

Grand jury report censures two former Philadelphia prelates: Report says cardinals "excused and enabled" sexual abuse

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Philadelphia's two most recent cardinals came under blistering criticism in a grand jury report released last month, but prosecutors said limitations in state law prohibit the filing of charges.

Cardinal John Krol, who served from 1961 to 1988 and who died in 1996, and his successor, Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, who retired in 2003, were accused of leaving known abusers in their pulpits or having "recycled" them without notifying parishioners of allegations against them.

The grand jury report contended that the two cardinals "excused and enabled the abuse," and that the church's handling of the abuse cases "was at least as immoral as the abuse itself."

District Attorney Lynne Abraham, who convened the grand jury in 2002, said charges would not be filed because the statute of limitations in the cases had expired. Gaps in state law also prevent criminal charges against the unincorporated archdiocese.

Philadelphia's current archbishop, Cardinal Justin Rigali, called the 418-page report "very painful to read" but defended the church's handling of abuse cases, as well as Krol's and Bevilacqua's actions. "The view of Cardinal Bevilacqua is so distorted and so unfair that those who knew him or were influenced by his ministry cannot help but be offended," the archdiocese said in a lengthy response.

The grand jury report documented abuse committed by at least 63 priests against "hundreds" of children, including an 11-year-old girl who was raped by a priest, who

later took her for an abortion. “We are left then with what we consider a travesty of justice: a multitude of crimes for which no one can be held criminally accountable,” the report said.

William Donohue, president of the conservative, New York-based Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, accused Abraham of embarking on a three-year “fanatical crusade” that came up empty. But church reformers disagreed. “The grand jury report documents what we have long known—a widespread and extensive cover-up of sexual abuse,” said Jim Post, president of Boston-based Voice of the Faithful. - *Religion News Service*