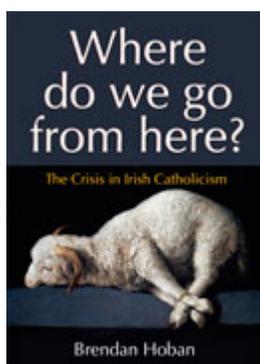


Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

February 13, 2013 at 6:00am

Irish book offers guidance to Los Angeles

by James Flanigan



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?: THE CRISIS IN IRISH CATHOLICISM

By Brendan Hoban

Published by Banley House, 9.95 euros

The statistics on the Irish and American churches are bleak. In both countries, only one-third of Catholics attend Mass regularly. Two of the most loyal churches in the Catholic world are dispirited; their good priests don't know where to turn for the shame of it.

However, the book *Where Do We Go From Here?*, published in Ireland, where public reports of clergy sexual abuse of children cover more than five decades, offers guidance to the American church and particularly Los Angeles, where Cardinal Roger Mahony was forced to release records of clerical abuse and cover-ups that have unleashed a fresh explosion of denunciation, rebuke, sadness and apology (see story).

Author Brendan Hoban is a priest in rural Ballina, County Mayo, Ireland, who has written half a dozen books on church and the priesthood, as well as on history. His prescription is simplicity itself, that the church finally live by the tenets of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Under the inspirational

guidance of Pope John XXIII, they ushered in a way for the church of being at home in a constantly changing world," Hoban writes.

Hoban uses words and phrases -- "the people's Church" and "co-responsibility" -- to steer the church away from the way an elite of bishops "sought to deal with the sex abuse scandals defending the institution but downplaying the seriousness of the damage done to children, seeking to protect the reputation of the church even at the cost of denying the very truth the church is meant to serve." Hoban calls for real authority in parish affairs to be exercised by councils of the laity and a "new priesthood" that includes the ordination of women and married men.

"To give one example," he adds, "if parents were dealing with the allegations of clerical child sexual abuse instead of bishops the response would have been very different."

The long silence on abuse has created what Catholic writer D.J. Waldie calls "the gap between pulpit and pew."

Hoban writes, "A new generation as conscious as any of the importance of a spiritual dimension to life, seeks a way of making sense of the complexities and confusions of their lives. What is different is that they no longer expect the Catholic Church to answer that need."

The result, he writes, has been a decline of the faithful attending Mass, the virtual elimination of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and a bitterness that has sown mistrust of the church that has been so much part of Ireland's history.

What is the public to think when the respected Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin can charge that a "cabal" at the highest level of the Catholic church protects molesters of children, and when Ireland closes its embassy to the Vatican in 2011, as Prime Minister Enda Kenny accuses the Vatican of covering up the crimes of priests who "raped children"? Or in America, when Mahony argues he had handed a "clean diocese" to his successor in 2011? He excused himself from blame for the archdiocese's actions in the 1980s, saying he had not been prepared by "education or background" to understand the damage of sexual abuse of children. To that *Los Angeles Times* columnist Steve Lopez rejoined: "Do you need special training to know that the rape, abuse and psychological torture of children has to be stopped immediately?"

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez said he is working on a long-term plan to rebuild trust in the church. A first step in that process was a public rebuke of Mahony, whom Gomez stripped of his administrative and public duties. Yet reaction to Gomez's denunciation -- like the tenor of Hoban's book -- was not bitterness but a wish for new hope. Voice of the Faithful, an organization critical of the church's handling of the scandals, called Gomez a "bright light."

Hoban is a member of the Association of Catholic Priests, an 850-member group that has been criticized by the Vatican, and readers outside Ireland can order Hoban's book on the group's website, www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie.

Hoban writes: "We need to put flesh on, rather than re-interpret, the insights of the Second Vatican Council." He closes with a quote from John XXIII: "We are not on the earth to guard a museum but to tend a blooming garden full of life."

[Writer and author James Flanigan lives in the Los Angeles archdiocese.]

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