

24 October 2011

Response by Bishop William Morris to the Australian Catholic Bishops Statement of 22 October 2011.

The statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops contains inaccuracies and errors of fact evidenced by the documentation relating to the issues concerning myself and a number of Vatican Dicasteries.

The Statement made by the Australian Bishops invites me to tell my story which I will publish in the foreseeable future.

I stand by my original statement which I gave to the Australian Catholic Bishops dated 2 May 2011, which I restate below.

“I had been hoping that I would never have to write this letter to you as it had always been my desire that the difficulties experienced between myself and the Congregations for Bishops, Divine Worship and Doctrine of the Faith would be able to be resolved. Unfortunately without due process it has been impossible to resolve these matters, denying me natural justice without any possibility of appropriate defence and advocacy on my behalf. This has been confirmed in a letter from Pope Benedict stating ‘*Canon Law does not make provision for a process regarding bishops, whom the Successor of Peter nominates and may remove from office*’.

“It has been my experience and the experience of others that Rome controls bishops by fear and if you ask questions or speak openly on subjects that Rome declares closed or does not wish to be discussed, you are censored very quickly, told your leadership is defective, that you are being unfaithful to the Magisterium, that you have broken *communio* and you are threatened with dismissal.

“I have never seen the Report prepared by the Apostolic Visitor, Archbishop Charles Chaput; I have never been shown any of the “evidence” that was gathered except for an unsigned memorandum handed to be by the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Ambrose de Paoli, which was filled with errors. There has been no canonical process to establish a “Grave Cause” for removal; the accusations that my doctrinal teaching contains errors and that I have a flawed pastoral leadership has never been backed by facts except by some broad statements based on my Advent Pastoral Letter of 2006 which has been read inaccurately and interpreted incorrectly and used against me.

“In a letter of 12 November 2009, I pointed out to Pope Benedict that such evident defects in the process, distortion of facts and a lack of care for the truth, which has

characterised this whole process, cannot be of 'God' when the truth is not respected and exactness is not preserved. Pope Benedict responded by focusing on the matters raised in my Advent Pastoral Letter of 2006 which addressed local pastoral questions and matters which are in ferment generally across the Church. I quote from his letter; *'In your Advent Pastoral Letter 2006 – besides containing some very questionable pastoral choices – there are at least two options presented that are incompatible with the Catholic faith:*

- a) *Ordaining women in order to overcome the priest shortage. Yet, the late Pope John Paul II has decided infallibly and irrevocably that the Church has not the right to ordain women to the priesthood.'*
- b) *"recognizing Anglican, Lutheran and Uniting Church Orders". But according to the doctrine of the Catholic faith, ministers from these communities are not validly ordained and therefore do not share in the Sacrament of Holy Orders; and as such their actions are not joined to the ministerial priesthood.'*

"How it can be said that my Pastoral Letter teaches these things is beyond me when it purely refers to the fact that these are among many questions being discussed internationally, nationally and locally. To me this shows a total misreading and misinterpretation of what my Pastoral Letter is saying. Pope Benedict further states that my leadership of the priests and faithful of the diocese raises serious questions and that the diocesan bishop must above all be an authentic teacher of the faith, which is the foundation of all pastoral ministry. This is said without any foundation or proof. I have also been told that it is the bishops role to support the Pope in whatever he says without question, to teach from the Catechism and the documents of the Church and not to ask questions about topics that have been declared definitive or closed. I ask you, where is the Spirit in this? I was also told by Pope Benedict that I am too practical and it is the will of God that I resign.

"The whole process has relied on the presumption that I would be compliant and resign. However, I cannot do so in conscience because my resignation would be based on my acceptance of a lie. My resignation would mean that I accept the assessment of my being unfaithful to the Magisterium and breaking *communio*. I absolutely refute and reject this assessment. I do not accept that there is any grave reason for me to resign and the conditions of Canon 401 §§ 1,2 not being met, it would be dishonest of me to suggest that they had.

"To negotiate a way through this stalemate I was offered an extra-diocesan position, to be artificially created, in which I was told I could continue to serve the Church in Australia in another ministry more in keeping with my gifts and talents. As I have been denied natural justice and due process, in conscience I could not accept such an artificially created position for in Australian culture it would be seen and ridiculed for what it is – a sinecure.

"Given the circumstances that there is no canonical process regarding bishops, that there is no separation of powers and the Successor of Peter nominates bishops and may remove them from office, makes my position as Bishop of Toowoomba untenable. I have never wavered in my conviction that for me to resign is a matter of conscience and my resignation would mean that I accept the assessment of myself as breaking *communio* which I absolutely refute and reject so it is out of my love for the Church that I cannot do so. I have never written a letter of resignation.

“To find a way through this moral dilemma I asked Archbishop Philip Wilson, when he met with the Holy Father in January 2010, to affirm my position that I would not resign and put forward a proposal that I was prepared to negotiate an early retirement. My proposal was that I would retire at seventy but this was found to be unacceptable. The other possibility was to retire in eighteen months depending on whether or not the sexual abuse cases I was dealing with here in the diocese were finalised. It became evident that more time would be needed to finalise these cases and to pastorally care for the victims and their families. Unfortunately this extension of time was denied, the eighteen months was reduced to fifteen by Pope Benedict and my retirement would be announced on Monday 2 May 2011.

“I wish to thank you for your friendship and prayerful support over the eighteen years I have been a member of the Australian Episcopal Conference. I have deeply appreciated your prayers and support during that time and I will miss you. I am sure our paths will cross sometime somewhere in the future and as the quote below says, *‘If we should bump into one another, recognize me’*.

“A Quote from *‘A Man for All Seasons’* an alternative ending:

“In the London production of this play at the Globe Theatre the play ended as follows:

“Instead of the CROMWELL and CHAPUYS entrance after the HEADSMAN’S line ‘Behold – the head – of a traitor!, the COMMON MAN came to the centre stage, having taken off his mask as the executioner, and said:
I’m breathing.....Are you breathing too?.....It’s nice isn’t it? It isn’t difficult to keep alive friends.....just don’t make trouble – or if you must make trouble, make the sort of trouble that’s expected. Well, I don’t need to tell you that. Good night. If we should bump into one another, recognise me.’ ”

William M Morris, DD
Bishop Emeritus of Toowoomba