

The 'Murphy Report' –

Commission of Investigation concerning child sexual abuse (CSA) by priests in Dublin and the response of the Archdiocese of Dublin in the period 1975 – 2004.

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December/January '09/'10.

- 1) THIS SCANDAL is all the more upsetting because it was done by priests – who are meant to represent Jesus Christ - whose central message and life was about compassion and caring – who said we will be judged by how much practical caring or uncaring is in our lives – especially to the hurting and vulnerable.
- 2) THE REPORT -What are the central findings? - that hundreds of children were sexually abused by priests in Dublin Archdiocese since 1940, and that between the 40's and mid-90s, church authorities in Dublin gave priority to avoiding scandal, secrecy and cover-up, protection of the reputation and assets of the church, over the protection of children! The report examines forty-six sample allegations against priests from one hundred and two which it judges should be investigated from the '75-'04 period, and details sometimes poor management, instances where allegations or suspicions against priests were known but not reported to the Garda, and accused priests reassigned to ministry after impaired counseling - resulting in more children being injured etc.
- 3) HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN, each unique and infinitely important, were robbed of their childhood and hurt and damaged – many seriously and permanently - involving loss of ability to trust and to form healthy adult intimate relationships, psychosexual damage, sexual confusion, a wrong sense of shame and self-blame, lifelong anger, loss of self-confidence, loss of faith, depression, self-destructive behaviour and even suicide ! Behind these words lies much suffering and pain.
- 4) RESPONSIBILITY :The abusers are mainly responsible, but so also is anyone who knowingly put any child in danger of being abused. The Garda and DPP are undertaking an investigation of this aspect. This investigation needs to be just and fair. The hindsight of more than twenty years, and the knowledge, authority and responsibility of all involved at the time are relevant factors. Growth in knowledge and a 'learning curve' about the nature and extent of CSA by priests, including amongst the relevant professions, is obvious. The Archdiocese took out a modest insurance policy re CSA in the late '80s (indicating some awareness of the abuse) and educational seminars for all Dublin clergy took place in the '90s. Truth (rarely pure and never simple), justice, healing, even forgiveness will be wiser objectives rather than just punishment or scapegoating. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin asked the auxiliary Bishops and other relevant church leaders to self-examine whether or not their past action or inaction ever resulted in the abuse of any child, and to resign if the answer was yes. The diocesan management culture, structures and policy up to the mid-90s (including secrecy, non-dismissal of abusers from ministry, insufficient knowledge, poor advice, etc) sometimes

actually resulted in further abuse of children. Four auxiliary Bishops of the examined time have resigned, including one consecrated Bishop in 1997 when policy and practice reforms were well under way.

5) **PRIESTS KNOWING ?** On the issue of priests knowing about, being aware, of this scandal – I, and I think most priests, knew nothing about CSA by priests until '93 or '94. Some priests obviously knew about individual local cases but equally I know of priests who were serving alongside abuser-priests in the same parish and knew nothing about it – it is by nature a clandestine crime. There were several future abusers in the seminary as students in my time as a seminarian and none of us had any suspicions about them.

6) **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CSA)** is a most serious crime and sin – some of it involving the selection, grooming, controlling of a child or adolescent minor for sexual pleasure and intimacy – often gaining the trust of parents and the loyalty and affection of the child. It is a psycho-sexual disorder and often addictive. It always damages and sometimes destroys lives. Such abusers have been called 'slayers of the soul'.

Psychologists talk of various categories – exclusive (attracted only to children) and non-exclusive; intra-familial (incest) and extra-familial; pre-pubescent and post-pubescent; morally conflicted (dislikes, ashamed of his sexual preference and wants help); socially conflicted (feels his sexuality is legitimate and justifiable – are high-risk re-offenders); psychopathic (no empathy or compassion for victims); sociopathic (frequently violent, a 'user' of others); infantophilia etc.

Its causes are debated by mental health professionals – theories about personality disorder, passive/aggressive traits, childhood experience of abuse of various kinds, lack of personal development, impaired inter-personal functioning, uncontrolled sexual desire linked with opportunity and power, introversion, neuroticism, familial transmittability, biological or neurological factors, etc.

