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# An analysis of the media debate following the ABC *Compass* Program "The Ultimate Betrayal"

**Rev Dr Peter Horsfield**

*ABC exposure of sexual abuse by church officials sparked defensive responses*

On 15 March 1992 the ABC Religious Programs Department telecast a one-hour program in the *Compass* series, "The Ultimate Betrayal: Sexual Violence in the Church", focusing on such violence done to women and children by male church leaders. The program reviewed some major cases of sexual abuse by clergy overseas, particularly in the United States. It then turned to Australia, describing some of the findings of Project Anna, a study of sexual violence within church communities conducted under the auspices of the Centre against Sexual Assault at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne. The program also interviewed a number of church leaders on the issue and presented several cameos of situations of abuse. The program received unusually wide national media coverage for a religious program, particularly in the week following its showing. This article provides an analysis of some of that response.

The Religious Programs Department issued a press release prior to the program and made available three or four roughs of the program to those who expressed an interest in it. Two newspapers picked up the story prior to broadcast. One was the *Australian*, whose religion writer, James Murray, was critical of the program. He wrote that "it relies so much on innuendo and quasi-accusation as to question the motivation of the program itself," that the program was "a kind of ecclesiastical Hinch" and that "the presentation seems ill-conceived and made in response to those more extreme feminist agendas to which the ABC, or certain members of its staff, seem so committed". He concluded by saying, "That 'The Ultimate Betrayal' should issue from the ABC is, of

course, no great surprise. It is now so strong on innuendo and often light on evidence."

On the day following the program most major newspapers in the capital cities referred to the program in one way or another. A survey of these items indicated they fall into two basic camps. The *Canberra Times*, the *Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* all ran much the same story, the response of Bishop Peter Hollingworth which began "The church did not try to hush up instances of sexual misconduct by members of the clergy, the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane said yesterday."

The second group—the *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, the *Adelaide Advertiser* and the *West Australian*—all ran a similar story, giving a report of the program with the common opener, "One in seven clergymen has committed sexual offences against women parishioners, it was revealed last night." The *Sydney Daily Telegraph Mirror* ran the story on page 1 with the large headline "Clergy abuse women. 3000 in sex attacks." That newspaper also ran an editorial under the heading "Church and sex", stating that it was not enough for church administrators to deal with the problem in their own way behind the secretive walls of religion, but that offenders should be prosecuted in the courts. The *Courier-Mail* in Brisbane ran a story under the heading "Abuse claim denied." All three television networks carried a story on the program, and Clive Robertson on *The World Tonight* suggested that this problem would not occur if priests were women.

Three main points of focus emerged in these early reports of the program. The first was the revelation of clerical sexual abuse itself. The second was the number of clergy allegedly involved. During the program I had projected the figure of 15 percent, drawn primarily from overseas research. The third main focus was the initial official church response from Archbishop Hollingworth. He acknowledged that such abuses did occur but denied the extent suggested by the program. He also denied that by handling the cases within its own structures the church was trying to hush them up.

On the second day following the program, the same seven newspapers ran a second story about the issue. With more time to seek reactions, there was a greater diversity in the stories and the people involved, although the stories centred on two main themes. The first theme was the number of women who had called sexual assault centres around Australia as a result of the program.

The reports indicated that Centres Against Sexual Assault were inundated with calls from women reporting they had been attacked by parish workers or clergy. News reports indicated more than 50 women had telephoned the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne, dozens had called the Prince Edward Hospital in Sydney, 30 had called in Perth and 15 had called one centre in Brisbane. Putting the calls into some sort of perspective was an Adelaide centre reporting that it received around 60 such calls a year from women.

Several reports explored the phenomenon with representatives of Sexual Assault Centres. The *Sydney Morning Herald* devoted more than half its

article to comments from sexual assault counsellors on the frequency of such reports and the patterns encountered in dealing with them. Only the *Sydney Morning Herald* considered the issue from the viewpoint of those assaulted. The newspaper picked up the thread again in a long editorial on the following day. The editorial came down strongly on the side of the victims, identifying the patterns that make it difficult for victims to gain adequate help and redress, and urging the establishment of clear and safe procedures for ensuring that victims are "treated with justice and charity even if the image of the Church suffers in the process."

