

## **Views from the Pews – Abuse in Care**

The hard copy of the Report must weigh several kilos – what to say in just 400 words?

Two propositions for debate:

1. The Church should not establish, manage, support, run or (worse still outsource) any residential facility, however worthy its aims, unless we can be 110% sure that this can be done safely and effectively according to modern safeguarding standards. That is a high bar, but the reputational damage suffered by faith-based institutions and by organized religion as a whole cannot be risked in the future. Unless we have the human resources to manage this level of risk then the risk is not worth it. There are other ways of doing God's work in the world. We should be especially cognizant of what went wrong at Dilworth and why. We should be aware of how traditional hierarchical structures – which appear so worthy on the outside – can decay quickly and can become resistant to scrutiny. This will be hard. The monastic model is an ancient part of Christian life but it appears to be vulnerable – because of its very respectability – to morphing into other forms. We owe it to ourselves and to the future of our Church to learn from the Report especially when it talks of human nature and our reluctance to look under the carpet.

2. The Church has a role in challenging what this morning we'll call the 'Golden Age Myth'. We all have friends who assure us that there's a direct link between the abolition of child smacking and the apparent growth of ram raiding. This mythology informs most of our criminal corrections policy to the detriment of the good science of cause and effect. There was no Golden Age according to the Report. It seems so in retrospect because those deemed in non-compliance were made to disappear. The Church advocates for a sacrificial model of reconciliation and has the tools to lead a necessary debate about our society and its flaws. This will be difficult because our institutional hands are not clean and how we handle ourselves in the next year or so will be crucial if we are to lead this kind of moral discussion. Once again, we should turn to Christ's example. His support for the marginalized and His challenge to the marginalizers is really all we need.

The Report will make difficult reading but then so are the Gospels.

*Richard Swarbrick*