

TRANSCRIPTT OF INTERVIEW WITH HIS GRACE BISHOP**RONALD MULKEARNS AT BALLARAT ON THURSDAY 7/4/94**

From my diary I can say that in August 1982 I saw **RE** and **BAI** and I saw Mr. and Mrs. **REDACTE**, all of Mortlake. The **BAI**'s and the **REDA** came together. I had not remembered that, my memory of it had been that it came to me through the Vicar General and it was only when I looked up the diaries, I realised I had seen them. Of course, this was 12 years ago and I was seeing many people at the time. Then having seen them on 11th/12th August 1982, I had Confirmation at Mortlake on the 15th and then I saw Ridsdale at the Terang presbytery that afternoon, after the Confirmation, not at Mortlake, but at Terang and then I went overseas to South America.

I came back from overseas on 8th September and I saw Ridsdale on 11th September and in the meantime, I had seen Father Fitzpatrick at the Catholic Enquiry Centre and that would have been with a view to looking at his being put in an office job; out of a parish situation. I should have pulled these diaries out earlier, but that was the time the complaints were made to me and as far as I can recall, I acted on it pretty much straight away.

When I did go to Mortlake for that Confirmation, I became aware that this young fellow was living at the presbytery, the boy **RED**, and that was something I didn't think was appropriate. However, it sort of finished very quickly, because I pulled Ridsdale out of there anyway, so it didn't become an issue, in a sense of having to confront him with that. It was a question of pulling him out of the parish, because at that stage there was no suggestion that there had been any interference whatsoever with this person in the house.

Ridsdale went to the National Pastoral Institute at Gardenvale after Edenhope. He asked for sabbatical leave to do the course at the National Pastoral Institute and that was the reason he was moved from Edenhope. It is being said that he was moved out of these parishes because of complaints against him. However, there was no complaint against him at that stage from Edenhope; he was moved out because he applied for study leave and was given it. Then when he finished that study leave, he was appointed to Mortlake. It was only there that the complaints came to me.

At Inglewood in 1975, was the first time I was made aware of any problem and although every occurrence is serious, it was on the lower scale of seriousness. The father was quite content, but I said "Well he is coming out of there immediately and being required to undergo counselling" and the father was quite content that that was appropriate and did not want anything more done about it. So the event itself, as far as the father was aware, was not as serious as it could have been, I suppose. That was the only incident I had been made aware of until Mortlake.

At the same time he was undergoing counselling regularly and I suppose that's a problem in that I put faith in that relationship with his counsellor; that he would have been open with his counsellor and had there been any problem, I would have been made aware of it. However, I am not trying to blame the counsellor for that and he is dead, unfortunately. That action seemed appropriate to me at the time, twenty years ago.

The Sydney ones are the ones that we would be more vulnerable to; from the point of view of his having gone there and Father Fitzpatrick was advised of the problem, but I

just cannot remember who else was advised. It was the idea to keep him away from parochial work, but after he had been there for some time and appeared to be going alright, he began doing a little bit of supply work, as I understand it now.

I am not aware of anything of a paedophile nature with Ridsdale since he was at Jemez Springs U.S.A. and that was December 1989 to September 1990. He was at St. John of God at Richmond, NSW and he went there for just somewhere to live. We would vehemently deny that there has been anything since Jemez Springs, which was the kind of catalyst for him; having to look at himself and acknowledge these things, because as you are no doubt aware, one great feature of this, which is a problem for anybody else, is the denial factor. There was never any admission that these things were happening, while they were happening, and Jemez Springs, I think, brought him face to face with the need to recognise what had been going on. Prior to that there was always that minimising of any fault and denial of fault. It was almost like leading another life.

My answers to Particulars of Negligence are as follows :

(a) "Failing to supervise the activity of Ridsdale adequately or at all". I would say that I had no reason to suspect that there was any need for extra supervision, until a complaint was made in 1975 and while it was serious, as any event is serious, it was not a major complaint and the person who made it was happy that the appropriate steps were taken. That supervision on the part of the counsellor to whom he was referred, was ongoing and that continued through and Ridsdale maintained it was very helpful to him. I suppose it is difficult for me to come to terms with; that fact that he was saying he was being helped, while obviously other things were happening.

