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Spirit numbing tragedy

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NCR Today

The new archbishop of Westminster faced criticism from victims of child abuse today as he was formally installed as the leader of the 4.2 million Catholics in England and Wales.

Child safety campaigners were outraged when the Archbishop Vincent Nichols said it took "courage" for religious orders and clergy to "face the facts from their past" in response to a report examining the systematic abuse of thousands of children by Ireland's religious orders and state-run institutions.

The response to Nichols remarks speaks to the tension permeating the church in Britain.

Did you think the sex abuse crisis was behind us? Think again.

Children advocates are calling for an expansion of the investigation into Northern Ireland.

We have been writing about the church's clergy sex abuse tragedy since 1985, a heart breaking and faith numbing quarter century now. However large you might have imagined the crisis represents for Catholicism, enlarge that scope.

Consider again what Editor at Large Tom Roberts wrote yesterday:

"... the sex abuse scandal has deflected the church's attention, energy and resources away from so many other matters that should be central concerns of the Catholic community. It keeps sapping the church's strength and credibility and it grossly distorts and overshadows in the eye of the wider culture what the church is at its best. If the Catholic clergy is ever to regain its footing, it won't be by escaping to the robes and manners of a previous age. It will require an honest and dispassionate exploration of how it got so far off track in so many places.

Meanwhile, widespread public outrage, fueled by media coverage of the Irish abuse cases, is growing. I cannot remember the kind of collective furor aimed at the church as one sees today in the wake of the report, which depicts endemic and even seemingly sadistic abuse patterns over six decades.

Deep self examination, the likes of which we have not yet seen at any time during this crisis, is called for.

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