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Dublin's archbishop gets it

by Tom Roberts

NCR Today

For months, Catholics in Ireland's Archdiocese of Dublin have been bracing themselves for release of a government report on decades of sexual abuse of children by priests and cover up of the abuse by the hierarchy.

Catholics in the United States will find much familiar about the reports of abuse -- the patterns of grooming, of brutality, of cover up and of payoff. Strikingly different, however, from what we've become accustomed to hearing from members of the hierarchy in the United States has been the reaction of the current cardinal archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin. Read the full text of his statement here.

In part, he said:

"The sexual abuse of a child is and always was a crime in civil law; it is and always was a crime canon law; it is and always was grievously sinful.

"One of the most heartbreaking aspects of the Report is that while Church leaders ? Bishops and religious superiors - failed, almost every parent who came to the diocese to report abuse clearly understood the awfulness of what has involved. Almost exclusively their primary motivation was to try to ensure that what happened to their child, or in some case to themselves, did not happen to other children. Their motivation was not about money or revenge; it was quite simply about that most basic human sense of right and wrong and that basic Christian motivation of concern for others. The survivors of abuse who courageously remained determined to have the full truth heard by all deserve our recognition and admiration.

"How did those with responsibility dramatically misread the risk that a priest who had hurt one of those whom Jesus calls ?the little ones? might go on to abuse another child if decisive action was not taken?

Excuses, denials and minimisations were taken from priest abusers who were at the least in denial, at worst devious in multiple ways, and decisions were taken which resulted in more children being abused.

"Efforts made to 'protect the Church' and to 'avoid scandal' have had the ironic result of bringing this horrendous scandal on the Church today.

"The damage done to children abused by priests can never be undone. As Archbishop of Dublin and as Diarmuid Martin I offer to each and every survivor, my apology, my sorrow and my shame for what happened to them. I am aware however that no words of apology will ever be sufficient."

Martin makes no equivocation, no comparison with what might have gone on in the same period in the larger culture, he doesn't impugn the motive of those who sought justice and redress. In fact, it was Martin who provided the thousands of pages of documentation on which the investigation was based.

Apologies at this point in the history of the scandal in the United States, Ireland and elsewhere may ring hollow, but Martin's words and actions suggest someone in authority finally gets it.

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