

Irish church obsessively hid child abuse: report

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By [Andras Gergely](#) for REUTERS

DUBLIN (Reuters) - Roman Catholic archbishops in Dublin obsessively covered up widespread sexual abuse of children by priests until the mid-1990s, a report commissioned by the Irish government said on Thursday.

One priest admitted abusing more than 100 children. Another said he had abused every two weeks for over 25 years, it said.

All archbishops in charge over the 1975-2004 period covered by the inquiry were aware of some complaints and the archdiocese was pre-occupied with protecting the reputation of the Church over and above protecting children's welfare, the report said.

It said the Church was "obsessively" concerned with secrecy and operated a policy of "don't ask, don't tell" about abuse.

"Unfortunately, it may be that the very prominent role which the Church has played in Irish life is the very reason why abuses by a minority of its members were allowed to go unchecked," it said.

The report, designed to show how the Church and state responded to charges of abusing children, said a representative sample of 46 priests against whom complaints were leveled at made it "abundantly clear" that abuse was widespread.

The inquiry, which came six months after a similarly damning report about Church-run industrial and reform schools, also accused state officials of abetting the cover-up.

The government acknowledged the errors of state agencies mentioned in the report, and Justice Minister Dermot Ahern told a news conference of his revulsion at the findings.

"REVULSION"

"I read the report as justice minister. But on a human level -- as a father and as a member of this community -- I felt a growing sense of revulsion and anger," Ahern said.

"Revulsion at the horrible evil acts committed against children. Anger at how those children were then dealt with and how often abusers were left free to abuse."

The Church in Ireland has been plagued by sex scandals for at least two decades. The disclosures in May of floggings, slave labor and gang rape in much of Ireland's now defunct system of industrial and reform schools earlier in the 20th century shamed Ireland and further eroded the Church's moral authority.

"The Dublin Archdiocese's pre-occupations in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse, at least until the mid-1990s, were the maintenance of secrecy, the avoidance of scandal, the protection of the reputation of the Church, and the preservation of its assets," Thursday's report said.

"All other considerations, including the welfare of children and justice for victims, were subordinated to these priorities," added the report, which was published by the Justice Ministry.

More than twice as many complaints related to boys than girls, but the report also said it was "risible" when an archbishop defended one case by saying it arose merely from a priest's "'wonderment' about the female anatomy."

Similar abuse cover-up charges have dogged the Catholic Church in other countries, especially the United States. Seven dioceses there have filed for bankruptcy protection to shield themselves from law suits by abuse victims.

Pope Benedict has condemned sexual abuse by clergy and said wayward priests should be brought to justice. He met abuse victims during his 2008 visit to the United States.

Abuse cases have also been reported elsewhere, notably in Australia, Austria, Britain, Canada, France and Poland.

"What is of the utmost importance now is that we continue to pursue relentlessly the perpetrators of abuse to bring them to the justice they deserve," Ahern said.

Maeve Lewis, executive director of victims' group One in Four, said: "We ask the minister of justice to extend the investigations to all archdioceses in the country."

Work on the latest report, begun in 2006, finished months ago but publication was delayed until the High Court cleared it last week with some details removed because they could jeopardize criminal proceedings.

(Additional reporting by [Padraic Halpin](#), [Antonella Ciancio](#) and [Tom Heneghan](#), editing by [Alison Williams](#))

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