I understand that ordinary personality tests which are used in screening would-be priests do not reveal paedophile tendencies. Most abusers seem normal – can be socially skilled and seem psychologically healthy. Many priest-abusers can be even charming, likeable and 'good priests' in many respects - often the person you would least suspect.

Experience now shows that there are several 'red flags' to watch out for which might indicate paedophile tendencies – confusion about sexual orientation; having childish interests and behaviour – being most at ease with and emotionally understanding children; a lack of any peer (adult) intimate relationships (no best friends); excessive, passive, conforming personalities, deferential to authority, extremes in developmental sexual experiences – either excessive or total lack of normal developmental sexual experiences; experience of profound shame and/or humiliation in childhood; poor emotional attachments to adults during childhood; a personal history of childhood emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect ( a study of many priests undergoing treatment in a church-run facility for abuser-priests in the USA found that 62% of them had themselves been sexually abused as children – an extraordinary fact). In general, most children sexually abused do

not go on to become abusers themselves, and most adult abusers do not report having being sexually abused as a child.

- 7) **CHURCH LEADERSHIP RESPONSE** : Why did church authorities act as they did in handling the allegations? Perhaps because of the existing authority culture of the church - hierarchic, patriarchic, all-male, centrally controlled, imperial, secretive concerning 'sensitive' issues. Until the mid-90s, the church in Dublin tried to handle the allegations secretly – that is what canon law laid down. And many of the complainants also wanted the matter handled discreetly. It also seems clear that between the 60s and 90s there was variety and lack of clarity re the roles of auxiliary bishops, and sometimes poor communication among the leadership. And the advice of lawyers and mental health professionals at the time did not always help good decision-making.
  
- 8) **VICTIMS & ABUSERS** : It is true that it was journalists, not church leaders, who championed CSA victims and revealed this evil. Equally, you could get the impression from some media journalists that most priests are paedophiles and that most paedophiles are priests. This is simply not the truth. Research in Ireland (SAVI Report, 2002) indicates that 3.2% of CSA victims in Ireland were abused by clergy or religious. 80% of perpetrators were known by the victim – family members (cousins, uncles, brothers, fathers, stepfathers etc), neighbours, teachers, babysitters, childcare workers, sports coaches, clergy of all denominations, youth leaders. 25% of child sexual abusers are children themselves – teenagers. Most victims are under twelve years of age; 40% of cases are of an ongoing nature, not a singular instance; 7% of CSA is by women. In Ireland, one in every five women experience 'contact sexual abuse' and 5.6% of girls suffer penetrative sex abuse as a child. One in six men report 'contact sexual abuse' and 2.7% suffer penetrative sex abuse during childhood. Research may or may not show that there is a greater than average percentage of paedophiles among clergy than among men generally – any role giving privileged access to children may be attractive to paedophiles . One study commissioned by the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference of North American Bishops examining the lives and ministry of over one hundred thousand priests found that 4% of catholic priests in the USA were the subject of some sort of sexual accusation in the years 1950-2002 .  
Whatever evils are in some people, are also in some clergy.  
Most children sexually abused by a family member are girls, most abused by priests are boys – this must have some significance.
  
- 9) **A CATHOLIC THING ?** : We can get the impression here in Ireland that this evil is solely a 'Catholic' thing – at home and abroad in the english-speaking, 'developed' nations. This may in Ireland have to do with our national history – the roman-catholic church for one hundred and fifty years or so has been the main provider of schools and education generally, of hospitals, caring, welfare, disabled, childcare and youth organisations and institutions. Similar institutions in other countries have been run under the auspices of a wider variety of civil and religious bodies. Sadly, CSA has also been perpetrated by clergy of other

religious denominations and has been all too evident internationally – incest, child prostitution and child pornography, paedophile ‘rings’, abduction of children, abuse in childcare institutions etc.

