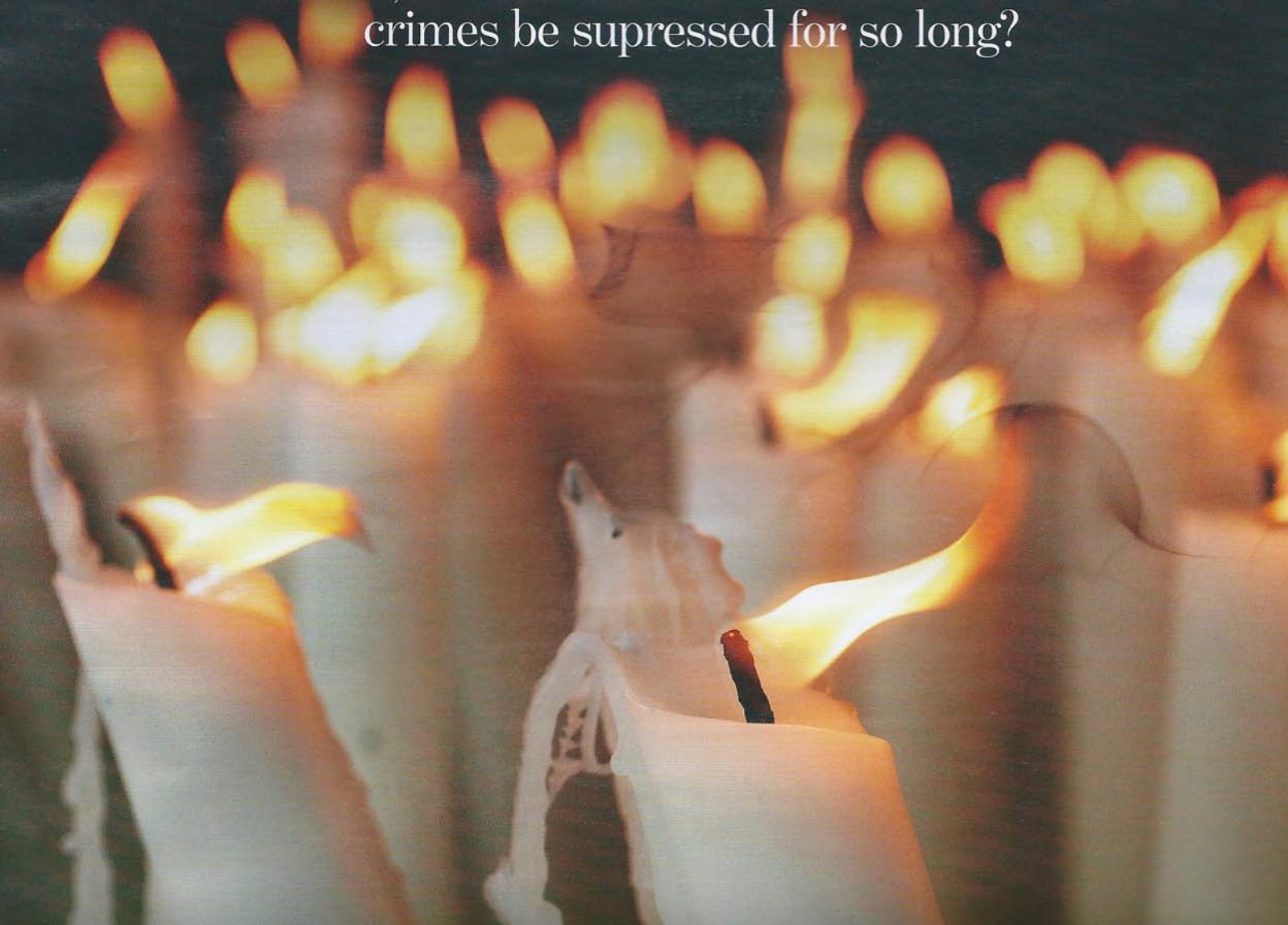


SINS *of the fathers*

As a royal commission investigates mounting child sex abuse allegations in the Catholic Church, Clair Weaver asks: how could these crimes be suppressed for so long?



