

Gerard Henderson to Louise Milligan – 30 May 2017

Louise

I have recently completed reading your *Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of George Pell* (Melbourne University Press, 2017).

By the way, there are several references in your book to the (then) Bishop Pell walking Gerald Ridsdale to court at Warrnambool in 1993. As a simple *Google* test will reveal, this Ridsdale case was heard at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court in 1993.

I note that it has always been journalistic practice to send "a list of questions" to people on whom you intend to write about.

I intend to write about *Cardinal* in my *Media Watch Dog* blog shortly. Consequently, I have set out below a list of questions concerning your book. They are as follows:

1. At Page 4, you refer to the allegations concerning (then) Archbishop Pell's alleged sexual assault of a choir boy at St Patrick's Cathedral sometime between 1996 and 2001 as "George Pell's ugly secret". How is this statement consistent with your comments, following the publication of your book, that Cardinal Pell is entitled to the presumption of innocence? Also, what is the justification for writing at Page 227 that some of Pell's accusers "will" be cross-examined by the Cardinal's Queen's counsel? – since he has not been charged.
2. In view of the serious allegations in *Cardinal*– and to the fact that you acknowledged on the ABC TV *News Breakfast* program on 17 May 2017 that your book is written "from of the complainants' point of view"– what is your policy about anonymous sources?

For example, *Cardinal* contains references to "one senior member of a religious order" (Pg. 20), "another Royal Commission source" (Pg. 41), "one of the most senior priests on the Curia of the Melbourne Archdiocese at the time" (Pg. 51), "one Church official" (Pg. 88), "officials in the church" (Pg. 281), "a friend...who is a mother in the neighbourhood" (Pg. 290), "someone who works around the Royal Commission" (Pg. 297), "the father-in-law of an ABC journalist" (Pg. 313), "people who knew [George Pell] in his Ballarat days" (Pg. 329) – and more besides – plus the occasional "many". The allegations at Pages 88 and 281 – which go to George Pell's character – are most damaging. But they are unsourced.

In view of the serious allegations in your book, do you believe that it is professional to allow anonymous individuals – none of whom claim to be victims – a chance to condemn George Pell in such a way that a reader has no chance of judging their credibility or motives?

3. What is your position on memory? At Page 101 – when rationalising an inaccurate description of George Pell by one of his accusers – you write: "Memory does strange things when it comes to visual descriptions of people". Yet, elsewhere in *Cardinal*, you accept as accurate the recollections of individuals who have seen George Pell on television in recent times and claim that this is the person they came across 30 to 40 years previously.
4. What is your position on the use of direct quotation marks? At Page 47, you place in direct quotes the recollection of a critic of Cardinal Pell who relates – word for word – a conversation which Pell had with her cousin. This despite the fact that (i) the alleged conversation took place over two decades ago, (ii) the woman concedes to being in the room next door to where the conversation took place and (iii) Pell was (allegedly) determined that the person could not hear what he said to her cousin. This would be uncharacteristic behaviour – in view of the fact that you maintain Pell has a "steel-trap mind" and would be

unlikely to speak so loudly that he could be heard between rooms while (allegedly) attempting to have a secret conversation.

Likewise, in Chapter 6 – on the basis of hearsay upon hearsay – how do you construct the precise words that (then) Fr Pell used some three decades ago? Is this professional journalism?

5. What is your attitude to time? At Pages 129-130 you write that Cardinal Pell was fit enough to turn up at an event in Ballarat “just before he gave video link evidence” from Rome to the Royal Commission on account of not being medically fit to travel to Australia. Cardinal Pell was in Ballarat in March 2015 and he was due to give evidence to the Royal Commission in December 2015 – nine months later.

This is an important point – since you imply that George Pell suddenly developed a heart condition which prevented him from flying from Rome to Australia for hearings of the Royal Commission. So, do you believe it accurate to state that March 2015 is “just before” December 2015 – and insufficient time for a 73 year old man, who already had experienced two heart attacks, to suffer a further deterioration in health?

6. What is your evidence that the Catholic Church could afford to splash around \$20,000 a day on Allan Myers QC as legal counsel before the Royal Commission for Cardinal Pell? (Pg. 131). Were you told this by the Catholic Church and/or Mr Myers? Or did you just make this up?
7. In view of your sustained criticism of the (then) Bishop Pell’s handling of Fr Peter Searson in Melbourne when he (Pell) was an auxiliary bishop – why did you fail to mention that, when he became Archbishop of Melbourne, George Pell sacked Searson and refused to abide by a Vatican decision that he be re-instated? (Pg. 260). Was this a deliberate omission or did you forget this fact – which was not challenged before the Royal Commission?
8. In dealing with the decision of former Judge Alan Southwell QC’s finding that Phillip Scott’s complaint – with respect to an alleged assault in 1961 – against (then) Archbishop Pell was not upheld, you write:

So, in the end, the character assassination of Scott was successful – it achieved its aim – to keep Pell as Archbishop of Sydney. (Page 103)

The clear imputation is that Judge Southwell’s decision was affected by the (alleged) character assassination of Mr Scott which occurred outside the hearing. What evidence do you have that there was any causal relationship between the alleged character assassination of Mr Scott in the media – and Judge Southwell’s decision? Do you believe that Judge Southwell would have been so unprofessional to allow media reports to influence his finding? If so, what is your evidence for this assertion?

9. On Page 19 you write that George Pell “infamously shared the [Ballarat East] presbytery with [Gerald] Ridsdale for a year.” At Page 142 you (incorrectly) state that Gerald Ridsdale shared a presbytery for a year with Paul Bongiorno in Ballarat East. It was, in fact, Warrnambool where Ridsdale and Bongiorno shared accommodation – as the evidence before the Royal Commission makes clear. Why is (then) Fr Pell’s accommodation with Ridsdale “infamous” – but not (then) Fr. Bongiorno’s accommodation with Ridsdale?
10. On Page 15 you write that “one seminarian in Pell’s year **seems to remember** Pell and [Anthony Salvatore] Bongiorno going on holiday together one summer”. (Emphasis added). Do you maintain that what an anonymous source “seems to remember” warrants quoting in what is presented as a serious book of contemporary history?

11. Do you believe that such words as “if” and “perhaps” are warranted in what is presented as a professional work by one of the ABC’s leading investigative reporters?

It would be appreciated if you could reply to the above questions before the close of business on Thursday 1 June 2017.

Gerard Henderson