

church abuse

Some of the hardest moments in my life have been...sitting in lounge rooms with parents whose children have been abused by someone from the church. It's just horrific. It is so horrific and the pain and the heartache that that causes to those parents and has caused to those children, and just the ripple effects of that, it's just so horrible. And in that situation I just want to say what I have said. I've said I'm so, so sorry that this occurred under our watch and it's a terrible evil.

▶ KEITH
CONDIE

PATRICK
PARKINSON

◀ We often talk about the church as being hypocritical...In a sense all of us have standards that we know are right and good and the way we should treat others, the way we should behave which we can't live up to. So when people talk about Christians as hypocrites I think we need to understand that all of us fall short of the standards that we deep down know we ought to live by.

There are causes of abuse that are true for all offenders. There are causes that are specific to the individual offender. In between there can be causes that belong to a particular culture, a particular organisation. What are the factors within the Catholic Church that might have fostered this? I feel I've identified a number. Some are specific to the Catholic church, some are not ... I think the angry God has a lot to do with it ... then I'd name moral immaturity ... loneliness...

▶ GEOFFREY
ROBINSON

PATRICK
PARKINSON

◀ ... I think celibacy has had a part to play in that, quite a big part. I think too the Catholic church has had a very closed approach to these things.

To be honest, we're really disappointed when we see leaders do terrible things - leave their wife, have an affair or abuse children - things that go completely against what the Bible teaches and what we've signed up for to follow Jesus. But at the same time I think one of the unique things about the Christian faith is that we're not a religion or an ideology that is saying we're looking for people to be good, to try their hardest and to follow this path to earn their way to a god or to heaven or Nirvana or whatever. The unique thing about the Christian faith is that at the centre of it is the idea that all of us as human beings are broken, we're dirty, we do rubbish things, we've had rubbish things done to us and that we need a Saviour.

▶ AMY
ORR-EWING

PATRICK
PARKINSON

I think one of the big issues has been forgiveness. That's one of the great things about Christianity – that whatever you have done, however badly you have lived – there's the possibility of being forgiven. There's that possibility that your guilt can be taken away. But at the same time it's a bit dangerous when you say that to an offender who hasn't repented, who hasn't changed life, who will continue to do these things. There's a big difference between remorse and repentance. Remorse is when you feel sorry about something. Remorse is what happens in the back of a police car. Repentance is when you agree to change your life and turn around and not do it again. Christ demands of us repentance, not remorse.

I think the safeguards that are now in place – the training, the protocols, the so much greater heightened awareness of the issues means that it's much harder to get away with ongoing abuse in a church than it used to be. And so I think we've come a long way but I don't think we can rest on our laurels.

KEITH
CONDIE

PATRICK
PARKINSON

I think that you should always be involving the police... They've got to face up to their crimes. They've got to face up to their accusers. They got to take the penalty for whatever that may be. And I think forgiveness is at the end of the process, not the beginning. There may be forgiveness - there is for the worst of us. But it's not to be given lightly. And I think forgiveness can follow from repentance, a change of life. (And) reparation, which is saying now what can I do for the victim or the victims, because often there are many victims.

What I can say is that I never equated that pastor's actions with Jesus Christ and I never equated it with the church. And so while I can understand why people would be angry at the church and angry at God for these things that happened to me or to anybody else, this is not what God wants. This was an abomination. When the Scripture speaks about hell I have no problem with hell. Maybe I should but I don't... But the reality is that it's never changed my understanding of the fact that I need God, that this world needs God and this world needs Christ. For all of us that are in the midst of this, we do need to find a way forward because it just eats us alive. I'm not shaking because I'm cold. I want to come to the place where I forgive because I'm the one that's suffering until I do. But I probably would beat up the pastor if I ever had the chance. And it would probably give me more delight than it should. And I need to let it go. I don't know how yet but I need to let it go. It's not going to do any of us any good to beat up on God and beat up on Jesus when they're our only hope.

DALE
KUEHNE

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