
— Rear Window

Lawyers audition for Catholics work Corrs vacated

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Columnist



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Since law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth abruptly dumped [<https://www.afr.com/street-talk/law-firm-corrs-foresakes-catholic-church-account-20220724-p5b442>] the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne’s “personal injury work” in July, a major power shift has been underway in the darkest crannies of the legal fraternity.

Corrs effectively wound up the practice of partner **Richard Leder**, longstanding adviser to the church and architect with **George Pell** of the 1996 “Melbourne Response”, the world’s first compensation scheme for victims of sexual abuse by clergy. And a sublime euphemism.



Corrs devised the Melbourne Response with the Catholic Church for victims of clerical abuse. **Tanya Lake**

It was a shitful response, absolving institutional liability in return for maximum payments of \$50,000. Its single greatest beneficiary was “independent” commissioner **Peter O’Callaghan QC**, whose \$7.7 million in fees accounted for 44 per cent of the program’s total outgoings.

Which rival shop Leder now lands at, or whether he’ll hang out his own shingle, remains an open question, but his annual billings from the Catholics alone were north of \$4 million.

Yes, this is a seriously lucrative calling if your conscience can suffer it.

The church's child sexual abuse liabilities in Australia, as assessed by its own insurance arm, are estimated to be \$1.4 billion. The lawyers' KPI is to pay out the minimum dollar claims for liabilities they know exist and to maximise their own return as the adviser along the way.

This "personal injury" or "professional standards" work is a deep, deep pit of despair, but the pit also happens to be overflowing with money. In such an avaricious profession, that's quite the quandary.

Corrs withdrew for a bunch of reasons – the reputational effects were top of mind but also the work itself was traumatising for its junior personnel. Corrs continues to advise British American Tobacco without apparent qualms.

An array of other firms are now trying to groom the Catholic institutions in their auditions for a bigger piece of this action. This is the dance of parasites seeking to attach themselves to a host.

The Archdiocese of Sydney swiftly replaced Corrs with Dentons

[<https://www.afr.com/companies/professional-services/corrs-loses-3m-in-church-legal-work-20220801-p5b6cp>], whose partner on the account, **John Dalzell**

[<https://www.afr.com/companies/professional-services/how-a-survivor-outlasted-corrs-on-church-legal-work-20220803-p5b6ua>], worked on the famous "Ellis defence" (which prevented victims from suing the church until it was overturned by legislation in 2019).

Then there's **Eddie Obeid's** old law firm Colin Biggers & Paisley, also house adviser to the Christian Brothers, who paid out \$90 million in legal expenses and compensation in financial 2021 and declared provisions for a further \$200 million. It will be vastly more than that.

CBP in particular, led by partner **Vanessa Kemp**, is known for its highly aggressive tactics in defence of its clients, tactics that are perfectly legal but completely devastating to victims, designed to apply maximum cognitive pressure.

Kemp describes herself as an insurance lawyer. This is another sublime euphemism. Really, Kemp is a lawyer to the reverse litigation fund of a paedophile ring.

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You can call it insurance, or professional indemnity practice, or personal injury work – as almost all of them do! Or you can call it what it is: minimising the financial impost of child rape and torture.

And you certainly wouldn't know any of this if you came across the Colin Biggers & Paisley Foundation. There goes yet another professional services firm perfuming their reputation by studiously disassociating themselves from what they really do.

The “core focus” of the CBP Foundation is to promote and protect the rights of children. The irony is almost overwhelming. You could spend hours reading the foundation’s impact reports, but you won’t find anything there about the impact of the firm’s major clients.

Nor will you find any reference to Matthew 16:26: for what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the world and lose his own soul?

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