The second theme was a further canvassing of church leaders' responses to the program and the issue it addressed. In general, most church leaders did not deny that such abuses occurred but said they were so rare as to be nonexistent. They affirmed that such matters were considered with great seriousness. Several church leaders emphasised that most clergymen had integrity, highlighted the pressures they worked under and regretted that the program had brought clergy in general into disrepute.

The major point of contention was on how common the problem was, focusing again on the accuracy of the figure of 15 percent. Common among the responses was that of Donald Robinson, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, who said in a press release that the figure "is totally at variance with my 20 years experience as a bishop. In my dealings with both clergy and church members the kind of matter raised is extremely rare." John Bayton was quoted as saying that in his two-and-a-half years as Anglican Bishop of Geelong he had not dealt with one such allegation, even though Bishop Bayton had been shown on the ABC program speaking at a public launch of a book on the subject and saying, "When confronted with the enormity of the problem of sexual violence in the community of the church there have been a number of responses. One, 'Oh yes, but it doesn't happen in the Christian community'. But it does."

Fr John Usher, the Director of the Catholic Centacare in Sydney, acknowledged there was a problem but was quoted as saying the percentage was closer to 1 or 2 per cent. In an article in the *Catholic Weekly* the following day, Fr Usher was quoted as saying the figure was "in the vicinity of 5 or 6 percent". The Rev Peter Middleton of a Sydney Anglican Church said that while he doubted the 15 percent figure, clergy sexual offences could result partly from the encouragement of "aggressive" leadership by clergy, making the church "attractive to people who want to control or domineer other people."

Church leaders were caught in the dilemma of acknowledging the problem while defending the integrity of the church and of its clergy. On one hand there was general acknowledgment that a problem existed. But on the other hand there was minimisation of its extent and its consequences, affirmation of the integrity of the vast majority of clergy, reassurance that the church dealt with such instances seriously, and sympathy for offenders.

This dilemma is found, for example, in the comments attributed to the Rev Peter Middleton. He had been quoted as saying that "aggressive"

leadership could partly be responsible for clerics committing sexual offences against women parishioners," that "the church is attractive to people who want to control or dominate people...and in my experience I have found this to be true" and that "Anglicanism is an aggressive type of Christianity and I think there is a real danger in that". Nevertheless, he disagreed strongly with the suggestion that churches were unsafe for women: "It is certainly safe for women to go to the churches I know" (*West Australian*, 17/3/92).

Archbishop Hollingworth, who said on one day that incidents were rare because "during training, clergy learn to deal with private and intimate situations," the next day was reported as saying that "he would meet his bishops and heads of churches to discuss improved pastoral training for clergy who often were 'exposed and vulnerable'". Only one female church leader was quoted in all the newspaper articles, the Rev Ann Ryan, Chairperson of the Commission on Women and Men of the Uniting Church, who was reported as saying that "sexual offences committed by clergymen in the Uniting Church were as frequent as sexual offences committed in the wider community" and "we are talking about a very serious problem."

The third theme that emerged on the second day was a counterattack by Archbishop Hollingworth. As reported in the *Courier-Mail*, he attacked the *Compass* program as "appalling and sensationalist", questioned the motivation behind the program and demanded that the ABC broadcast an apology to all clergy.

By the third day, the matter had begun to settle down in the daily press, though the *Sydney Morning Herald* devoted a major editorial to the issue, observing accurately that debate had become fixed on the number of clergy who were involved, rather than addressing other major issues. The editorial raised the matter of seeing the issue from the perspective of victims and obtaining justice for them.

The first response from the church press also came on the third day. The *Catholic Weekly* interviewed Fr Usher. The perspective of the article was well represented by the heading: "Centacare priest rejects sexual abuse figures as inconsistent". The *Today Show* on Channel 9 pursued the story with an interview with a priest who said he had been sexually harassed by a woman parishioner. He said that some women might see a priest's vow of celibacy as a challenge.

