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Australian prelates welcome investigation into child abuse cases

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Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced Nov. 12 the formation of a royal commission that will have sweeping powers to investigate child abuse in institutions, including the Catholic church, government and nonprofit care providers, scouting groups and sports clubs.

Gillard said the inquiry will not just look at perpetrators, it will also cover those who were "complicit," by "averting their eyes" or committed acts of omission, Australian media reported. The inquiry will also look at how police have responded to the problem.

Separate parliamentary inquiries into sex abuse are already under way in the states of Victoria and New South Wales.

Earlier this month a New South Wales senior police officer, Detective Chief Inspector Peter Fox, alleged on a national television news program that Catholic church officials had covered up evidence involving clergy sex abuse and urged the state premier to launch an inquiry. A number of Labor and independent politicians as well as victims' groups took up his call, *The Age* newspaper reported.

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott declared his support for a "wide-ranging" royal commission into child sex abuse but said the focus should not be on only the Catholic church.

Cardinal George Pell of Sydney said he welcomed the prime minister's announcement on the "enormously important topic and very painful topic." He said, "I believe the air should be cleared and the truth uncovered."

The cardinal and other church leaders "are not interested in denying the extent of misdoing in the Catholic church" and will cooperate fully with the royal commission, he said.

But he objected to allegations being "exaggerated" and the Catholic church being singled out. "One of the good things about this royal commission is that it doesn't focus exclusively on us," he said. "I don't think we should be scapegoated."

"We'll answer for what we've done. We're not trying to defend the indefensible," he added.

Pell said he hoped the inquiry would bring victims "some peace, that they will feel that justice has been done."

The archbishop of Melbourne and president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Denis Hart, also welcomed the scrutiny and pledged full cooperation.

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