10) THE RYAN REPORT : The earlier ‘Ryan Report’ had revealed parallel abuse over decades up to the 70s in industrial schools, reformatories and other institutions run by religious orders, with state support –dealing often with marginalised and vulnerable children. A government-appointed truth and awards tribunal received in excess of fifteen thousand allegations of physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse. This dreadful and dark side of our national reality gave a voice to these children, now adults. Apologies, some convictions, and monetary awards by the state amounting to €1.3 Billion (with over €250 million contributed so far by religious orders) have followed. The average award was €63320 and twenty-seven abused received in excess of €200000 – indicating very severe abuse and damage to their lives.

The previous ‘Ferns Report’ together with the ‘Murphy Report’ would indicate that a similar reality and pattern to that uncovered in Dublin would likely emerge from investigations into other Irish dioceses.

11) POSITIVE POINTS : The only positive things I can find to say are -  
The church ‘culture’ and management has changed gradually and especially during the 90s – new guidelines were introduced in ’96 ; Archbishop Diarmuid Martin arrived with a fresh and radical approach to the issues, including cooperating fully with the Commission of Investigation, handing over all relevant documentation. All complaints of CSA by priests are now communicated to the Garda. The Diocesan Child Protection Service Office opened in ’03, with professional staff who now oversee the Garda-vetting of all church workers; advise and manage all allegations, the support of victims and treatment and supervision of priest-abusers (more priest-abusers undergo treatment than abusers generally and recidivism is much lower among treated abusers, and there is more supervision and monitoring of priests-abusers than abusers generally). The setting up of Parish Pastoral Councils and Child Protection Representatives has widened the number of people involved in leadership in every parish in Dublin diocese, including women. Some comfort comes from the fact that many victims become survivors who achieve healing and health. And most child sexual abusers can be treated and supervised and likely not injure again – mainstream treatment involves facing the truth, achieving empathy and compassion, taking responsibility, human development, moral and spiritual development, ongoing support and supervision. And the church, in pain and shame, wants to be healing and caring towards the abused, and also pastorally responsible towards the abusers – the church is possibly the only organisation which invests substantially in treatment and ongoing supervision of its abusers, rather than just punishment and good riddance (a dangerous combination).

12) CHURCH RENEWAL : Can some good result from this evil? Diocesan management structures, procedures and culture must change. Recent years have

seen the appointment of lay people as leaders of several diocesan agencies and departments – this is a positive development. Women should be more present in diocesan leadership. Perhaps a Diocesan Pastoral Council drawn from the successful Parish Pastoral Councils, which includes laity, clergy and religious and presided over by the Archbishop could become the primary authority of the archdiocese (similar to what now exists at parish level).

Among the obvious issues which it should consider and act on are – responding to the declining number of clergy; development of lay ministry and diaconate; involvement of women at all levels in the church; involvement of young adults at all levels in the church; parish renewal; collaborative ministry; reaching out to the lapsed; use of media; better system of selection of bishops; the church and schools; a diocesan pastoral plan; development of more social justice action; review of mandatory celibacy for clergy; women priests; development of better pastoral resources; parish/home/school links; improving liturgy; review and development of doctrine, including moral personal and social doctrine (assisted by theologians, historians, scientists of various kinds, scripture scholars etc); inter-church and inter-faith ecumenism; ongoing formation and care of priests and all in ministry etc.

- 13) POSTSCRIPT : There are many other aspects and issues of CSA not mentioned in this article – what about the adequacy of support services for CSA victims generally? What happened historically concerning the 97% of victims who were not abused by clergy or religious – how did this stay secret and how was it managed? What of child protection policies and practice throughout society? How can we best monitor/supervise/support convicted abusers who have completed a prison sentence? What about the effects on an accused person of the long delay between an allegation and end of a criminal investigation? What about situations where it is likely abuse occurred but will never be established legally? Etc.

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- 14) MANY HURT : Many people have been hurt by this greatest scandal within the church in our lifetimes – those abused, their families, the families of abusers, and the ordinary parishioners and priests. I pray for healing for the victims and for the church and for the re-building of our church.