Response on radio to the program was difficult to track. Radio, particularly in its talk shows, played a significant part in the debate by extending the discussion, expanding it, and allowing people the opportunity to talk about it. The three staff at Project Anna at the Centre against Sexual Assault in Melbourne did 25 media interviews on the Monday after the program and in the week and a half following the program did 40 media interviews, including radio around Australia. My office and home received more than 15 requests for interviews, beginning on the Sunday morning and recommencing at 5am the following day.

The program generated much interest. One person reported that she had been watching morning television in Perth when a report on the

*Compass* program appeared via a satellite feed of a news program from England. The Melbourne *Sunday Herald-Sun* carried a US syndicated article on clergy sexual abuse in the US. Substantial publicity was given to the revelations of a teen-aged child of the Irish church leader, Bishop Eamon Casey. A Melbourne talk show host interviewed on air a woman who said she had been sexually assaulted by a clergyman.

The issue stayed in the news two weeks after the program and at least a week after the public media debate had died down. On 3 April the *Age* ran a small article headed "Abuse occurs, churches admit" and James Murray in the *Australian* on 4 April referred to the churches' failure to defend themselves adequately against what he called "the quite bogus accusations" made in the *Compass* program.

A number of monthly church periodicals addressed sexual abuse by clergy. In two of the Anglican monthlies—*Focus* in Brisbane and *SEE* in Melbourne—the respective Archbishop handled it through his monthly column. Peter Hollingworth in Brisbane discussed the issue as part of a broader discussion of women within the church and Keith Rayner in Melbourne under the title "Puzzled by extreme figures." The *S.A. Catholic* presented an editorial entitled "You can't hide the truth", which referred to the American experience of clergy abuse and the establishment of a committee within the S.A. Catholic Church for the handling of complaints against clergy, but without mention of the *Compass* program or the Australian situation. The most extensive news coverage was in *New Times*, the Uniting Church newspaper in Adelaide, which devoted a full page to the issue, with three articles, the chief of which ran under the heading "Sexual violence to be deplored." In the April edition of *National Outlook*, an independent national religious journal, editor David Millikan, former head of the Religious Programs Department of the ABC, devoted four columns to the issue. Several other religious periodicals subsequently addressed the issue, either in articles or letters in their editorial pages.

The major response evoked by the program begs some explanations and analysis. First, why was there such a major response to a single religious program and the particular issue it addressed? Sexual assault by clergy taps into or has a number of things in common with several dominant themes within Australian culture and Australian media culture.

One of those is sex, which remains a perennially popular news value because of its basic nature as a human drive and the ambiguous manner with which it is viewed within Australian culture. Though sexual assault has more to do with the exercise of power and the doing of violence than it has with sexual relations, the sexual nature of such assault makes it more newsworthy than other forms of violence against women and children.

A second factor relates to the common perception of the church as moral guardian and the resistance, opposition or even antagonism in society to that perceived role. Stories of sexual misconduct of church leaders are attractive because of their contradiction to the social perception and their capacity to deflate perceived moral imposition. This was

obvious in recent reporting of sexual misbehaviour of American televangelists. It may be speculated that reporting on the fall of high profile American religious leaders has created a climate of questioning whether such behaviour exists in Australia.

A third possible factor is the general and generally cultivated disproportionate interest in the sexual behaviour of the country's social and political leaders. Such a milieu already exists. Debate has existed for some time on this issue in US politics. To a large extent in Australia it has been present more as whispered innuendo than outright statement. Occasionally isolated incidents have been raised in current affairs programs or through isolated articles. The *Compass* program extended this speculation to the nation's moral leaders.

A fourth possible reason is that the social climate has become ripe for addressing the issue. Largely through the work of feminist theorists and workers, more has become known about the patterns and incidence of violence against women and children in the last twenty years than was known previously.

With this has come unprecedented action to respond to and address the different facets of the issue of violence against women and children. Recent legislative changes and legal decisions in different states have defined violence within the home as criminal behaviour, have given police added powers to act against domestic violence, have removed the long-standing legal principle of the right of a husband to demand sex from his wife without her consent, and have changed rape laws to clarify ambiguity and remove bias toward the rapist and against the victim.

