

## MEMOIR EXPOSES DEPTH OF HARM DONE BY PAEDOPHILE PRIESTS

As a fifteen-year-old boy, James Miller was a gifted student who loved surfing. However, he started getting into trouble at school and his parents decided he needed a more disciplined environment. So they transferred him to St Pius X Secondary College in Newcastle in 1978 where he soon drew the attentions of Principal Father Brennan and Deputy Father Helferty. Aided by his deputy, Brennan wields his authority to find many occasions to see James alone and sexually abuse him, transforming James's naturally sunny easy-going disposition into one wracked with self-loathing and shame.

Confused and bewildered by what was happening, James began drinking and secretly self-harming. The influence of the Catholic Church and Father Brennan within the local community was such that James was unable to escape him, even after a decade in Sydney. When his marriage crumbled, his wife and young daughter moved back to Newcastle and James followed. He decided that the only way to escape these predatory men was to become so successful that they couldn't reach or touch him, and he joined prestigious chambers in Sydney as a barrister. However, his internal life was a wreck. He was terrified that someone would discover his secret shame, and he developed a deep-seated paranoia and a serious substance abuse problem.

Out of the blue he was asked to make a statement in criminal proceedings against a serial paedophile priest who was protected by Father Brennan. James knew that if he appears at the trial, he would be forced to reveal what had happened to him. To make matter worse, Brennan then contacted James, demanding his help in his own legal defence of related charges. Faced with exposure and confronted by an irreconcilable moral dilemma, James had a breakdown, eventually losing his job and becomes homeless, before finding the internal fortitude to resurrect himself and his life. In 2015 he began a lawsuit against the Newcastle-Maitland Diocese.

Miller said that he hopes *The Priests* will help readers to better understand the adult effects of child sex abuse. He said, 'It produces mental illness that is typically two or three decades in the making, and is all too often devastating in effect. I would be pleased if victims are more able to help themselves, loved ones more open to understanding and carers more equipped to assist.'

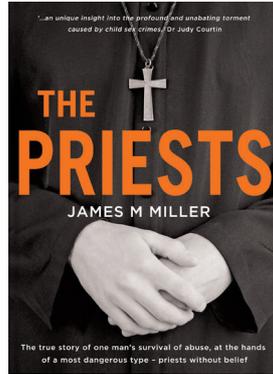
'Writing *The Priests* confirmed in my mind that there exists a valid and timeless distinction between Good and Evil. Yes, this important distinction is difficult to fully define

in the abstract; as an object in philosophy. But the real world consequences - the concrete effects of child sex abuse - are so predictable, direct and devastating that we can say with absolute conviction that it is evil conduct. It must be unequivocally condemned and gravely punished.

'For many years I had attempted to address my mental illness, on my own. I was dubious about the benefits that mental health treatment could provide and made no effort to seek it. By forcing me to accept treatment and comply with it, completing *The Priests* brought this issue to a head. It has been a revelation to me. My views are now the opposite of what they were. I strongly urge anyone suffering from poor mental health to step up and get help. The road to recovery or at least to a better state of mind cannot be walked alone; I am certain about this.'

*The Priests* is a powerful and gripping personal story by an educated, articulate man about the long term and far-reaching damage sexual abuse can inflict on a human soul. It is also a riveting expose of the context and conditions of the Church which allowed child sexual abuse to flourish worldwide and particularly in the Newcastle region, which has been described as an epicentre of the sexual abuse epidemic in Australia between the 1960s and 1980s.

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### The importance for James Miller of writing down his story

*James Miller says of writing this memoir, "I kept the abuse secret for thirty-five years. I knew it had badly affected my mind. As I entered middle-age I was constantly bothered about how my life would end if I did nothing to confront the past. So I set out to revisit the past and understand how my mind had become so difficult to live with. If I honestly unpacked the dark parts of my life-memory and reconsolidated them with an understanding of things for which I was personally responsible and things for which I was not, I may be able to improve the state of my mind. That was my approach, in writing The Priests.*

*'In writing this book I was hoping for a cathartic, purgative experience; one that, even if only in part, may shake off the effects of the past. If I could achieve that I would have a chance to write a better ending to my life. Writing The Priests undeniably helped me. But it also left me with a fresh and firm conviction: I desperately needed professional help.'*



James Miller

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### About the author

James Miller has worked as an academic and a barrister. He is the author of *Shoot and Demonise: The Death of Ron Levi* (2000) and *Getting Into Law* (2002). James lives in Woolloomooloo, Sydney. He works as in-house counsel and is an avid bushwalker.

### Advance praise for *The Priests*

*'Miller provides unique insight into the profound and unabating torment caused by child sex crimes. The author's fearless honesty and unrelenting courage inspire the reader ... a brilliant book. - Dr Judy Courtin, Lawyer and Accredited Mediator*

*'I hope readers of **The Priests** better understand the adult effects of child sex abuse. It produces mental illness that is typically two or three decades in the making, and is all too often devastating in effect,' James Miller.*

*'James Miller has written an incredibly lucid and powerful book... People need to hear from survivors like Mr Miller to understand how profoundly powerful institutions like the Catholic Church failed so many children for so long, and failed them again when they sought help as adults. - Joanne McCarthy, Senior journalist, Newcastle Newspapers, Fairfax News*

*'James Miller's confronting and compelling memoir is honest, courageous and written with poignant clarity' - Dr Cathy Kezelman AM President, Blue Knot Foundation*

*'This story has a very authentic voice – this is very personal but has many insights important for us all.' - Professor Kay Wilhelm, AM, Director of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, and Conjoint Professor of Psychiatry at the University of New South Wales*

***The Priests** is available 1 August from all good bookshops and onlineetailers and retailers in paperback (\$34.99) and ebook (\$9.99)*

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