

What you missed in George Pell's tell-all TV interview

George Pell's tell-all interview has revealed the dramatic transformation he has undergone during his time in prison, an Australian body language expert says.

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April 15, 2020 6:51pm

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George Pell's tell-all interview revealed the dramatic transformation he has undergone during his time in prison, an Australian body language expert says.

Dr Louise Mahler told News Corp Australia that the freed cardinal appeared a “changed man” during his exclusive TV interview with *Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt on Sky News.

“There is no semblance of the nasty, empathy-free, ogre like Pell of his pre-jail time,” Dr Louise Mahler, author of *Resonate: For People Who Need To Be Heard*, said.

“The forceful, overbearing and arrogant Pell has completely disappeared, as if a magic wand has been waved, with a new man before us.”

Dr Mahler said Pell's previous “ever-present resting bitch face” and “staring eyes” were not on display.

The body language expert noted his “heartfelt” description of his drug-affected fellow inmates and glimpses of humour.

“His emphasis on forgiveness sounded and looked, from his direct eye contact, to be a solid conviction,” she said.

“Pell is a man who is wounded, not scarred, who survived prison through faith, a serious man who has found a way to smile and even offer a rare laugh, despite his ordeal.”



George Pell says his legal bills were paid by wealthy donors.

During the interview, Pell said he believed he was a “scapegoat” for the “terrible crimes committed in the church’s name”, revealing that his legal bills were paid by wealthy benefactors and that he had to kick in his own superannuation to cover the costs.

Pell opened up about his time in prison, describing it as a “grim place” where he shared a unit with ice addicts.

In discussing the case against him, Pell said he had insisted his legal team present the “fantastic implausibility” of the accusations of sexual abuse.

Pell was released from Barwon Prison last week after his convictions on five sexual abuse charges, relating to two choirboys at Melbourne’s St Patricks Cathedral in the 1990s, were quashed by the High Court.

The 78-year-old has always vehemently denied any sexual abuse and has maintained his innocence throughout legal proceedings.

Pell said he felt sorry for the complainant and did not know what motivated him.

“I wonder whether he was used. I don’t know what the poor fella was up to,” he told Andrew Bolt.

Pell said he did not give evidence at his trial because he was “so incensed” at the way prosecutors had treated two witnesses that he feared his “nasty, aggressive self” would come out in court and be counter-productive for his legal team.

He said he now had “considerably less” money than before after contributing to his legal bills, which were not paid for by the Catholic Church but by “a lot of very generous people”.

“Some of them wealthy people who kicked in very solidly, a lot of them Christians and Catholics who weren’t very wealthy people and of course I kicked in my own super and more,” he said.

He said his faith was his one consolation as he initially grappled with the verdict and that he was ultimately answerable to God.

“Terrible crimes have been committed in the church’s name. I think it’s a bit ironic that I’m the figurehead, the scapegoat, that has copped most of this because of what I did very, very early in ‘96 is set up the Melbourne Response.

“But one consolation for me of course, as a Christian for no Christian is any earthly tribunal the last tribunal. So, you’ve got your own conscience, what you know is right and wrong, and I know I won’t be able to fool my good God.”



George Pell arrives at the Seminary Of The Good Shepherd in Sydney last week.
Picture: AAP

When asked by Bolt if people perhaps thought Pell was a “monster” who had been covering up abuses in church, Pell defended the Church’s response to sexual abuse crimes by clergy.

“Well, I think you’d have to ask them. It’s a bit of a mystery to me but nonetheless people do feel like that and I don’t think the Church has ever got enough credit for the fact that we broke the back of this problem. The offending stopped, not completely, but almost completely from the middle ’90s.”

Pell used prison slang – the term ‘narc’ – as he gave a colourful description of life inside Barwon Prison.

He said he was treated well by other inmates and once heard a debate between a group of them about whether or not he was innocent.

One prisoner, Pell said, told the others he believed Pell was innocent as he had “two prime ministers who support him” .

Describing prison as a “worldly retreat” — as he was allowed a kettle and television set — Pell said Barwon was well-staffed and that he and other “quiet inmates” were at the “Toorak end” of Unit 8.

“The poor fellas at the other end, often damaged by ice, were roaring. They had anger, they had anguish.”

Pell said he soon settled into prison life and was supported by his fellow inmates, who gave “one enormous cheer” when news of his acquittal came through.

“I had a daily routine, I followed the advice I’ve often given to priests when they’re in a bit of trouble. I said keep up your prayers, get out of bed at a good time, eat properly, exercise every day and try to sleep at night.”

Pell slammed the justice system, saying it was “not a sign of a civilisation where you have guilt by accusation”.

“These things have to be tested respectfully. The pendulum 30 or 40 years ago was massively against anybody who said that they had been attacked,” he said.

“Nowadays, we don’t want to just swing back so that every accusation is regarded as gospel truth. That would be quite unjust and inappropriate.”