(b) "Failing to control Ridsdale adequately or at all".

Well I think it is much the same thing, that pre 1975 I didn't have any reason to think there was any need to control him any more than anybody else; than the general supervision of clergy. Post 1975 was through the reference to the counsellor, Fr. Augustine Watson, who is now deceased. Prior to 1975 I had no knowledge at all of any paedophile behaviour by him.

(c) "Failing to take any or any reasonable steps to curb Ridsdale's known propensity for engaging in sexual assaults."

It was not a known propensity as far as I was concerned, until 1975 and then I took what steps I thought were reasonable.

(d) "Failing to warn its congregations and in particular the Plaintiff and his parents about one Ridsdale, two the risk of sexual assaults generally by Priests of the Church."

Again, until after Inglewood, I had no reason to think that there was anything to be concerned about. After Inglewood his appointments were only made on the advice of his counsellor, that it was a prudent and reasonable thing to do and that there wasn't a danger, as far as the counsellor could see. His counsellor was a trained psychologist and so there was no perceived need to warn people, given that the counsellor had given that advice and also given that, so far as I was aware at the time, that the Inglewood thing was a 'one-off' occasion. I wasn't aware of any other history.

I think it is unreasonable to categorise Priests of the Church generally and I think this is

an outrageous statement. I do not know of any statistics regarding Priests of the Church one way or the other, but I have read that it is no higher than anywhere else. You expect it should be lower, I suppose, because of the particular vocation, but I have not got any statistics to say that. However, to lump all Priests of the Church as people who are a risk to the general public, seems to me to be outrageous.

(e) "Ignoring or choosing to overlook Ridsdale's known propensity to engage in sexual assaults."

Well again, once an incident was brought to my attention action was taken, so it was not ignored or overlooked.

(f) "Ignoring or choosing to overlook Ridsdale's known propensity to engage in inappropriate behaviour with Catholic boys and/or boys generally."

I wasn't aware of this propensity.

(g) "Failing to implement any or any adequate controls so as to detect Priests of the Church who were paedophiles and to remove such people from positions where they could abuse boys."

It seems to me very difficult to install any adequate controls with regard to behaviour which is of its nature secretive anyway. Priests who lived with him had no idea that these things were going on.

There are general standards of behaviour emphasised during the seminary training and so on. I don't know that there was any specific directive about being 'one-out' with boys,

but there was certainly the expectation that the behaviour would be appropriate.

(h) "Providing opportunities for Ridsdale to satisfy his lust and sexual perversion."

I can only say that I was not aware of these events happening and certainly did not intentionally put anybody at risk.

(i) "Failing to dismiss Ridsdale and/or remove him from any position in its organisation in which he could take advantage of boys.

I suppose the popular wisdom at the time was that a person could be salvaged; that dismissal was not the first option. The first option was to get appropriate treatment and that is the option that was taken and we did fail to dismiss him at that time. When it became obvious subsequently that this wasn't the case, that it was not something quickly cured, then he was removed from the priesthood or he did apply for removal.

Regarding dismissal, you could suspend him from exercising his priesthood. You cannot dismiss him from being a Priest; that is something that is the prerogative of the Holy See of Rome, but you can suspend him from exercising his faculties for good reason, but you can't arbitrarily do that either. However, you can do it when there is good reason to do it. But he was dismissed in the sense, that he was removed from his parish when a complaint was made and only returned when the advice was, that that was a reasonable thing to do.

Apart from reports, I spoke to Father Augustine Watson, the counsellor, on the telephone and he thought Ridsdale was going well, but he could only go on what he was being told

by the client and you expect there would be an honesty in a client/counsellor relationship. I guess that is where I felt let down. That is one thing that surprises me a little bit, there seems to be a great reluctance to call on Ridsdale as a witness at all, because as far as I am aware, he would have to say that I wasn't made known of his failings.

(j) "Exposing the congregation and in particular the Plaintiff to the known danger of a lustful and sexually perverse Priest."

