

The AGE, 19/9/12, p. 10.

We need answers

THE Catholic Church hierarchy's continuing cover-up, sadly, will surprise no one ("Abuse inquirer paid principal", *The Age*, 17/9). However, this latest scandal raises many questions.

It was, at the time Father Peter Searson was abusing children, and still is, a crime in Victoria for a person, believing a priest to have committed child sexual assault, to impede the apprehension and prosecution of the offender. Shouldn't the relevant church officials, responsible for managing Peter Searson over many years in the face of numerous complaints, now be investigated by police? Bishops Pell, Hart and Little and vicars-general Connors and Cudmore are all implicated. Shouldn't the parliamentary committee of inquiry call these officials to answer such questions — and request they bring all relevant documents?

The conduct of the church's independent commissioner, Peter O'Callaghan, QC, raises troubling questions. Given his private payment of \$90,000 to Graeme Sleeman and his family, to cover expenses caused by the hierarchy's cruel rejection, what does this say of that hierarchy's Christian (or any) sense of justice, let alone "compassion"?

What are the 330 victims of clergy sexual abuse whom O'Callaghan has processed to think now? At the time, the church capped ex-gratia compensation payments at \$50,000 (now \$75,000). Did these "primary" victims suffer less? Have different criteria been applied? These questions also should be asked by the committee.

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