Consideration of violence within the churches has been an extension of this, a specific application of a broader milieu. The establishment of Project Anna has been a major step towards breaking the silence on what has emerged as a significant area of unrecognised and previously unaddressed need. To a large extent the *Compass* program simply gave focus and wider expression to the large amount of educational and advocacy work that has been done on the ground in this area.

A major focus of the media debate was on the number of clergy involved in sexual abuse of women parishioners. All newspaper articles studied included reference to the allegation that 15 percent of clergy were involved in sexual abuse, which extrapolated out to 3,000 male clergy in Australia. It was obviously not the behaviour itself that sparked the reaction and necessitated a defence from the churches. Such behaviour has probably never been questioned and has always been a part of Australian folklore. Examples include jokes about the actress and the bishop, about ministers and the choir leader and about priests and the altar boy. It was the suggestion of the size the problem and the implication that the church was unsafe for women that became the focus of public attention.

It may be useful to note the specific claim that was made on the *Compass* program. What I said was, "There are different figures as to how common it is. We don't have any in Australia. But American figures suggest the figure could be as high as 25 percent of clergy are involved in sexual

misbehaviour of some sort. I am not sure whether it is that high. The figures that I have seen are figures which are much more in line with other professions, of around 15 percent of clergy. So, if you look at that figure, it's a pretty major figure."

The figure referred to was drawn from a document entitled "Policy and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct" adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1991. That policy stated, "The necessity for a denominational policy on sexual misconduct by those in positions of religious leadership is painfully apparent....Statistical evidence suggests between 10 and 23 percent of clergy nationwide have engaged in sexualised behaviour or sexual contact with parishioners, clients, employees, etc. within a professional relationship...We are facing a crisis terrible in its proportions and implications."

Some other estimates and studies give a figure much higher than that, in some cases double that number. The 15 percent figure is a more conservative definition and estimate from a respected overseas church body. This figure also closely approximates that used by Peter Rutter in his study on sexual abuse within professions (*Sex in the Forbidden Zone*).

There is no reason to believe that figures for Australian churches would be significantly different from these figures. Given similarities between other indices of violence in Australian and in overseas societies, there is reason to believe the figures would be similar. The silence and isolation with which such cases are handled by Australian churches meant that there are no "official" nor confirmed statistics. Given the nature of the issue, it is unlikely that definitive research will be forthcoming.

Church leaders evidently lack a clear understanding of the extent of the problem. Or perhaps they are unwilling to acknowledge it. While most church leaders acknowledged the problem, their responses to its extent varied significantly. The only person to give an alternative estimate was Fr John Usher, whose estimate changed from one to two percent as reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to five or six percent as reported in the *Catholic Weekly* the next day. Other church leaders based their response to questions on the extent of the problem on their personal experience and the number of cases they had been personally acquainted with.

What becomes obvious when one studies the newspaper reports is the gender difference apparent in the responses. All except one of the church officials quoted were male who said they had minimum personal acquaintance with the issue. Fr Peter Marshall, spokesman for the Catholic Church in Adelaide, for example, said:

The church in Adelaide had responded to an international recognition of the problem by establishing a special committee to members of the clergy. However, the committee, formed in the past year, had yet to receive any allegations of sexual misconduct by Adelaide priests (*Advertiser*, 17/3/92).

And John Bayton, Anglican Bishop of Geelong, said that for the two

and one-half years he had been bishop he had not dealt with a single sexual assault allegation against a member of the clergy (*Age* 17/3/92). Donald Robinson, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, said the issue "is totally at variance with my 20 years' experience as a bishop. In my dealings with both clergy and church members the kind of matters raised is extremely rare" (Press release, 16/3/92). The Rev Peter Middleton, St. Aidan's Anglican Church, Annandale, said he could not imagine 15 percent of the people he knew committing such offences (*Courier-Mail*, 17/3/92).