Maiden centurion Ed Cowan's tearful tribute to mentor Peter Roebuck: FULL STORY SPORTSDAY

The Sydney Morning Herald

Nationwide royal commission • No organisation will escape investigation Gillard acts on sex abuse claims

Philip Gosses and Jacqueline Terry

PRIME MINISTER Julia Gillard has signalled that her government will investigate the Catholic Church's role in the nationwide royal commission into child sexual abuse. Gillard's spokeswoman said the government would commission an inquiry into the church's role in the abuse.



Julia Gillard announcing the commission.

A victim's story
Richard was only seven when he went to the school, and he said sexual abuse was happening from the very start, through until he was 15 years old, although when he left the school he said some of his mates from the school would ring and they would talk about it among themselves. **A sister speaks** - Page 2

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Lorena Taylor

Before the announcement, the Catholic archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, said "the diocese will continue to work with the police and other agencies to ensure the safety of children and young people". The archbishop said he would work with the police to ensure the safety of children and young people. The archbishop said he would work with the police to ensure the safety of children and young people.

It's a depressing measure of the scale of the sex abuse scandal engulfing the Catholic Church that news of a priest preying on a child is no longer shocking. A typical response: "Oh, another one?" Meanwhile, the dark stereotype of a paedophile lurking in young boys is practically a foregone conclusion when it comes to comedic discussions around men of the cloth. Many of us have, in short, become desensitised to one of the most brutal child sex abuse cabals in recent history.

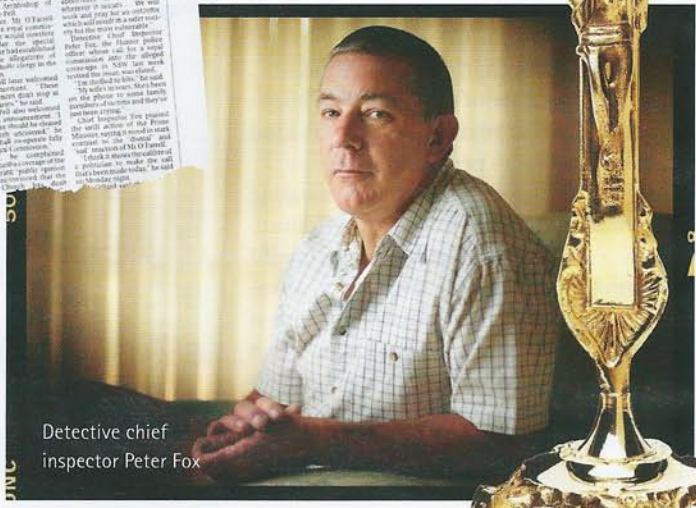
But sometimes it takes a heartfelt personal story to cut through apathy and force change. In this case, it was the horrifying ordeal of young Daniel Feenan – abused by his trusted parish priest from the age of 12 – that was forced into the public arena in unfiltered, high-definition detail. On national TV, detective chief inspector Peter Fox described how the boy was driven to a park by Father James Fletcher and ordered to remove his pants.

"[The] priest anally penetrated him," Fox told ABC TV's *Lateline*. "The boy wasn't aware at that stage that his anus had been torn and he started bleeding. He was screaming in agony on the seat and his knuckles were turning white. And as the priest continued while he screamed, he said he focused on the St Christopher's cross on the dashboard and watched it swaying back and forward to try and take his focus off the pain."

It's the kind of nauseatingly graphic account we don't often see or hear in the media. Newspaper editors might deem it the sort of story that would "put people off their Corn Flakes". Some viewers, no doubt, turned off their TV. Others surely cried for Daniel, who wasn't named on the show.

Unpalatable as it may be, it's still happening. And it's the kind of evil likely to have been inflicted on thousands more Australian children – vulnerable and voiceless – at the hands of highly respected, powerful men who have supposedly dedicated their lives to doing God's work. Indeed, the extent of the scandal triggered a royal commission into child sex abuse in churches and other institutions that started early this year.

Clearly, a deeper investigation was needed: once the immediate shock of the latest revelations wore off, many of us were left baffled, and could only wonder how this happened in the first place.



