

# Sacred Hearts: From Archdeacon O'Donnell To Cardinal Pell



place?

Cardinal Pell: is his heart in the right

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On 3 September 1949, at the Calvary Hospital in Hobart, the Catholic Archdeacon of Tasmania, Thomas Joseph O'Donnell, died. He was aged 72. The cause of death was Hypertension (high blood pressure) and Pulmonary Oedema Cardiac Failure (heart attack).

In March 1949 he had been deliberately defamed by the editor of the openly sectarian Protestant newspaper, *The Rock*. The editor's name was John William Wallace Campbell.

Archdeacon O'Donnell's death stopped a defamation trial in its tracks. It meant that Campbell's attempt to use the trial process to expose the Catholic Church's Magdalene laundries in Australia and New Zealand was thwarted. Campbell resorted to this legal tactic as he could not persuade the conservative media of the 1940s to report the evidence he had gathered about the laundries.

This is what Campbell said to provoke the defamation case:

- 'We accuse O'Donnell (and we mean the one and only Archdeacon of Tasmania) of willfully and knowingly being the head of an organisation in Tasmania which has been guilty of abducting girls and women for criminal purposes, namely to force them to work without remuneration under pain of corporal punishment and fear of solitary confinement.'

- We accuse O'Donnell of knowingly conniving with others to prevent the normal development of young girls by criminally withholding from them the right to education and recreation.
- We accuse O'Donnell of knowingly and criminally restraining women from fulfilling their compulsory obligation to vote at election time.

We could go on accusing O'Donnell till further orders for the crimes against society for which he, as head of the Roman Catholic Church in Tasmania, must accept responsibility, and we CHALLENGE O'DONNELL TO PROCEED AGAINST US in any court he chooses in Tasmania, under any aspect of the law of libel which infers Protestants evade by the artifice of not using the name of any individual. And to remove the possibility of any other subtle excuse being made by Archdeacon O'Donnell for not doing so, we notify him that the author of this article is J.W.W. Campbell.'

O'Donnell's death in September 1949 was indeed very unfortunate. It meant that the information Campbell was trying to force the media to report was buried for another forty years.

It was not until 1992 that a young trainee nun in Ireland, Patricia Burke Brogan, was so appalled at what she witnessed supervising in a Magdelene Laundry in Galway, that she felt compelled to turn her experience into a play *Eclipse*, which exposed for the first time, what was going on.

A decade later, in 2002, the film *The Magdalene Sisters*, left no stone unturned in its fictional depiction of what happened in the church's laundry organisations in Ireland. Evidence gathered in Irish government reports confirmed the allegations of brutal mistreatment of women and girls.

It was also in the early 1990s the churches' cover-ups of child sexual and other abuse began to be more widely known. The then Bishop of Melbourne, George Pell, established his 'Melbourne Response' program which capped payouts to Catholic victims of abuse at \$50,000, later \$75,000 while victims in similar-fact situations overseas were receiving vastly larger sums in compensation.

In an strange turn of events, the now Cardinal Pell has successfully argued to a Royal Commission that he should not have to return to Australia from the Vatican to experience face-to-face cross-examination, in front of victims, about what he knew and when he knew it.

Like Archdeacon O'Donnell some sixty years before him, Cardinal Pell, aged 74, is reportedly suffering from high blood pressure and heart trouble that prevents him travelling long distances by air.

Archdeacon O'Donnell did not have to face cross-examination because he died.

Cardinal Pell will have to face cross-examination by video link, a great advantage for him as he will not be in a witness chair in a Royal Commission room with victim witnesses present.

With the advantage of the cardiac drugs developed since Archdeacon O'Donnell's death, and expert medical advice, Cardinal Pell should at least be able to make it to the place where he will give evidence to the Royal Commission.

Unless, of course, fate intervenes again to stop evidence from being heard.