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Irish prime minister challenges the Vatican -- and us

Thomas P. Doyle | Jul. 21, 2011 Examining the Crisis

Enda Kenny, the Taoiseach, or prime minister, of Ireland, addressed the Irish Parliament about a judicial report released last week on how the Cloyne diocese responded to the clergy sex abuse crisis. That report found that the church's own guidelines were "not fully or consistently implemented" in the diocese as recently as 2008. It also accused the Vatican of being "entirely unhelpful" in the crisis, charging in fact that the Vatican "effectively gave individual Irish bishops the freedom to ignore [those] procedures."

Kenny told the Parliament "the Cloyne Report excavates the dysfunction, disconnection, elitism ? the narcissism that dominate the culture of the Vatican to this day."

These or similar sentiments have been repeated time and time again by critics of the Vatican's consistently inadequate response to the clergy sexual abuse nightmare over the past two decades.

What is utterly remarkable and undoubtedly an historic bombshell is the fact that they were spoken by the Prime Minister of Ireland before the Irish Parliament. **Read the full text** [1].

These were not the words of just any head of government. These words began an incredibly direct, realistic and challenging address by the head of the government of *Ireland*, long considered to be the most Catholic country on the planet. They are the words of a man who has risen far above politics and above the mute deference to the hierarchy of the Catholic church to speak for the victims of sexual abuse by clergy, for their mothers and fathers and for the countless others who have been betrayed by the church to which they have given unconditional trust and obedience.

This speech is historic for many reasons one of which is the fact that a senior political figure, a government leader, has taken the risk of speaking directly and bluntly about a critical problem that plagues many other countries. In no other country has an elected or appointed leader by-passed the often-hypocritical subtleties of political discourse to stand tall in support of not just any class of vulnerable, abused and the rejected persons, but the victims of the Roman Catholic church, which in Ireland is without question the largest, most powerful and most deeply entrenched pillar of society.

The Cloyne Report has moved beyond the stark exposure of decades of abuse and cover-up as did the Ryan and Murphy reports and indeed the several grand jury reports in the United States. It clearly named the Vatican's response as "unhelpful." The Taoiseach went even further and completely rejected the Vatican's actions and attitude, expressing the Irish peoples' "abhorrence of same."

These are strong words but within the context of what prompted them, they are entirely justified. The report also dissolved the erroneous appeal to a "pastoral approach" as a substitute for treating a crime as a crime and not simply as a sin that can be absolved and forgotten along with the devastating impact of the sin on the victims.

The third explosive but realistic aspect of the report was the explicit acknowledgement that the bishops could not be relied upon to follow through with their own guidelines much less Irish law and therefore clear, effective

and enforced measures must be taken to see that children are protected whether the Church likes it or not.

The opening words, quoted above, point to a cause of this overall problem that hits right at the heart of the matter: the profound difference and distance between the heavily narcissistic clerical culture especially at the level of the Vatican, and the abhorrence in the real world of the Irish society and of any civilized society, of the rape and ruination of innocent children by anyone much less the most trusted members of society.

The Vatican and various elements of the hierarchy have flooded the Catholic world with countless words, all very carefully nuanced and wordsmithed, to express their regret and to their promise to change. Mr. Kenny no doubt was as fed up with the meaninglessness of words without relevant action as the people of Ireland and every other country plagued by clergy abuse. He by-passed the seemingly endless and often convoluted rhetoric of the Vatican by getting right to the heart of the matter, the culture of arrogant neglect of children and some of key underlying causes. One target is clericalism, the virus that continues to corrupt the church to the point that the People of God are buried in anachronistic monarchism.

This groundbreaking address buries the destructive myth that the institutional Catholic church with its monarchical governing structure is some sort of superior or exalted political entity with self-created rights to subvert the civic order of any society that calls it to accountability for the behavior of its privileged class.

Charlie Flanagan, chairman of Fine Gael, the single largest party in Ireland and lead party in the ruling coalition, framed this in a stark and eye-opening way in his call for the expulsion of the Papal Nuncio: "If any foreign government conspired with Irish citizens to break the law here, their ambassadors would be expelled."

The Taoiseach repeated this sentiment by reminding the Irish lawmakers and indeed everyone that Ireland is not Rome.

> "Nor is it an industrial-school or Magdalene Ireland where the swish of a soutane smothered conscience and humanity and the swing of a thurible ruled the Irish Catholic world. This is the Republic of Ireland 2011. A Republic of laws, of rights and responsibilities?of proper civic order?where the delinquency and arrogance of a particular version?of a particular kind of morality?will no longer be tolerated or ignored."

This is much more than a stirring address to the Irish parliament. It is the voice of a long awaited and sorely needed liberation from the chains of a clericalist control that sacrificed the very ones Jesus spoke out so passionately in defense of. This liberation is essential not only in Ireland but in any state or country where the Catholic church hopes to regain its relevance not as a gilded institution but as a Christian way of life. One can only hope that this momentous breakthrough and long-awaited challenge will be taken up in every other country where children have been violated by the Catholic clergy or religious.

The only fitting conclusion is with Mr. Kenny's own words:

> "I am making absolutely clear, that when it comes to the protection of the children of this state, the standards of conduct which the church deems appropriate to itself, cannot and will not be applied to the workings of democracy and civil society in this republic.
>
> Not purely, or simply or otherwise. CHILDREN ? FIRST.

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