Fr John Usher gave an interesting response in the *Catholic Weekly* of 18/3/92: "Two persons would have spent some time with me in a therapeutic situation to deal with their stress about something that had happened to them." He evidently conceptualised the problem as one that the woman had in handling the stress resulting from the abuse, rather than one with the behaviour of the offender. Keith Rayner, Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, said: "I have been a bishop for almost 23 years in three dioceses, and the figure mentioned is so out of line with the number of cases of which I have knowledge that I find it quite incredible."

Male church leaders dealt with the discrepancy between their personal experience and the figure of 15 percent in different ways, the most common being that the 15 percent quoted was an overseas figure which was not applicable to Australia. Keith Rayner suggested a number of possible reasons for the discrepancy. One possibility he raised was that perhaps "offenders in this field are commonly multiple offenders so that one person may be guilty of dozens or even hundreds of offences", thus questioning whether the figures reflected "the number of offences rather than the number of offenders."

Women respondents quoted in the press presented a quite different picture. The Rev Anne Ryan said, "Sexual offences committed by clergymen in the Uniting Church were as frequent as sexual offences committed in the wider community. We are talking about a very serious problem" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17/3/92). Sexual assault centres throughout the country, which are staffed by women, reported an overwhelming response from women: 50 callers at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne, "dozens of complaints" at the Prince Edward Hospital in Sydney, 30 in Perth, 15 at one centre in Brisbane, 60 such calls a year from women at one Adelaide center.

This gender difference in response and awareness illustrates what has been found elsewhere: Women choose to disclose experiences of sexual assault to other women, not to men, and particularly not to men who publicly minimise the problem or defend offenders. The problem that exists within the broader society is illustrated to a greater extent within the church: While it is largely women who experience the problem, it is largely men who control conceptualisation of the issue, shape policy, control the debate and allocate the resources.

The pattern of the media response of church leaders illustrates clearly what women say generally happens when they raise such issues. Church

leaders evidently have difficulty believing women's testimony that the problem is bad and respond to the issue or complaint in such a way as to see the church leader as the victim in order to defend and protect the church.

The common response of church leaders in this media debate did little to reassure women who reported assaults by clerics and who sought assurance that they would be believed if they spoke out against a male leader. Having been betrayed and violated by one male church leader, women, no matter how dearly they hold the church, seem reluctant to trust another male church leader to understand or deal justly with their complaint. This discrepancy is largely a gender issue, but it is also an institutional one, in that it makes many church women feel that Centres against Sexual Assault are safer places than the church to go for help.

Questions are frequently raised about whether the media serve any useful purpose in dealing with such serious and sensitive social issue as sexual violation of women by male church leaders. The criticism is often made that the media sensationalise such issues, polarise debate, focus on superficial aspects and demand quick responses, all of which inhibit dealing with complexities and allowing time for thoughtful consideration.

Certainly there were those elements in the debate sparked by the *Compass* program. Clergymen felt under attack and needed to defend themselves and the church, though it should be noted that this is a common response wherever a complaint of sexual misbehaviour is made.

Media focus was on the response and perspectives of people in positions of power. The *Sydney Morning Herald* was virtually alone among the media in spelling out the issue from the perspective of the victims of the assault and accurately presenting that as the most important issue in the whole matter. Most media reports elaborated on the issue from a "moral" perspective, focusing on the sexual behaviour of clergy rather than on the effects of violence done by the abuse of power.

In spite of these limitations, however, the media helped break the silence that had hidden the issue. That the issue broke in the public media rather than in the church media has been an important factor in this. The public media reached many women who had been driven away from the church by officials who sexually abused them. That the public media addressed the issue is important also because of the tendency of church leaders, like other organisational managers, to want to control the handling of information on issues that may attract criticism.

The ABC Religious Programs Department and sexual assault centres across Australia received many calls and letters from victims of clergy sexual assault. These women called or wrote to tell their stories, to say it had happened to them and to express gratitude for the program. A common theme was that they had felt isolated, and an effect of the program was to help them realise that they were not alone and that there were steps they could take to redress their grievances. In more than half of these cases, this was the first time the women callers had told anybody about their experience.

While the raising of such an issue is not a comfortable thing to do or deal with, the response by victims/survivors to the *Compass* program indicates the importance of breaking the silence that has hidden this issue.