Detective chief inspector Peter Fox

To outsiders, the Catholic Church seems a mysterious place. Steeped in ancient traditions and symbolic rituals, it is an extremely wealthy, prestigious and powerful global institution. It has intimidating darkened churches with stained-glass windows, large crosses and statues, sombre masses, bells, incense, communion and wine, haunting church organs, confessionals, holy water, blessings, exorcisms, elaborate costumes... shall we go on? Anybody who has visited the Vatican and gazed at the enormity of St Peter's Basilica in Rome returns with stories of its massive, almost overwhelming, reach.

But to those of us who grew up in the faith or attended Catholic schools, all this showiness starts to seem absurdly normal. For us, it's simply taken for granted – an inextricable part of one of the largest religions on earth. Today, more than 723,000 Australian children attend Catholic schools – a figure that has grown by more than 25 per cent since I was enrolled in primary school in 1983 – and continues to rise.

I'm grateful the church provided me with a high-quality education, caring environment and some moral guidance. But disturbing indications that child sexual abuse has somehow become institutionalised in the Catholic system got me thinking perhaps conditions within the church can offer important clues as to how it happened for so long, at such magnitude, without being exposed.

And what magnitude it is: "My estimate is that the Catholic Church has six times as many cases of child sexual abuse by clergy or religious leaders as all other religions in Australia combined," says professor Patrick Parkinson, a leading child protection expert at →



the University of Sydney's law faculty. Combined. That's an astonishing figure – one that firmly contradicts Cardinal George Pell's claim the church is merely being targeted unfairly by the media.

What is it about the Catholic Church in particular that seems to make this kind of behaviour more prevalent?

The culture of secrecy permeating the church has to be seriously considered. From a young age, Catholics are taught to confess their sins in a dark room, alone and through a privacy screen to a priest who then hands down a judgment that effectively "clears" one's sins. All of this is done under a seal of confidentiality, a practice that can be said to help relieve or even negate feelings of shame, fear and discomfort for perpetrators. In an extreme case that may provide some insight, a former Queensland priest admitted to going to confession more than 1500 times to admit to sexually abusing boys, only to be told to pray and then be absolved: "It was like a magic wand had been waved over me."

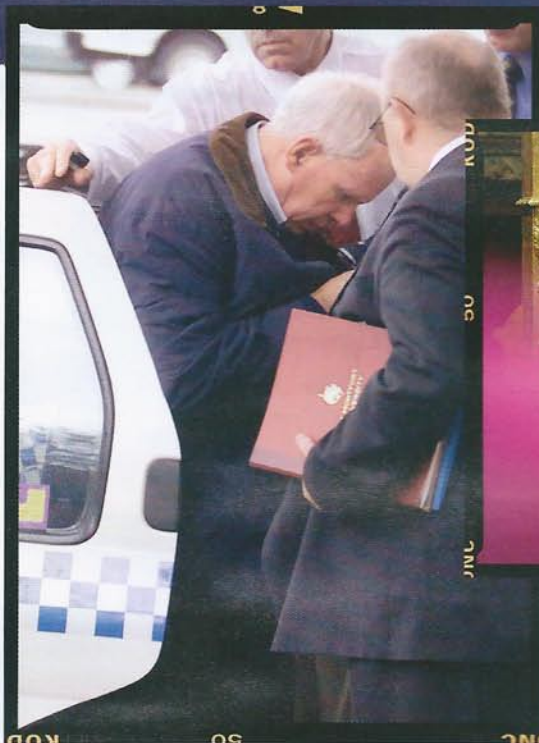
Cardinals, meanwhile, take a lifelong vow of secrecy when they enter the conclave, negating any possibility that brewing scandals can be handled effectively.

A Vatican document, published in 1962, threatened priests with automatic excommunication if they revealed details of internal sexual abuse trials. That rule remained in effect until 2001.

Assisting concealment is the fact the church largely manages itself separately from regular society. "It's an international institution that actually has its own laws, known as Canon law, and its own system of governance in the Vatican," professor Parkinson explains. "I think culturally, the Catholic Church is a law unto itself." This special status long allowed it to present a clean, pious image to the public and protect its assets, and to leave its problems and scandals firmly behind closed church doors.

