

Irish Catholic cover-up of child sex abuse echoes past priestly scandals: Archbishop of Dublin offers contrite apology

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A new, damning report on the large-scale child sexual abuses by Irish Catholic priests has drawn a contrite apology to victims by the archbishop of Dublin.

A government commission charged with probing allegations involving the Archdiocese of Dublin between 1975 and 2004 revealed a pattern of clergy abuse that was covered up by the Catholic Church, at times with the collusion of the Irish police.

The archdiocese placed greater importance on protecting the church's reputation and maintaining secrecy than it did on children's welfare and justice for victims, according to the report released on November 26.

Starting in 1940, four successive archbishops of Dublin were aware of complaints, the report said, but church authorities failed to implement most of their rules on dealing with abuse.

"As archbishop of Dublin and as Diarmuid Martin, a person, I offer to each and every survivor, my apology, my sorrow and my shame for what happened," said Dublin archbishop Martin. "The damage done to children abused by priests can never be undone."

At that point, however, the Vatican had not yet commented on the findings. "The pope should come here and make an apology to the victims and the Irish nation, and he should be contrite and sincere," John Kelly, one of the founders of the Survivors of Child Abuse association, told the *Irish Times*.

A Vatican spokesperson told Religion News Service it was up to the Irish church to respond. Some have challenged that assertion on the grounds that the Vatican has also been criticized for not cooperating with the inquiry.

The commission asked for details of reports on abuse sent to the Vatican by the Dublin archdiocese in 2006, but the Vatican did not reply, later saying the request had not gone through appropriate diplomatic channels. Nor did a request for information from the Holy See's ambassador to Ireland, Giuseppe Leanza, draw a response.

The parallels to similar scandals in the U.S. and other parts of the world—with eerily similar charges of cover-up and shuffling predatory priests from one church to another—have also led to demands for action.

“Let’s stop using the past tense and start using the present tense. It’s foolish to assume or believe that what’s happened in the past isn’t happening now,” said Barbara Blaine, a founder of the Chicago-based Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests.

“We beg church officials to take practical steps to deter future recklessness, callousness and deceit, by publicly and strongly disciplining every single church worker who ignored or concealed child sex crimes, or who is doing so today.”

Martin’s predecessor from 1988 to 2004 as archbishop of Dublin, Cardinal Desmond Connell—himself criticized in the report—expressed regret at his failures.

“I have experienced distress and bewilderment that those placed in a position of sacred trust could be guilty of such heinous offences and cause such appalling harm to vulnerable young people,” he stated. “I wish to express without reservation my bitter regret that failures on my part contributed to the suffering of victims in any form.”

The commission of investigation was appointed in March 2006. It selected a representative sample of complaints or allegations of child sexual abuse made in the period from January 1975 to May 2004 against Catholic clergy operating under the aegis of the Dublin archdiocese. *-Religion News Service, Ecumenical News International*