*Rev Dr Peter Horsfield is Dean of the Uniting Church Theological Hall and Lecturer in Practical Theology at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne. This article was presented as a paper at the National Conference of the Australian Communication Association, Bond University, July 1992.*

## Applying the spiral of silence: Nothing more practical than a good theory

Myles Breen

*ABC program triggers practical example of the Spiral of Silence theory*

For many years now, my colleagues in Australia and abroad have told me that the course on communication theory was a hard sell. Yet communication theory provides a practical benefit. It allows us to explain phenomena which are very puzzling and confusing to many people, and it gives us information with which to plan our actions—a map for our journey, so to speak.

To place these abstractions most concretely, I will describe a case study which arose out of a discussion of a paper given at a convention. Peter Horsfield's paper was a fascinating and important one, and, unlike most stories to do with ecclesiastical matters, sensational. His paper, "Media response to the ABC *Compass* program: The ultimate betrayal", was delivered at the Australian Communication Association's annual conference in 1992 and dealt with the fallout from the ABC's *Compass* program's coverage of the topic of sexual assault by the clergy.

I will comment on Horsfield's paper taking the ideas of Aristotelian ethos and Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence theory. Before discussing the Spiral of Silence theory, it is worthwhile paying some attention to the importance persons and institutions give to reputation, and what this means in the study of communication behaviour.

Although the concept of ethos goes back at least as far as Aristotle, it is one which resonates with students, and so, it is probably seen as being relevant to explaining our communication behaviour today.

Aristotle claimed that the ethos of the speaker, the credibility, or the personal attributes of trustworthiness, expertness and goodwill had a persuasive effect on audiences (1). Aristotle also claimed that in uncertain situations in which the arguments for or against a line of action

were inconclusive, the audience would choose a position based on the ethos or credibility of the speaker for the cause. Especially when the facts are in dispute—or hard to understand or confusing—then the reputation, credibility, standing, or ethos of the speaker carries the persuasive day.

In class, we have discussed this matter, using the examples of Paul Keating and John Hewson as competing protagonists. While the leaders did discuss the issues during the 1993 election campaign, it seemed pertinent to point out that they tried to damage each other's credibility. For example, Hewson's party ran commercial spots with a distorted video version of Paul Keating saying, "This is the recession we had to have," essentially providing a shorthand way of damaging Keating's expertise and veracity.

Keating returned the compliment by calling Hewson, "The professor of economics...the visiting professor." He relied on the Australian disdain for intellectuals, and avoided the issues by denigrating the protagonist of the cause.

From my experience in teaching communication theory, I have found that students have no difficulty at all in detecting this tactic when it is pointed out to them. Yet it is so embedded in their culture, so taken-for-granted, that it is invisible to most of them unless it is explicitly brought to their attention.

Peter Horsfield brings to his task high credibility. His "ethos" in this literally challenging task stands up under scrutiny. The journalist, or the social scientist, who, like the punter, looks for a track record, will be impressed with his credentials. He "wrote the book" on the "electronic church" (2). A close reading of his book allowed the reader to be able to predict the subsequent scandals exemplified by Jim and Tammy Bakker years before they happened.

His purpose in submitting this article to the *Australian Journalism Review* was clearly to have a scholarly version of the media debate available for professional scrutiny outside the world of the ministry. The substantive material of the question of sexual assault by clergy, in another form, had already been presented in *Australian Ministry*, a forum which, one might suspect, had escaped the notice of most academics and journalists.

In a footnoted version of the *Australian Ministry* article, although the message is startling, even sensational, Horsfield affected a scholarly style determined to ensure there were no holes in his thesis. He started his story in footnote seventeen. A journalistic lead would tell us that the story started in March, 1992, when the ABC's *Compass* program quoted him as saying that up to 15 percent of Australian clergy might be involved in pastoral sexual abuse. The subsequent media attention this statement attracted is the focus of interest for the communication scholar, quite independently of the question of whether or not the clergy are or are not behaving with impropriety.

Horsfield's thesis was that, extrapolating from American figures, 15 percent is what one would expect to find if standard social science

methodology were applied to solving the question in Australia. He explained that there was no reason to doubt that the situation here would be substantially different to what pertained in North America.

