth of their own story and to receive 'acknowledgment, empowerment or regaining a sense of control in their lives, and restitution for the harm done' (McCarthy 2016, 71).

Offenders need to take accountability that addresses the harms, 'encourages empathy and responsibility and transforms shame'. A further need of the offender is to be encouraged (a) to experience personal transformation, such as healing for the harms that contributed to their offending behaviour, and (b) opportunities for treatment for addictions and/or other problems, and enhancement of personal competencies. Again, offenders need encouragement and support for integration into the community.

As for the community stakeholders, 'they need attention to their concerns as victims, opportunities to build a sense of community and mutual accountability, and encouragement to take on their obligations for their members, including victims and offenders, and to foster the conditions that promote healthy communities' (McCarthy 2016, 71–2; Zehr 2002, 12–14).

These three groups with their respective needs (victims, offenders and the community) find clear parallels with the situation facing the Church. All are to be embraced within the circle of restorative justice – as indicated earlier.

16.6.4 Learning from the Christian Tradition

Our learning from the Royal Commission, secular world, victims and cultural life will lead, hopefully, to a broader moral horizon, things we feel 'deeply' about and get angry about if they are attacked or undermined. This underlines the 'preventative' aspect of learning from 'moral failure' and its bearing on changes in attitudes and convictions. To 'own' practices and protocols that safeguard and protect innocent children and vulnerable adults, we must, finally, consider what can be learnt from the Christian Tradition and, importantly, about God.

First, we return to the God revealed in the Hebrew story. The prophets often speak of God as 'always faithful', as one who never forgets his people. For God's community, being faithful is to remember; being unfaithful is to forget – who we are (a needed reminder from the Royal Commission). These are the benchmarks against which the God of the Covenant measures fidelity. True worship, then, flowers in mercy and compassion. More importantly, it produces the fruits of justice, particularly in how one treats those most disadvantaged – the widow, the orphan and the stranger. This is not just about mercy. In the Hebrew perspective, it concerns what should be done, the claims of those in need and what we all have a duty to give.

Second, this moral failure of the Church offers another reminder for us, once again, from our Jewish heritage. Holiness primarily denotes God's transcendence and 'otherness' – someone totally beyond us. In the God of our Jewish heritage, the holy and the fostering of what is right and just are closely intertwined. Why? Because the God of Israel is personal. The benchmark of justice (whether divine or

human) is 'right relationship' – between God and creation, between humanity and God and between human beings in their dealings with each other. Hence, damage or harm to anyone, especially to the more vulnerable members of society, offends God's holiness. That is why the prophets are so vehement about social justice or, better, social injustice.

One persistent theme in the prophets was God's anger when the Covenant is distorted: when worship was disconnected from its ethical demands – measured by how the most disadvantaged are treated. This is a rupture between holiness and justice and a distortion of what fosters 'right relationships'. These considerations are very relevant here. For whatever reasons, the Catholic tradition may have soft-pedalled such aspects of justice and of God's anger. With recent events, such a consideration cannot be ignored.

This brings us back to the question of holiness and justice. As noted earlier in this chapter, for some time, Catholic morality has tended to be somewhat individualistic, namely, with a focus on 'me and God'. Sin, then, was primarily seen as an offence against God. If that is fixed up by receiving the sacrament of reconciliation, then, all is well in the eyes of God.

These recent events involving such widespread emotional and spiritual damage to myriads of innocent victims highlight the serious inadequacy of such an approach. The Christian moral life is less about me and more about We – recovering our Hebrew roots. Being moral (just) and sharing God's holiness are personal and about fostering and maintaining right relationships with others (and not only with God).

Seen from that perspective, sin is not simply an offence against God as holy. As an evil, more often than not, it entails some form of harm, damage and even injustice. At times, reparation and restoration are imperative. Again, while an action may not be public but private, it still has social repercussions. It can involve a more distorted perception of life (and people) or dispositions to be more self-focussed. Institutional protocols and practices of safeguarding and protection (the 'preventative') are about what really matters to us. It brings to mind the old adage: each of us is our brother and sister's 'keeper'. This brings us back, finally, to the question of culture.

16.7 Cultural Change and Hope

Gerald Arbuckle observes that 'profound cultural change is a messy and painful process. It takes some time for individuals to get their heads and hearts adjusted to the fact that the world has changed, and they must change also' (Arbuckle 2019, 14). Any shift in 'felt' meanings primarily involves the heart and then the head. Structural changes, with policies and protocols for safeguarding and the protection of children and vulnerable adults, need time to become embedded in the life of an institution such as the Church and its members.

Hans Zollner SJ[4] has pinpointed that the task ahead for the Church is about nurturing a culture of trust, a 'heart change', so that 'things come naturally and spontaneously, because you feel it' (Dioceses of Parramatta and Wollongong 2018, 18). This entails destroying structures of sin (or flawed structures) and replacing them with forms of living that are more authentic, life-giving and affectively inclusive. This process of changing the distorted 'felt-meanings' of a Church culture demands the presence of another cardinal virtue, namely, courage (allied with patience). This must be underpinned by faith in the presence of Jesus, the crucified and risen victim. On that foundation, positive engagement with moral failure, and its associated shame and disgrace, can be undertaken with hope.

16.8 Conclusion

We have examined an example of gross moral failure in a religious institution, namely, the Catholic Church in Australia. The profound damage to thousands of victims has serious implications for the culture, structure and governance of the Church. Different ways in which the Church might learn from what has happened were explored.

Central in all this is the quote of Pope Francis cited earlier: 'we showed no care for the little ones; we abandoned them'. Both haunting and poignant in their pain, these words are a salutary (and needed) reminder of the fragility of the human beings in the Church's care. They are also point to the ever-present danger for the Church to become self-serving, most especially, of finding itself morally blind and deaf to the cries for help right in its own back yard. The Pope's words, then, stand as a cameo of a Church called to be a humble servant, a beacon of mercy, but, most importantly, of a loving justice.

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