But this remoteness – combined with frequently heavy-handed condemnations of modern morality and a stunning reluctance to acknowledge its own problems – only fuels claims the church is antiquated and out of touch. Pope Benedict XVI, for example, used his Christmas address to slam gay marriage and claim homosexuality is destroying "the essence of the human creature". Many would argue that child sex abuse is more destructive than allowing loving couples, irrespective of gender, to be married – and should therefore take precedence as an issue worth tackling.

We now know the church's code of silence has prevented justice from being served against paedophiles in the ranks. Even worse, it has allowed perpetrators to simply move between parishes and, more often than not, abuse even more children –



LEFT Catholic priest Father Jim Fletcher at court to face allegations of eight counts of child abuse, 2003. ABOVE Pope Benedict XVI addresses cardinals and bishops at the Vatican during his 2011 Christmas message.

A Vatican document threatened priests with excommunication if they revealed details of internal sexual abuse trials

in some cases for decades after the first alarm bells rang. Most recently in January, it was reported that Father Tom Knowles, a leading Australian priest who sexually preyed on a 19-year-old disabled woman in Sydney for 14 years, had been allowed to return to preaching and running community groups at Melbourne's St Francis', one

of Australia's busiest Catholic churches.

Many claim the cover-up of cases of sexual abuse stretches into the highest levels of the church's hierarchy.

And secrecy, as paedophiles know, is an effective way of preventing victims from speaking out. "For Daniel," his mother Patricia tells madison, "the easiest thing would have been to [obey and] keep silent." He did just that for more than a decade.

Another powerful tool of control is fear. Catholicism is known for a black-and-white approach to morality. As a child, I can remember the school priest using his sermon to angrily condemn divorce, adultery and abortion – and feeling sorry for any classmates whose parents had committed such grave sins. Many children are understandably afraid of what they hear in teachings about concepts like sin, hell, purgatory, Satan and even God. Some victims have told of perpetrators telling them abuse was their punishment for wrongdoing.

Lawyer Judy Courtin, a PhD student at Melbourne's Monash University who is conducting research into sexual assault and the Catholic Church, compares it to being under a spell. "Think about the little brain of a young child who comes from a Catholic family and believes a priest is God's representative on earth," she



Calls to widen clergy inquiry across state

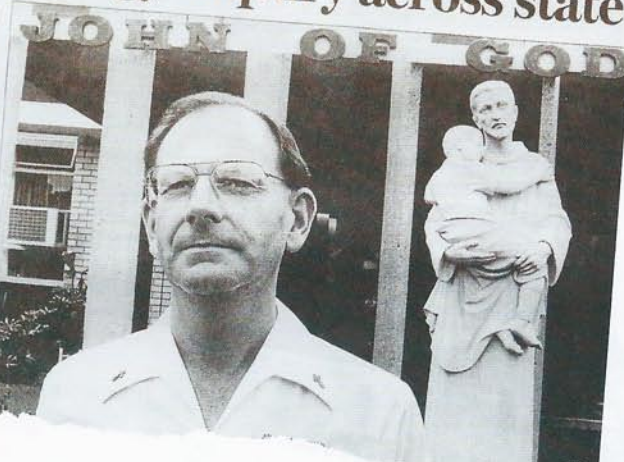
Sean Nicholls and Josephine Tovey

SPECIAL commission of inquiry with the powers of a royal commission will examine claims of negligence in police investigations and handling of child sexual abuse victims and the investigation of clergy members.

in ever-increasing numbers. "I can testify from my own experience that the church covers up, silences victims, hinders police investigations, admits wrongs, destroys evidence and moves priests to protect the good name of the church," he wrote.

NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione, believes a royal commission should not go ahead while there are police investigations under way.

The Premier has rejected calls for the NSW Greens for a royal commission as "politically motivated" and also resisted to emulate the Victorian Parliament's inquiry into clergy sexual abuse.



Pell urged to close order over abuses

EXCLUSIVE
Rory Callinan and Josephine Tovey

MORE than 70 per cent of the Brothers from the St John of God order are suspected child abusers and the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney should immediately shut it down, says a psychologist who was employed by the order to meet scores of victims.

