

Lot more than meets the eye with bishop's gross injustice

SATURDAY'S edition of the Chronicle gave two instances of injustice some coverage – but treated them in entirely different ways.

In case you missed it – the front page dealt with the horrific case of young Brad Gillis who was wrongly jailed for a crime he did not commit.

Journalist Peter Hardwick emphasized the lack of fairness in the way that the Queensland justice system deals with 17 year olds – treating them as adults – rather than as children.

On page 20 of the same paper Mr Hardwick offered comment on the forced early retirement of Bishop Morris from the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba.

If you are part of the 73 per cent of the population who doesn't identify as part of the Roman Catholic faith you are entitled to ask whether the issue should be covered at all.

I would argue that it should.

For those of us who are signed up members of the faith – issues of justice and transparency should be central.

For the wider community the church represents part of civil society and by today's standards fairness and due process should again be a given.

‘There can be no reconciliation without justice and the best way to start this process would be with the truth.’

If you choose to send your child to a school run by the church or if taxpayers' money goes towards supporting the homeless, the refugees, the counselling services run by church organisations the wider community has a right to know how the church operates.

The issue is not about division amongst Catholics in Toowoomba – the issue is process or lack thereof.

Nobody that I know is questioning the right of the Pope to act in this way – nor is there a campaign to “maintain the rage” as Peter puts it or to “Bring back Bishop Bill!”

Instead there is a deep hurt and confusion at how this came to be. The recent Australian Bishops letter from Rome mentioned the word “healing”.

Healing in any social situation cannot occur without truth-telling. Which takes me back to the front page of Saturday's Chronicle.

Peter Hardwick spends much of his time following our local courts and could almost claim to have a corporate memory like Rumpole of the Bailey.

So let's put the Bishop Bill story in that setting. If a man came before the courts and was asked to plead guilty before he knew what the charges were and before he knew the identity of his accusers would it be right?

If the accused man had no access to the evidence and was not given an opportunity to defend himself again would it be right?

If we took this from the court setting to the employment setting and a man was asked to resign before he could be told the reasons that he was not seen fit to continue in his position? Again would that be right?

All of the above applies to one Bishop William Morris.

In a sense whether Bishop Bill

was a good man or not is irrelevant – the fact that his leadership set the standards in pastoral care and open dialogue with the wider community makes it all the harder for some of us to stomach.

So many of us are left scratching our heads.

What did Bishop Morris do that was so wrong?

As adults we do not leave our sense of justice or fair play at the church door when we kneel to pray.

Peter Hardwick seems to imply that there might be more to this case than meets the eye.

The Australian Bishops have recently returned from Rome stating that they now have a more adequate understanding of why Bishop Morris needed to retire early.

Let's hope some time soon they are able to share this new understanding with the wider flock.

To hint that our lived experience of the leadership of Bishop Morris was not all that it seems – simply adds to the original injustice.

To “move on” as Mr Hardwick suggests implies that the past has been dealt with.

There can be no reconciliation without justice and the best way to start this process would be with the truth.