

CATHOLIC CHURCH SHOULD DEFROCK THIS MOLESTER

Father Peter Comensoli, the disgraced priest jailed for sexually molesting boys, should be thrown out of the priesthood.

He has forfeited all rights to wear the garments and act in any pastoral capacity where people, particularly youth, are involved.

And unless the Catholic Church strips this convicted molester of his rights to practise as a priest, then its credibility in this diocese will remain at a very low ebb.

The church would also be abrogating its responsibility to its flock by allowing Comensoli to stay on as a priest. I believe it is scandalous for the church to even suggest, as a spokesman did this week, that Comensoli would always remain a priest and that he might even return to work in the Wollongong Diocese.

I wonder what Comensoli's victims think of that. I wonder what the victim's parents and family, and many others sickened by his immorality, think of it?

A parent of one of the victims told me this week: "They just have to throw him out of the priesthood."

"Comensoli is a convicted criminal who has destroyed young lives."

"And they talk about letting him administer the sacraments again."

I agree completely.

Comensoli sexually assaulted boys and teenagers and went to jail for it. He showed them pornographic movies, got



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them drunk and then molested them.

Comensoli may well feel penitent. He may even be on the road to rehabilitation. But nobody could ever be sure that he would not offend again.

Can the Catholic Church give guarantees that this convicted sex offender will never touch a boy or teenager again? Of course not.

Apart from that, the church has a massive image problem to deal with in this diocese. A lot of people have been hurt. If the church wants to rebuild and restore its good name, it must make sure that molesters like Comensoli are cast aside, or at least kept millions of miles away from the faithful.

I could think of nothing more disgraceful than Comensoli practising as a priest back in this diocese, or any diocese for that matter.

It simply cannot be allowed to happen. Comensoli is unfit for the priesthood. Banishment from it is the church's only choice.



Father Peter Comensoli . . . the Catholic Church must not allow the disgraced priest to practise in this diocese - or any other.



MONSGNR WILSON

A new Bishop and new hope

Monsignor Phillip Wilson, Illawarra's newly appointed Catholic Bishop, has a major cleansing operation in front of him.

Hopefully, he will get the job done in the diocese. Interviewed by *The Mercury* during the week, he said: "My first word to the diocese would be one of hope."

I am sure that our new Bishop-elect will get substantial support, not only from elements of the church, but from the community generally.

Monsignor Wilson is very highly regarded in the Hunter Valley as a good bloke and an integral part of the diocese. I also hear on the grapevine that he is not afraid to kick a few heads.

Those clerics who refuse to toe the line might find themselves on the wrong end of the new bishop. "He won't tolerate any nonsense," a Hunter Valley priest told me yesterday.

The majority of Catholics will find that good news. What is more encouraging is the prospect of a new broom sweeping away the debris around the corridors of the church.

Yet another very encouraging sign is that Monsignor Wilson attended St Patrick's Primary School in Cessnock and that he hails from that noble coalfields spot.

They produce good people on the coalfields, so the chances of Monsignor Wilson doing a professional job in the Illawarra are particularly high. His arrival may herald the dawn of an exciting new era for the Catholic Church in this diocese. We all hope that is the case, anyway.

Bishop only has himself to blame



BISHOP MURRAY

I just cannot accept the feeble excuse from Bishop William Murray that he was unsure how to handle allegations of sexual misconduct against a priest and a brother when they first surfaced.

If a bishop does not know how to handle such grave allegations, he should never have been consecrated a bishop in the first place.

Indeed, if the church cannot handle such a crisis - the sexual molestation of boys and teenagers by the clergy - then it is a church in peril.

At least we should be grateful that Bishop Murray broke his long silence this week, coincidentally at the same time as the Royal Commission moved on Evans and Comensoli.

Bishop Murray spoke of the pain he

suffered because of media publicity levelled at him. Well, Bishop, all that publicity would have been averted if you had taken some action after learning of the allegations against Comensoli and Evans.

The victims of these paedophiles spoke to the *Illawarra Mercury* because you did nothing. They did not want the church shamed publicly. Coming to this newspaper was a desperate, last resort to get action.

Let us not forget that some of the boys and their families went to Bishop Murray 10-15 years ago.

They spoke to the *Illawarra Mercury* less than three years ago.

So Bishop, the publicity of which you complain was virtually self-inflicted.

Soon Bishop Murray will go into retirement in Kiama. I am not sure that

Illawarra history will be kind to him. The strong possibility is that Bishop William Murray will be remembered for what he did not do - rather than what he did.

Some parishioners may find that a cruel remark. But consider another thing. Father Peter Comensoli was sentenced to 18 months jail on October 19, 1994, for sexually molesting teenage boys.

Those boys are now young men in their late 20s. They still live here and so do their families.

Comensoli was convicted and went to jail 18 months ago. To this day, none of Comensoli's victims, their parents or family have received any communication from the Catholic Church expressing sorrow or regret at what happened.

Not a line, not a phone call. They are still waiting.

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