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With abuse scandal, priest shortage, a sour 10 days in Ireland

Arthur Jones | Sep. 15, 2011 NCR Today

DUBLIN, Ireland -- For the Vatican this has been a sour 10 days in Ireland. It began with Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin suggesting there may be a ?cabal? in the Vatican protecting sex abusers. This at a time when Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny refused to back down on his charges of Vatican interference in the sovereign affairs of the Irish state -- despite Rome?s rebuttal that cut little ice in Ireland as it denied a cover-up.

Days passed, and then, when a former Irish missionary sued Ireland?s national television, RTÉ, for libel over an allegation he?d fathered a child in Nigeria, Rome was immediately reminded that Nigeria could be the next country to erupt with a barrage of clerical sexual abuse claims.

Meanwhile, the Vatican is waiting for the next boot to drop as the Irish police, the Garda', move to the fore. The Garda' is reviewing 80 years of formal sexual abuse complaints against the clergy, complaints presumably hushed up due to collusion between church and governmental authorities.

To cap the 10-day period, former Derry Bishop Edward Daly, in a book published this week, called for optional celibacy -- a married priesthood -- in the Catholic Church.

All this, with Mass attendance plummeting and much of the 4.5 million Irish population (nominally 88.4 percent Catholic) disgusted at the church leadership?s betrayal from the top on down.

The most damaging blow to the Vatican?s image was the Sept. 4 suggestion by Martin in the *Irish Independent* that sexual abusers in the Cloyne diocese (already the subject of a major Irish investigation) may be protected by a ?cabal,? and that by extension the same cabal could exist in the Irish church, and the Vatican.

His statement in full, as reported by the *Independent*, suggests:

> There may be a cabal in Cloyne. They may have friends in other parts of the Irish church. They may have friends in Irish society. There may be friends in the Vatican.
>
> The numbers that are involved are few. The damage that these people cause is horrendous. It?s for all of us to see where they are, but in the long-term I have to take the responsibility that in Dublin there are not cabals who reject our child protection laws.
>
> Everybody knows there are people who have challenged what I do, there are people who challenge what the Dublin archdiocese does, people challenge what the national norms are. They exist. The way we get out of the cabals is by those of us who are convinced of what we are doing being strong together.

Yet it is Daly who, in his *A Troubled See: Memoirs of a Derry Bishop*, is indirectly pressing the Vatican hardest with a reality it cannot avoid: the priest shortage. Married priests may not be enough. Sixteen years from now there will be only 1,500 rapidly aging priests in Ireland for 4.5 million people.

[On assignment in Ireland, Arthur Jones is *NCR* books editor.]

Editor's Note: Just after Jones filed this report, Catholic News Service reported that **Pope transfers nuncio from Ireland to Czech Republic** [1].

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