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## [Book Review of] *George Pell*, by Tess Livingstone

Catholic Medical Association

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human tumors, but until Carbone tested the Parke - Davis vaccine, there was no proof that the slow-growing SV40 found in humans had come from polio vaccine. Carbone's finding debunked claims that the virus the researchers were finding in human tumors came from another source. Even if some small amount of exposure to SV40 was due to monkey bites, SV40 researchers now widely agree that there is no question that the vast exposure of millions of Americans to the monkey virus occurred through contaminated vaccines. "This proves that the SV40 that was present in the polio vaccine is identical to the SV40 we are finding in these human tumors," Carbone says of his finding.

*The Virus and the Vaccine* is a meticulously researched and powerfully written account. The Salk vaccine and its roles in wiping out one of mankind's most dreaded diseases may ironically have contributed to a new threat to the health of millions.

Needless to say, the possibility has inspired extensive political maneuvering among numerous national health agencies reluctant to admit that their triumphal medical achievement of the 1950s may prove to have a serious downside.

*Reviewed by :*

**Eugene F. Diamond, M.D.**  
**Director,**  
**The Linacre Institute**

*George Pell* by Tess Livingstone, Duffy and Snellgrove, Potts Point, N.S.W., Australia, \$22.00.

This is the first biography of George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney. It is a book about strong leadership, and about the dangers strong leaders face today if they espouse unfashionable views.

In recent decades a war has been waged within the Catholic Church between traditionalists and those who want to drain its teachings and institutions of much of their meaning. This is the story of that struggle, told through the life of a leading combatant, George Pell, who has spent much of his adult life battling attempts to, in his words, "trivialise Jesus Christ".

Tess Livingstone is the editor of the opinion page at the *Courier Mail* in Brisbane. She is an experienced journalist who has worked in London, Canberra and Brisbane. For this book she visited many parts of Victoria, Sydney, Oxford and Rome, and interviewed over fifty people, including many of Pell's opponents.

George Pell was born in Ballarat and was signed to play Australian Rules football for Richmond. Despite this and his academic success, he

decided to join the priesthood, to the initial disappointment of his Anglican father, who told a nun that George might just as well have been “a bloody dill. But you probably don’t want dills, do you?”

Because of his early promise, Pell was taken from the Melbourne seminary and sent to complete his training at the Vatican’s elite Pontifical University in Rome. This was followed by a PhD in history at Oxford, where Pell studied how the authority of the popes had been challenged and defended in the early Church. (In retrospect it was to prove a subject deeply relevant to the modern Church too.)

Pell returned to parish duties in rural Victoria and in 1973, at the age of 32, was appointed principal of Aquinas College for Catholic teachers in Ballarat. He was involved in the formation of the Australian Catholic University, wrote several books, and edited *Light*, the magazine of the Ballarat diocese.

In 1984 Pell became rector of Corpus Christi, the Melbourne seminary for trainee priests. In the face of opposition from some staff and students, he reintroduced traditional prayer practices and began to acquire a reputation as a defender of the authority of the Church and an opponent of some of the liberalisation that had flowed from Vatican II.

In 1987, at the young age of 45, Pell became auxiliary bishop of Melbourne. It seems that by this point he had been identified by Pope John Paul II as a potential Church leader. One of Pell’s jobs now was as chairman of Caritas, the Catholic overseas relief agency. He visited numerous Third World countries and helped redirect aid from the communist organisations in south-east Asia where some of it had been going. In this period Pell began to write for *AD2000*, the conservative religious magazine, increasing his profile among Australian Catholics outside Victoria. In 1990 the Pope appointed him to several part-time Vatican groups, including the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Church’s ultimate body where faith and morals are concerned.

In 1996 Pell became Archbishop of Melbourne, with his predecessor retiring unexpectedly. Pell moved to reform many areas of the Church’s activities, particularly by strengthening the religious education of children and the training of priests. In response to his reforms in the seminary, the entire teaching staff resigned, but the reforms led to an increase in the numbers of young men entering the priesthood. He also moved quickly to introduce a procedure to deal with the increasing number of sex abuse claims being made against priests. Compared with most other bishops, he spoke out publicly on major issues such as Victoria’s gambling culture, One Nation, and the *Piss Christ* art exhibition. He became famous for refusing Holy Communion to homosexual activists wearing the rainbow sash to Mass, and did pastoral work visiting men dying of AIDS in Church hospices.

In 1998 the Australian Catholic bishops were admonished by the Pope for the increasing liberalism of the Church. Seminary training had become unorthodox in most places, religious education was a joke in many schools, lay people were being invited to perform some of the functions of priests, the words of the Mass had been changed, individual confession was being replaced with group sessions, and some nuns had stopped wearing their habits and were living outside their convents.

In 2001 in another unexpected move, George Pell became Archbishop of Sydney, Australia's senior archdiocese. Former Human Rights Commissioner Chris Sidoti told ABC radio that "The Church in Sydney is headed back to the Middle Ages." Australian Vatican expert Desmond O'Grady suggested that Pope John Paul II chose Pell not necessarily because he is conservative but because he is strong: "The Vatican wants leaders who will make their presence felt in and beyond their sees ... the point about all of them is that, while you may disagree with what they say, you know they are there."

In Sydney Pell has introduced many of the reforms he had brought to Melbourne, and has also been the subject of demonstrations by the rainbow sash activists. His effigy has appeared on a float in the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. As a strong and famous leader he has attracted enemies in search of publicity and journalists in search of viewers and readers. In 2002 he was interviewed about the Church and sex abuse by "60 Minutes" and, later in the year, accused of having abused a boy himself. The accuser's anonymity is protected by law, while either the accuser or people close to him leaked details of the alleged incident to the media. On 21 August George Pell stood aside from his position while the claim was investigated by a retired supreme court judge. On 14 October Pell was cleared of the allegations.

George Pell, says Tess Livingstone, "is fully cognisant of the daily struggle of priests in dioceses who continue to defend the fullness of Church teaching and refuse to sell out in the face of pressures to trivialise Catholic teaching or reduce the Christian message to a bland, lowest-common-denominator level in the pursuit of short-term popularity and peace at any price." This is the story of one of the most extraordinary, important and controversial Australians of our time.