

# Catholic Church shamed by Irish abuse report



By SHAWN POGATCHNIK, Associated Press Writer Wed May 20, 7:07 pm ET

DUBLIN — After a nine-year investigation, a commission published a damning report Wednesday on decades of rapes, humiliation and beatings at Catholic Church-run reform schools for Ireland's castaway children.

The 2,600-page report painted the most detailed and damning portrait yet of church-administered abuse in a country grown weary of revelations about child molestation by priests.

The investigation of the tax-supported schools uncovered previously secret Vatican records that demonstrated church knowledge of pedophiles in their ranks all the way back to the 1930s.

Wednesday's five-volume report on the probe — which was resisted by Catholic religious orders — concluded that church officials shielded their orders' pedophiles from arrest amid a culture of self-serving secrecy.

"A climate of fear, created by pervasive, excessive and arbitrary punishment, permeated most of the institutions and all those run for boys. Children lived with the daily terror of not knowing where the next beating was coming from," Ireland's Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse concluded.

Victims of the abuse, who are now in their 50s to 80s, lobbied long and hard for an official investigation. They say that for all its incredible detail, the report doesn't nail down what really matters — the names of their abusers.

"I do genuinely believe that it would have been a further step towards our healing if our abusers had been named and shamed," said Christine Buckley, 62, who spent the first 18 years of her life in a Dublin orphanage where children were forced to manufacture rosaries — and were humiliated, beaten and raped whether they achieved their quota or not.

The Catholic religious orders that ran more than 50 workhouse-style reform schools from the late 19th century until the mid-1990s offered public words of apology, shame and regret Wednesday. But when questioned, their leaders indicated they would continue to protect the

identities of clergy accused of abuse — men and women who were never reported to police, and were instead permitted to change jobs and keep harming children.

The Christian Brothers, which ran several boys' institutions deemed to have harbored serial child molesters and sadists on their staff, insisted it had cooperated fully with the probe. The order successfully sued the commission in 2004 to keep the identities of all of its members, dead or alive, unnamed in the report. No real names, whether of victims or perpetrators, appear in the final document.

The Christian Brothers' leader in Ireland, Brother Kevin Mullan, said the organization had been right to keep names secret because "perhaps we had doubts about some of the allegations."

"But on the other hand, I'd have to say that at this stage, we have no interest in protecting people who were perpetrators of abuse," Mullan said, vowing to "cooperate fully with any investigation or any civil authority seeking to explore those matters."

Buckley, who said she was abused at an orphanage run by the Sisters of Mercy, which ran several refuges for girls where the report documented chronic brutality, said the religious orders for years branded the victims as money-seeking liars — and were incapable of admitting their guilt today.

She criticized Mullan for suggesting that "today, having read the report, he doesn't mind if the abusers are named and shamed. Isn't that a little bit late for us?"

The report found that molestation and rape were "endemic" in boys' facilities, chiefly run by the Christian Brothers order, and supervisors pursued policies that increased the danger. Girls supervised by orders of nuns, chiefly the Sisters of Mercy, suffered much less sexual abuse but frequent assaults and humiliation designed to make them feel worthless.

"In some schools a high level of ritualized beating was routine. ... Girls were struck with implements designed to maximize pain and were struck on all parts of the body," the report said. "Personal and family denigration was widespread."

Ireland's myriad religious orders, much like their mother church, have been devastated by 15 years of scandals involving past cover-ups of abusers in their ranks.

The Christian Brothers have withdrawn from running several schools that still bear their name and the order has had few recruits in Ireland in the past two decades. Other orders are down to a handful of members, and their bases are closer to nursing homes than active missions.

"Most of these orders will literally die out in Ireland within the next generation or so," said

Michael Kelly, editor of the Irish Catholic newspaper in Dublin. "Many of them are already in wind-up mode. They lack the confidence even to seek new vocations (recruits), due to the stigma associated with their members' shocking, scandalous behavior."

The Irish government, which in 1999 apologized for its role in permitting decades of abuse and established the commission to nail down the full truth of the matter, has tried to use money to bring closure to the victims.

A government-appointed panel has paid 12,000 survivors of the schools, orphanages and other church-run residences an average of \$90,000 each — on condition they surrender their right to sue either the church or state. About 2,000 more claims are pending. Irish Catholic leaders cut a controversial deal with the government in 2001 that capped the church's contribution at \$175 million — a fraction of the final cost.

Some victims emphasized, even as they began thumbing through the report, that nothing — not even criminal convictions of their long-ago tormentors — will ever put right their psychological wounds and make their nightmares go away.

Tom Sweeney, who spent five years in two Christian Brothers-run institutions where he was placed for truancy, says he suffered sexual abuse and beatings. He also has bitter memories about more everyday humiliations — such as being forced to wrap his urine-stained sheets around his neck and parade in front of other children when he'd wet his bed.

"It's something you'll never forget, the way you lived in these industrial schools," he said.

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On the Net:

Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse report, <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/>

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