

Facing the past: Theology, Mission and Abuse

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Abstract

In 2012 when Julia Gillard launched the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse a process began which placed the child in the midst of the church's ecclesial practices, missional activities and fundamental theology. What was revealed was the systematic abuse of some of the most vulnerable members of our society and the deliberate and pervasive action taken to protect the reputation and status of the institutions involved, shielding the perpetrators from criminal investigation or consequence.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the theological and doctrinal belief systems and practices associated with an increase in the risk of sexual abuse, barriers to disclosure and poor intuitional responses. Through a qualitative analysis of the data collected by the Royal Commission and presented in Volumes 5 and 16 of the final report key risk factors were identified in the following areas

1. Ecclesiology
2. Hamartiology
3. Anthropology of the child
4. Missiology

There is a temptation to consign these catastrophic failures to history because much has changed both in the church and society. Yet, children remain vulnerable to those willing to abuse the power of religious leadership. Research has demonstrated that essential baseline actions of screening and policy development can create a false sense of security and inhibit the more difficult shift in culture required to protect children.¹ Using a risk management approach, this paper will examine high risk theology and practices and present a rubric to facilitate the evaluation of the way the church interacts with children.

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¹ Professor Keith Kaufman and Marcus Erooga with Kelly Stewart, Judith Zatkan, Erin McConnell, Hayley Tews and Associate Professor Daryl Higgins, *Risk profiles for institutional child sexual abuse: A literature review*, (Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016), 84