Michelle Mulvihill, who dealt with more than 120 of the order's child abuse victims during compensation negotiations, claims Cardinal George Pell was aware of "loan by the Catholic Church to...der, which was"

READER'S LETTER

Childhood is the most basic human right of all children. Whom could these children turn to when sexually abused within the Catholic Church? Not the law, not the state, not the Catholic Church, to Australia's shame. Shame on Cardinal Pell for more or less saying that Ireland was not Australia, when the same problems were happening here.

Richard Ryan, Summerland Point
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FAR RIGHT Brother Rodger Moloney, convicted in New Zealand of serious sex assaults in the 1960s, remains part of the St John of God order, currently being investigated by police.

In a cruel twist, Patricia and her then-husband John agreed to send Daniel to stay at Father Fletcher's presbytery for the night after he tried to commit suicide at the age of 19. They now know that instead of getting pastoral support, he was assaulted. Again.

Rituals, often used in religions and cults alike, retain a serious power. When Daniel, now 36, recently appeared at the launch of his mother's book *Holy Hell* (\$24.95, Fontaine Press), he gave the audience some insight into how he came under the priest's control. "Daniel said 'stand up' and everyone stood up, then 'sit down' and everyone sat down," Patricia says. "He was talking about being a little kid at mass and how you just do things you are told."

Like most Catholic mothers, Patricia was proud when Daniel was chosen to serve as an altar boy. In retrospect, she knows Father Fletcher exploited it as another way to get close to and manipulate her son. "[Daniel] didn't really know what it was about... He aspired to be an altar boy and ding the bell," she explains. "He was groomed into submission."

explains. "They would never question that and, of course, they are terrified. If the very person who is God's representative [sexually abuses them], it fucks with their mind."

On the flipside, the church also puts a strong emphasis on forgiveness. Jesus preached about turning the other cheek. But in the case of these scandals, the entire principle was perverted for the church's gain. For the sake of their families, the clergy and fellow Catholics, some victims were encouraged to adhere to the concept when considering how to deal with their abuse.

Catholic priests are required to be celibate. Some argue the resulting sexual frustration can corrupt into paedophilia but not all experts are convinced. "I'm sure celibacy is completely unnatural and a crazy way to live," says Courtin, who goes on to ask a provocative question: "[That said], why don't they choose an adult instead?" Courtin may have already found her answer. Her research has suggested that, in at least some cases, paedophiles join the seminary because they know they will have access to children - and a cone of protection from the church.

Opportunity is clearly a factor. About 80 per cent of child sex abuse victims in the Catholic Church are boys, whereas girls are statistically more likely to be preyed upon in mainstream society. Clergy have access to unaccompanied minors, in their capacity as altar boys or through schools, orphanages or other organisations. "Even 30 years ago, if a priest wanted to take a 14-year-old girl off on a camping trip, I think most parents would worry and wonder why," professor Parkinson says, "whereas if it was a boy, particularly if they were troubled, they would have been delighted."

Today, Daniel is a father of three. He is well and happy most of the time but feels he's fallen behind where he should be in life, transforming from a happy school captain to a tormented young man who went off the rails. He endures the emotional burden of his years of abuse every day. In 2004, an unrepentant Father Fletcher was found guilty of nine charges of sexual abuse of a minor. He died in jail just over a year later.

For Patricia, the creation of a royal commission came as a relief. For others raised in the Church it was a depressing reminder of just how much a trusted institution still has to answer for.

Patricia is forever grateful to Peter Fox, who wrote an open letter to NSW premier Barry O'Farrell calling for an inquiry, a breach of police protocol. (Fox admits his career is probably over because of it.) "People hear the words 'molestation' and 'sex abuse' and think that's awful," she says, "but then [Peter] said the words about what actually happened to Daniel and it galvanised the nation into saying no, this must not be allowed to happen anymore." **m**

If you have been sexually abused, know someone who has, or would like more information on counselling services, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14; lifeline.org.au, or Kids Helpline, 1800 55 1800; kidshelp.com.au.