

Benedict XVI speaks on the Irish Scandal

Michael Sean Winters | Dec. 11, 2009 NCR Today

Pope Benedict XVI met with leaders of the Church in Ireland today to discuss the Dublin Report on the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and the resulting cover-up. One thing you have to give this Pontiff: He does not mince words.

Usually, the communiqués that follow such meetings are exercises in diplomatic speech, saying precisely nothing. Not so [the statement issued](#) [1] after today's meeting. "The Holy Father shares the outrage, betrayal and shame felt by so many of the faithful in Ireland, and he is united with them in prayer at this difficult time in the life of the Church," it read. Even more important was another sentence from the communiqué: "The Holy See takes very seriously the central issues raised by the Report, including questions concerning the governance of local Church leaders with ultimate responsibility for the pastoral care of children." Finally, someone – and not just someone, but the Successor of Peter – said what needed to be said. This scandal started as a sex scandal the way Watergate started as a burglary. It was the cover-up that has become the thing that is impossible to understand, still less to justify. It is time not only to remove priests who were pedophiles but the prelates who abetted their crime.

The Pope's stand could not be more different from that on evidence in the recently released documents from Bridgeport that showed a prelate, then-Bishop, later Cardinal Edward Egan, exhibiting a moral callousness that was stupefying. But, even in 2002, at the height of the sex abuse crisis in the states, and not just in a deposition he thought no one would see but in his public comments, Egan was morally deficient. "If in hindsight we also discover that mistakes may have been made as regards prompt removal of priests and assistance to victims, I am deeply sorry," Egan told his flock in 2002. Note the distance between the word "mistakes" and the pronoun "I." That is the measure of a man determined to avoid responsibility for anything and someone who should be asked to surrender his red hat.

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