The knee-jerk reaction to this rather bland statement was as swift as it was predictable.

The theory which can most easily be retrofitted to Horsfield's thesis is "The Spiral of Silence" (3), originated by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, who is from Germany, a country which has suffered much in this century because of its solidarity, conformism and submissive silence to authority. The spiral of silence theory links cultural and interpersonal behaviour to mass communication theory. Simply stated, it means that, in small groups, people will remain silent about their beliefs if they feel these beliefs are not held by the majority. Because these people remain silent, the beliefs which are expressed are more and more widely disseminated. And although these beliefs might be the work of a well-organised and determined minority, they become established as the perceived majority opinion.

Horsfield's motivation is remarkably similar to that evidenced by Noelle-Neumann in espousing the theory in the first place. It is a clear warning against keeping silent when one knows evil is afoot, because silence helps spread the evil. The theory posits that passivity has a communication effect.

To focus on this point, it is best to quote from Horsfield's article. He claimed that if the Church takes action against an offending church leader, it tends to be done in secret, keeping even the congregation in the dark. While he also acknowledged the importance of confidentiality, he claimed:

Silence often serves to protect the church and perpetrators at the expense of those who are victimised, giving the impression that the church does not have a problem in this area and isolating women who experience assault by making them think they are the only one this has happened to. Silence also prevents other male leaders from acknowledging the problem within themselves and doing something about it, it deters the development of a tradition, research and resources for dealing with the problem, and it fails to present an honest face of repentance and forgiveness by the church to the wider society (4).

Whether or not the facts of this case are true is clearly outside the purview of this article. The purpose here is to point out that the case study presented here fits the theory of communication rather well.

David Altheide and John Johnson's book, *Bureaucratic propaganda*, provides an excellent, up-to-date resource describing the propaganda mechanisms by which institutions use a variety of methods from traditional mythology to record-keeping (5). For example, they discuss police crime statistics as not only justifying expenditures and salaries, but more importantly as being accepted as "objective" indicators of the amount of crime in any given society (p.18). The police, like the clergy, are being analysed using the same statistical yardstick by the media.

A vivid example can be taken from a Sunday newspaper (6): "NSW thought police corruption was on the way out, but the evidence coming out of two new inquiries is suggesting that the old bogies are still looming in the background. It appears now that (former police commissioner) Avery's reforms to weed out corruption foundered on the insidious and far-reaching obstacle of police culture."

If any institutional or bureaucratic similarity in response to criticism between police and clergy were needed, the article quoted a former police minister who offered the opinion, "there's probably 1 per cent of the police service that's corrupt now."

Providing interesting chapters in recent Australian history, two high-profile journalists, Chris Masters and Quentin Dempster, have tackled the themes of police culture and corruption in their books: *Inside Story* (7) and *Honest Cops* (8). Dempster writes about "the culture," and tells the story of whistleblowers and others who stood up to corruption. Masters covers the same culture, but in his own first person narrative.

The bureaucratic response that Peter Horsfield details from the church's response to the sexual assault charges resembles that received from the police hierarchy to their challenge. Because of the current climate of suspicion regarding sexual assault by clergy, the hierarchy responded by forming standing committees—organisational structures for dealing with the problem. This, at least, shows that they cannot be accused of ignoring the matter. As Horsfield quotes Father Peter Marshall as reported by the *Advertiser*:

The church in Adelaide had responded to an international recognition of the problem by establishing a special committee to deal with allegations of sexual abuse by church officials and members of the clergy. However, the committee, formed in the past year, had yet to receive any allegations of sexual misconduct by Adelaide priests (9).

All of the above matters fit neatly into different areas of communication theory, from the concept of Aristotelian ethos, through bureaucratic propaganda, to management theory of corporate cultures (10). Of course, what pertains for the police and the clergy also pertains to journalists and to journalism educators, although journalists are perhaps not as as important in most people's lives as are the police or the clergy. Journalists, however, like dramatists and song writers, do influence society profoundly, albeit surreptitiously. Journalism educators, for their part, study and teach about the role of the media, covering such entities as the Australian Press Council, and the ABC's *Mediawatch* and *Backchat* programs. Rarely do educators, however, speak out with the conviction of a P. P. McGuinness, who is perfectly willing to prod sacred cows in his columns (11).

