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Vatikanets reaktion på sexskandalerne

Vatikanet har i den forløbne uge er det meddelt, at paven har afvist at imødekomme to irske hjælpebiskoppers ønske om at måtte træde tilbage. Meddelelsen har ikke kun vakt stor harme og vrede i den irske befolkning, men også fået den til at stille spørgsmålet, om paven og hans stab i Rom i det hele taget er interesseret i at få løst problemerne med sexkrænkende præster. Her er en analyse af motiverne bag Vatikanets afvisning. Den har været trykt i den respekterede irske avis Irish Times den 14. august 2010.

Refusal of resignations serves to protect church

ANALYSIS: To spread responsibility for child abuse even to prelates who omitted to act against it would collapse the system, writes **MARY RAFTERY**

THE KEY to understanding the refusal this week of Pope Benedict XVI to accept the resignations of Dublin auxiliary bishops Ray Field and Eamonn Walsh lies in realising the scale of the trauma experienced by the Vatican in recent months.

After all, no such problems arose with the resignations of two other former auxiliary bishops Donal Murray and Jim Moriarty. At that stage, however, it was early in the year and it seemed the fallout from the Ryan and Murphy reports on the widespread cover-up of clerical child abuse was merely an Irish problem, a blip on the Vatican's horizon.

But then the appalling vista began to emerge. Undoubtedly prompted by the considerable international media interest in the Irish scandals, further child abuse and cover-up revelations exploded throughout Europe, this time pointing a damning finger deep into the Vatican itself.

The German revelations were the most serious. The scandal initially concerned allegations of abuse of boys at a number of elite Jesuit boarding schools. Then the pope's brother, Msgr Georg Ratzinger, denied knowing about abuse cases during his time as leader of Germany's most famous boys' choir, the Regensburger Domspatzen.

The focus then shifted to the pope. In 1980, it emerged that a known paedophile priest had been assigned to normal parish duties in the Munich archdiocese, where he continued to have access to children. The archbishop of Munich at the time was one Joseph Ratzinger, now of course the pope.

According to the Vatican, however, the then Archbishop Ratzinger knew nothing about this priest ministering in his archdiocese. A monsignor came forward to shoulder the blame. Some weeks later, though, it was reported that the monsignor claimed that pressure had been put on him to exonerate the pontiff.



The pope's own response to the growing scandal was characteristically dismissive. On Palm Sunday at the start of Holy Week, he intoned that faith in God helps to lead one "towards the courage of not allowing oneself to be intimidated by the petty gossip of dominant opinion". This was widely interpreted as referring to the clamour in his native Germany for him to explain himself.

Amid all this, we had the visit by the Irish bishops to Rome – that infamous spectacle of men decked up to the nines in purple, queuing up to kiss their master's ring – followed by the pope's letter to the Irish church.

We also had the damning revelations concerning Seán Brady, Cardinal and Primate of All Ireland, who in 1975 swore to secrecy two children who revealed to him their abuse at the hands of Fr Brendan Smyth. Brady did not inform the civil authorities of these crimes and Smyth went on to abuse countless more children before finally being caught, tried and convicted more than 19 years later.

In acting in this furtive manner, Brady was obeying Vatican instructions on how such matters should be investigated. The Murphy commission described these Vatican-mandated procedures as "permeated by a requirement of secrecy. For example, the accuser was required to take an oath of secrecy. The penalty for breach of that oath could extend to excommunication."

Brady engaged in a now well-established Catholic Church practice of delayed response, in the hope that public interest might wane. After several weeks of so-called reflection, he announced that he would not be resigning. He would instead become "a wounded healer".

This then is the background against which the Vatican was assessing whether to accept the resignations of two relatively junior bishops from Ireland, who did not appear to have done anything too terrible themselves, but who were offering (however reluctantly) to resign on the basis that they shared in a collective responsibility for a culture of cover-up during their periods in office.

Diarmuid Martin, the current Dublin archbishop, strongly promotes this concept of collective responsibility. However, it is now clear that the notion is being viewed with deep alarm by the Vatican.

There is hardly a country in the world not experiencing the scandal of clerical child abuse and its cover-up for decades by bishops. How many of them would have to resign if they accepted the principle of collective responsibility? Where would it all end?

The church response has been the creation of the "wounded healer" concept. Coming from an organisation famous for its lack of PR savvy, it is really quite a clever notion. It allows all kinds of senior church figures to glide over a plethora of omissions in their pasts and remain in power to oversee "healing".

Never mind that those omissions invariably meant an abject failure to protect children from appalling crimes. The Catholic Church has joined firmly with the world of disgraced bankers/speculators/financiers in adopting the "we are where we are" approach – leave the past behind us and let's move on.



The events of the past six months have hammered home to the Vatican the vast extent of the international cover-up by bishops of abuse and rape of children by priests. It is simply unthinkable that responsibility be spread to those who turned a blind eye and, through omission, failed to protect children.

To do so would require the removal from office of bishops, archbishops, cardinals (and even a pope) on such a scale that the structures of the Catholic Church would collapse. Clean hands are as rare as hen's teeth among current Catholic prelates. With stakes as high as these, concepts of right and wrong have become irrelevant. Pragmatism rules, dressed up in notions of the greater good being served by survival of the church.

This approach mirrors exactly the disastrous attitude adopted by Catholic hierarchies to the issue of clerical child abuse itself – secrecy and cover-up were considered crucial to protect the credibility of priests and bishops in preaching the faith. Damage that credibility and you damage the faith, condemning countless souls to damnation. Weighed in this kind of balance, secular notions of law, justice and the protection of children from sexual predators didn't register.

This is probably the most charitable construction one can put on what has amounted to an international criminal conspiracy on the part of the Catholic Church to pervert the course of justice in order to protect paedophile priests from the law. It is this perversion which defines the culture laid bare with such factual devastation by the Murphy report and its counterparts abroad.

In one of the very few genuine expressions of decency connected with this immense scandal, ex-bishop of Kildare Jim Moriarty homed in on this culture and on his own failure to challenge it during his 11 years as auxiliary bishop of Dublin. In taking personal responsibility for his failings and in stating this so clearly as the reason for his resignation in the wake of the Murphy report, he laid bare the hypocrisy (past, present and future) of those clinging to office despite similar derelictions on their part.

Another voice of integrity is that of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin. Addressing the Knights of Columbanus last May, he spoke of "strong forces" still present in the church "which would prefer that the truth did not emerge". He referred to "subconscious denial on the part of many about the extent of the abuse . . . and how it was covered up". He added: "There are other signs of rejection of a sense of responsibility for what had happened".

While the archbishop was referring to the Irish church, his remarks could equally be applied to the Vatican, particularly in the context of the pope's refusal to accept the resignations of Field and Walsh. Given Martin's strong advocacy of the principle of collective responsibility, the Vatican decision to leave the two Dublin auxiliaries in situ is more than a slap in the face for him – it is something closer to decapitation.

His view that "the Catholic Church in Ireland is coming out of one of the most difficult moments in its history and the light at the end of the tunnel is still a long way off" is perhaps overly sanguine. It might be more accurate to describe the church as having walked itself into a black hole of its own making – and, as everyone knows, there's no light in a black hole – and no way out.