

Irish premier attacks Vatican after new evidence of child abuse

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Speaking in the Irish parliament last month, Enda Kenny, Irish *Taoiseach* and head of the Fine Gael/Labour coalition government, denounced Vatican sabotage of investigations into child abuse by Catholic clergy.

The Vatican's role was exposed in the recently published Cloyne report into the Catholic Diocese of Cloyne, near Cork, Ireland.

The tone and content of Kenny's criticisms were unprecedented in the history of the Irish republic, whose 1937 constitution, created by Eamon de Valera, defined the "special position" of the Catholic Church in the Irish state.

Speaking of the Vatican, Kenny stated, "The rape and torture of children were downplayed or 'managed' to uphold instead the primacy of the institution, its power, standing and 'reputation'."

Attacking Pope Joseph Ratzinger's statement, that "Standards of conduct appropriate to civil society of the workings of a democracy cannot be purely and simply applied to the Church," Kenny called for the Church to be "truly and deeply penitent for the horrors it perpetrated, hid and denied."

Kenny's speech was broadcast live and had a substantial public impact in Ireland. Internationally, within 48 hours, the speech had been reported by more than 800 publications, with many carrying full transcripts. Kenny, it seems, is the first government leader in any of the countries plagued with clerical abuse to openly attack the Vatican.

That it should be the head of the Irish government, long perceived as one of the most Catholic countries in the world, is particularly damaging to Rome.

The Cloyne report is the latest in a series of devastating exposures worldwide into the sexual and physical abuse of children and young adults by Catholic priests. Over the last two decades, there have been tens of thousands of complaints from generations of people whose lives were

blighted by the abuse and the subsequent ostracism and intimidation many of them suffered.

In 2010, the Murphy report documented an extended series of abuses, based on more than 100,000 documents. It established that the Church authorities in Dublin, in collusion with the police and state authorities, had systematically covered for abusive priests for decades.

The Cloyne report was initiated following a 2008 study by the church-based National Board for Safeguarding Children (NBSC).

The NBSC report found that Cloyne diocese placed the needs of accused priests above those of vulnerable children, ignored requirements to take preventative action, placed children at "risk of harm" and "failed to limit access to children by individuals against whom a credible complaint of child sexual abuse was made."

The NBSC report was dismissed by a Cloyne diocese committee under Bishop John Magee of Cloyne, which threatened action against the NBSC in either "ecclesiastical or secular courts or both."

Magee is a prominent figure in the Catholic Church with close relations to the Vatican itself, having been private secretary to three popes. He was expected to finally become archbishop of Armagh—the head of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

In response, the Irish government launched its own investigation into the handling of sex abuse allegations in Cloyne in the period between 1996 and 2008. Responsibility for the report was handed to Judge Yvonne Murphy, the author of the previous Murphy report. Legal wrangles delayed publication of this latest report until this year, although it was completed in December.

The Cloyne report's central finding is that a 1996 Church policy entitled "Child Sexual Abuse: Framework for a Church", which elaborated a detailed procedure for dealing with allegations of clerical child sex abuse, was largely ignored.

Responsibility for this lies with Magee, who took “no active interest in the management of clerical child sexual abuse cases until 2008.” In the absence of Magee, management of allegations was passed to a Monsignor Denis O’Callaghan, who did not agree with the Framework document. In particular, O’Callaghan opposed the requirement to pass allegations of abuse to the Garda [police] and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as contrary to “pastoral discretion”.

Between them, Magee and O’Callaghan were found to have failed to pass two thirds of allegations of abuse to the Garda, while none were forwarded to the HSE. Neither victim support staff nor an independent advisory panel to deal with complains were appointed.

Authority for these failures came from the Vatican. In 1997, Luciano Storero, then papal nuncio to Ireland, wrote to Irish bishops making clear that in the Vatican’s opinion “the situation of ‘mandatory reporting’ gives rise to serious reservations of both a moral and a canonical nature’.” The Framework document was “not an official document of the Episcopal Conference but merely a study document”, he wrote.

A 2001 statement from the previous pope, Karol Wojtyła, *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*, further made clear that allegations that had a “semblance of truth” should be referred to the Vatican to allow the Church to formulate a global response.

In line with this, according to the report, Magee lied to the Irish government by claiming that the Church’s own guidelines for dealing with abuse cases were being followed. Magee lied when he told the HSE that all allegations of abuse were reported to the police.

On another occasion, Magee provided two completely opposing accounts of a meeting with a priest accused of abuse. One report was sent to the Vatican, in which the priest admitted his guilt. The other was sent to an advisory committee for Cloyne studying abuse allegations, in which the allegation was denied.

A Catholic commentator, Thomas Doyle, a US Dominican priest who has campaigned on behalf of abuse victims, noted the significance of the report in the *Irish Times*:

“The direct role of the Vatican in enabling and even directing the cover-up, stonewalling and obstruction of justice has been suspected for years. The report made a vitally important breakthrough by describing in concrete detail the essential role the Vatican played in the disgrace of the diocese”.

In response to Kenny’s comments, a deeply offended

Vatican has withdrawn the current nuncio, Giuseppe Leanza. A Vatican spokesman said that Leanza’s recall “denotes the seriousness of the situation”.

Kenny received no small amount of popular acclaim for his stance, which contrasts with that of his predecessor, Brian Cowen. In response to the 2010 Murphy report, Cowen considered that the “Holy See appear to have acted in good faith”.

Kenny’s attack on the Vatican, however, is of an extremely restricted character. Despite the vehement tone, Kenny made clear he was speaking as a Catholic and at no time suggested that the relationship between the Irish state and church should be fundamentally modified, let alone undone.

Rather, in circumstances in which the government, with all-party support, is deepening its assault on the social conditions and wage levels of the working population, the political establishment is alarmed over the destabilising impact of the Cloyne report for the Irish state.

Since 1994, when the abuse cases began to surface in the courts, the extent of state collaboration has come to light. In 2005, the unpublished Ferns report warned of extensive child abuse and a Church cover-up. In 2009, the Ryan report exposed a state-supported, Church-operated children’s gulag based on systemic brutality and near-slavery, maintained with all-party support.

Now, in response to the global economic crisis and the diktats of international finance capital, the Irish bourgeoisie, like its peers internationally, are seeking to reimpose comparable levels of pauperisation on the working class.

The concern is that institutions of the Irish state, all of which are tied to the Catholic Church, will be so discredited by the Vatican’s ossified and impenetrable arrogance that they will be incapable of carrying this out.



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