I can only repeat what I have been saying all a long.

(k) "Failing to recognise the profound psychological advantage possessed by Ridsdale over Roman Catholics and in particular the Plaintiff."

Well the person is in a position of trust and that puts them in a place of some psychological advantage, I suppose. But then I had no reason to believe that that trust was being abused.

(l) "Concealing Ridsdale's known propensity for engaging in sexual assaults."

I am not sure from whom I was supposed to have concealed and what I am supposed to have known, but I did not know of propensities for engaging in sexual assaults prior to the complaints. The one in 1975 was as far as I was made aware, a 'one-off' incident. When the complaints were made at Mortlake, without being very specific in the nature of the actions that took place, it was still complaints of inappropriate behaviour, which was sufficient for me to say "Well this is not good enough".

When he went to Edenhope, there were no complaints as far as his pastoral duties were

concerned. Ridsdale was a very talented fellow and he was performing duties, as far as I was aware, very satisfactorily. There were no complaints from Edenhope, not to me anyway, concerning paedophile activities.

He went from Edenhope to the National Pastoral Institute at Gardenvale, simply because he asked for sabbatical leave for renewal and updating his pastoral education. That was the purpose of the Institute, to provide a period of renewal, theological renewal. We are talking in the context of the post Vatican II when there were developments in scripture and theology and so on and it was one of the opportunities to bring people who had been educated and trained for priesthood prior to the Vatican Council up to date and that was a perfectly respectable thing to do and quite acceptable. It was not as if he was the only one who went to that kind of place.

You mentioned that Father Madden commented on his travelling long distances to attend Charismatic Meetings. Perhaps his involvement in the Charismatic movement was for two reasons; one being in line with his support for people in the movement and the other for his own spiritual development. As far as him using the group to make contacts, that certainly would not have been something that one would suspect of a thing that is ex-professo a prayer group. The reason a Charismatic prayer group would come together, is to pray together.

(m) "Failing to heed complaints made concerning Ridsdale and his propensity for sexually assaulting boys."

The first complaint from Inglewood was heeded in the way I mentioned and as I say, to

my knowledge, then, that was a 'one-off' incident and I understand there have been a couple of others at Inglewood now, who are stating that they were abused by him, but that was not known to me at the time. The next complaints were Mortlake and I tried to heed them. One can always argue, years later, about the appropriateness of the action that was taken, but I suppose I get concerned when people say no action was taken.

He was with Father Madden at Horham from July 1986 to May 1988, because Father Augustine's advice was that it would be a responsible thing to put him back into parish work and we didn't know anything that had happened in Sydney. However he advised it be desirable Ridsdale be put with someone else and particularly with a friend, to whom he could talk about how he was going and he was a friend of Father Madden and that was the reason he was put at Horsham.

On leaving Horsham in May 1988 and before going to Jemez Springs in December 1989, he was up at his place at Whitecliffs for some time, but not engaged in parochial work during that time. In that period I think he may have been at Whitecliffs.

I think basically the Archbishop is being seen as Bishop of Victoria. However, the Dioceses are autonomous entities as far as the Church is concerned and answerable to the Pope rather than to an Archbishop or Cardinal. The Archdiocese has no authority over the Diocese of Ballarat. He can't come and tell me how to run this Diocese any more

than I can go and tell him how to run Melbourne. He presides at Meetings of the Bishops of the Province, but the Archdiocese is such by virtue of its position and its size, so a Diocese might have a certain pre-eminence as of being important, because it is the biggest and it is in the centre and so on, but that does not give them authority over the others. So the Archbishop presides at our Meetings, but there is no relationship of authority.

As far as the Cardinal is concerned, he is a Cardinal because the Cardinals are advisors to the Pope, but that does not give him any more authority than in his own area, so again he would preside in New South Wales in a Bishops' Meeting, but he has no authority in other Dioceses other than his own. He does happen to be President of the Australian Bishops' Conference, because he is elected. It is not automatic; they could have elected any Bishop, so it is not by virtue of him being a Cardinal, however, it turns out to work out that way I suppose. There is no right to the position, he was elected to it.