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THE LEGACY OF CARDINAL GEORGE PELL

Melbourne, Victoria

The death of Cardinal George Pell has had a profound impact on the Survivor Community. It has brought to the surface decades of pain and injustice and highlights the inequity of experience between Survivors of abuse and those that aided its perpetration.

While many will mourn Pell and remember his legacy, I hope that they view the legacy in full and not just aggrandise the more palatable aspects of his character, at the expense of the harm he caused so many.

As an architect and administrator of the Melbourne Response to Catholic Abuse, Pell oversaw a decades long campaign designed to intimidate, marginalise and further the power imbalance experienced by victims of Catholic clerical abuse.

A system that was so adversarial in approach, mean-spirited and removed from pastoral care, that many of the Survivors that lived through the process are still scarred with extreme trauma to this day.

The key component of the Melbourne Response was not to provide justice to those that came forward, but to obfuscate liability at all costs, and shield the Catholic Church from its responsibility to Survivors.

Pell was not a martyr to his faith, he was a poster boy for an institution that would rather do irrevocable harm to people abused as children, than acknowledge any semblance of responsibility (personal or institutional) for their historical abuse.

For many survivors, witnessing the pomp and pageantry of Pell's requiem service is a reminder that those in positions of power have a far different journey in life and in death, and how starkly it contrasts with their own lived experience.

Often when a Survivor first discloses their experience of abuse, they are met with skepticism and often cynicism, not just by those around them, but by the very agencies that are supposed to investigate these claims.

Imagine a Survivor's dismay at seeing NSW Police trying to quash peaceful demonstrations adjacent to the Pell service. Demonstrations designed to bring light to the lived truth of their abuse and systemic hypocrisy they have faced - an institutional privilege that Pell somehow continues to enjoy in death as he did in life.

Imagine their pain when provocateurs of media and formerly relevant public figures race to galvanise the legacy of a man they idolise; while letting the devastating experience of so many languish as an afterthought or inconvenience to their narrative of beatification.

Imagine their sorrow seeing an opulent and costly funeral for an agent of their trauma, after witnessing so many of their peers die without justice and their experiences of abuse acknowledged. How many Survivors could have been supported across Australia with the resources dedicated to this garish ceremony?

Many today will remember Pell in their own way.

But we in the Survivor community will remember the immense pain he caused, his complicity in systemic abuse, the hurdles he invented to stifle justice, and the multitude of lives lost because of processes he established.

This was Cardinal George Pell, and this is his legacy to Survivors.

Clare Leaney, Chief Executive Officer, IGFF

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About In Good Faith Foundation

In Good Faith Foundation is a national charity and support service providing advocacy services to individuals, families and communities impacted by institutional abuse for over 20 years.