Perhaps we, as journalism educators, maintain our own spiral of silence. Perhaps we don't feel confident enough of our professionalism to highlight media shortcomings. Sam Lipski, writing a column on the press entitled "Why media story needs to be told," for the *Australian* newspaper, claimed:

Australian university journalism departments are understaffed and lack standing by comparison with those in the US and, with the exception of the Sydney Institute, there are no Australian think-tanks that regularly monitor media performance (12).

Lipski was writing in the context of the comments of the Fairfax newspapers' chief executive, Stephen Mulholland's comments that Australian journalists had "unwarranted obsessions" about the doings of the media. Lipski's point was that the opposite obtained.

For journalism educators, the Lipski comment can only be taken as encouraging. Straws in the wind indicate a coming together of the professional journalists and the university-based educators. At the JEA conference held in Newcastle in December 1992, JEA president Chris Lawe-Davies took another established journalist to task for his former lack of support for journalism education. Greg Sheridan, the guest speaker at the conference, who had only nice words to say for the current task of journalism education, denied having taken the critical positions his name was associated with in the past. Lawe-Davies, unmollified, insisted on quoting chapter and verse, or more precisely, newspaper and date for the Sheridan criticisms.

With the present funding crises within universities, few educators will mind reports in the press that their departments are "understaffed." Many remember that not so long ago the journalistic establishment decried any university training in journalism, so, by definition, our departments would have been "overstaffed." The more experienced, and perhaps cynical, amongst the educators might conjecture, however, that their former journalistic critics might now be hustling for positions within the formerly disdained ivory towers of academe.

If our area is acquiring acceptability and respectability, we may yet have, in the foreseeable future, to carry the burden of reputation which so troubles the clergy and the police.

As Australians tend to follow American social trends, as explicated in the breakdown of the family as measured by rising divorce rates, the decline in union membership, the female and gay revolutions, notification of natural parent and child in adoption situations, and many other social phenomena, the role of the whistleblower in Australian life may be changing in legislation, acceptability and prominence.

While, in the future, whistleblowing may become protected under the law, it is currently viciously punished in Australian society as Quentin Dempster has documented. If, as theory predicts, this phenomenon increases in prominence, we will need a change in culture. Australian culture today still betrays its convict origins in a strong ethic of sticking by one's criminal mates. The place of the whistleblower in our society is not one of comfort.

Whistleblowing, however, is one of the functions of the prophetic ministry of the church, and as an ordained minister of the Uniting Church, Peter Horsfield clearly believes, he is duty-bound to blow his whistle.

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Myles Breen is Professor of Communication at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst

# The masters of truth and justice? News production at Television New Zealand Ltd 1989-1992

Pahmi Winter

*Commercialisation brought a change in journalistic culture*

In 1989, New Zealand's state television monopoly was removed and its two channels—Television ONE and Channel Two—were made to compete in a deregulated market. Despite the radical shift in organisational ethos and structure and the disparate nature of public and private interests, fieldwork enquiries by this researcher showed that TVNZ journalists experienced the convergence of public service and commercial philosophies as unproblematic.

Television New Zealand Ltd managers of the news operation claimed the advent of competition and the "discipline of the market" liberalised and enhanced the journalistic project by freeing it from the inefficiencies and fetters of a state bureaucracy. While journalists revealed to the researcher ambivalence about the impact of commercial requirements on their professional values, newsroom conversations were concerned with the logistics of getting the daily bulletin to air.

However, while news production at TVNZ continued to be routinely accomplished, it had in fact undergone a significant transition. The concept of "proper" journalism had been reformulated in response to a new institutional milieu in which the maximisation of audiences, options and financial returns became managerial priorities. This study seeks to illuminate one particular management strategy employed to impose the "discipline of the market" on the journalistic enterprise and news production at TVNZ.

TVNZ's News and Current Affairs Department's statement of intent declares: