

Movimiento internacional

Somos-Iglesia

Movimento Internacional

Nós somos Igreja

Movimento Internazionale

Noi siamo Chiesa

Mouvement international

Nous sommes Eglise

Internationale Bewegung

Wir sind Kirche

International Movement We are Church

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IMWAC Report and Press Release on The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (The Ryan Report)

The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, published last week, paints a picture of systemic institutional violence, and outlines a horrific catalogue of emotional physical and sexual abuse of children incarcerated in institutions run by a number of religious orders, over many decades.

The Report lays bare a penal system, administered by Irish Religious Congregations, funded by the State, in which thousands of Irish children were incarcerated, many of them for minor misdemeanours, often for long periods of their lives. It paints a picture of cruelty of an unthinkable scale, intensity and impact on children who were utterly powerless to resist.

Denial by Religious Congregations

The Ryan Report belies the oft-repeated assertion that the abuse was perpetrated by dysfunctional individuals or 'bad-apples' within these institutions.

Despite the vehement denials of the religious congregations involved, it is evident from the Report, that in many cases, the religious were aware of the endemic culture of violence and brutality perpetrated in these institutions but a culture of silence and turning a blind eye allowed it to continue. In the case of the Christian Brothers, documentary evidence from the Congregation's own archives in Rome, belatedly produced by the Brothers, confirmed the Congregation's awareness of complaints of abuse and violence going back over many years.

The Ryan Report is particularly critical of the religious congregations, with the exception of the Rosminian Order, for their 'failure to take responsibility for the abuse' and for being 'defensive' in responding to reports of abuse. This was particularly evident in the adversarial approach adopted by the congregations, who contested the evidence of witnesses, many of whom were re-traumatised in telling of the abuse perpetrated on them as children.

In contrast, the Rosminian Order, were praised by the Judge Ryan for their decision to listen, in a non-adversarial way, to those who gave evidence, so that they could learn from it.

Responses to the Report

1) From Survivors of Abuse

There has been a spectrum of responses to the Report from survivors of the abuse.

- Some survivors have welcomed the report and its confirmation of cruelty and brutality previously denied by the religious orders. They have felt vindicated in that their stories have been heard and they have been believed by the Commission.

- Others point to the limitations and weakness of the Report in the lack of accountability for the abuse perpetrated. The Report protects the identity of the perpetrators, giving them pseudo-names, even in cases where perpetrators have already been convicted through the court system.

- Others have been critical of the one dimensional focus on physical, emotional and sexual abuse within the Report and its failure to recognise the impact of abuse on the whole person, what one survivor has termed " the murder of the soul".

2) Public Reaction

There has been widespread public outrage at the findings of the report. There were emotional scenes this past weekend as members of the public queued to sign a book of solidarity with the survivors opened by the Mayor of Dublin, Ms. Eibhlin Byrne.

There is mounting public anger too at the Compensation Deal agreed by the Irish Government under previous Taoiseach, Bertie Aherne, days before a change of government in 2002. Under this agreement, negotiated by the Conference of Religious of Ireland on behalf of 18 Religious Orders, it was agreed that the State and the Religious Orders would share the payment of compensation to the survivors. However, the contribution of the Religious Orders was capped at €127 Million, much of it to be handed over in property. The government agreed, in return for this amount, to indemnify the religious orders against any further financial claims.

It now transpires that the cost of compensating survivors is expected to surpass €1.3 billion, over nine times the contribution made by religious.

The government is coming under increasing public and political pressure to re-negotiate this agreement but claims that it is legally prevented from doing so. Pressure is mounting on the Religious Orders to voluntarily agree to pay more in compensation. Cardinal Sean Brady, Dr. Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin and Willie Walsh, Bishop of Killaloe have, added their voices to those requesting the Religious Orders to reconsider how they may respond to the survivors, including the matter of compensation.

Response/Press Release from We Are Church

We Are Church believes that the evidence of the Ryan Report and the confirmation of the scale and denial of the extent of the abuse perpetrated on children, raises fundamental questions for the Irish State and Irish Society and for the Church.

Questions for State and Society

- Why were children incarcerated in these penal institutions for such lengthy periods when this had no basis in law?

- Why did the State adopt 'a deferential, submissive attitude' towards Church Institutions, and collude with the cover-up of institutional abuse?

- Why were the State's institutions and departments reticent to hold the religious congregations to account? Will the perpetrators of the abuse continue to be protected by the State or will those responsible be held accountable?

Questions for the Church

We Are Church believes that the findings of the Ryan Report call for critical reflection within the Church on the culture and practices which allowed institutionalised abuse to flourish.

1) Since abuse is primarily underpinned by a need for power and control over victims, the Church must address the impact of rigid authority systems and power structures, and a culture of submissive obedience within the Church.

2) The Church must examine the culture of institutional denial and the silencing of truth at the service of protecting the Church as institution.

3) The Church must consider what role the repression of sexuality in our Church played in the emergence of deviant and distorted expressions of sexuality.

Another Church Is Possible

We are Church proposes that another Church is possible :

- a Church which proclaims a positive approach to sexuality,
- a Church which accepts and promotes equality and justice between genders,
- a church where priestly celibacy is seen not as compulsory but as an option,
- a church which bases its governing structure on democratic principles,

A Servant Church -- which sees ministry as service to the people not the institution,

A Listening Church -- which hears the Word of God in the lives of the people,

A Christian Church -- which bases its vision and mission on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Report is available on line at <http://www.rirb.ie/ryanreport.asp>

Now more than ever we must clarify and strengthen what we are requesting from Rome. We want to influence our church to become truly a church for our time in the light of our lived experience... At this time we want to make our voices heard in the light of our country's experience of regimes of cruelty, previously accepted as "care", that this Report has opened up-

Above all, the needs of those who suffered in these institutions should be met with generosity and compassion. Irish Society must determine why such abuse was allowed to continue for decades, confronting our darkness with the contemporary spirit of openness. The false deference that used to be given to those in authority and which hid so much should be put aside once and for all time.

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International Movement We Are Church Background Information

The International Movement We Are Church, founded in Rome in 1996, is represented in more than twenty countries on all continents and is networking world-wide with similar-minded reform groups. We Are Church is an international movement within the Roman-Catholic Church and aims at renewal on the basis of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). We Are Church was started in Austria in 1995 with a church referendum.