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Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Pope calls Irish abuse crisis 'appalling'

John L. Allen Jr. | Jun. 17, 2012 NCR Today

ROME -- In a rare video-message to a Eucharistic congress concluding today in Dublin, Ireland, Pope Benedict XVI said that gratitude for the legacy of the Irish church has been shaken ?in an appalling way? by revelations of sexual abuse committed ?by priests and consecrated persons against people entrusted to their care.?

Benedict acknowledged that the abuse crisis has "undermined the credibility of the church's message."

The Vatican released the text of Benedict's video address this afternoon via an e-mail alert to journalists, with translations in Italian, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese, suggesting officials want the message to have a wide distribution.

Catholicism in Ireland has been rocked by one of the largest sexual abuse crises in the world. Starting in the 1990s, a series of criminal cases and Irish government enquiries established that hundreds of priests had abused thousands of children in previous decades.

In many cases, those investigations have shown, abusing priests and religious were moved to other parishes to avoid embarrassment or a scandal, assisted by senior clergy. There have been calls for leaders of the Irish church to resign over the scandal.

tBenedict XVI addressed a pastoral letter to Irish Catholics about the sexual abuse crisis in March 2010. Today?s message was his first direct statement on Ireland since that letter.

tIn today?s message, the pope celebrated the history of the Irish church, including ?generations of monks, martyrs and missionaries [who] have heroically lived the faith at home and spread the Good News of God?s love and forgiveness well beyond your shores.?

tYet, the pope said, that history has been called into question by the abuse crisis.

?Thankfulness and joy at such a great history of faith and love have recently been shaken in an appalling way by the revelation of sins committed by priests and consecrated persons against people entrusted to their care,? the pope said.

?Instead of showing them the path towards Christ, towards God, instead of bearing witness to his goodness, they abused people and undermined the credibility of the Church?s message.?

?How are we to explain the fact that people who regularly received the Lord?s body and confessed their sins in the sacrament of penance have offended in this way?? the pope asked, saying, ?it remains a mystery.?

?Evidently, their Christianity was no longer nourished by joyful encounter with Jesus Christ,? he said. ?It had become merely a matter of habit.?

Benedict argued that the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) were intended to overcome this sort

of habitual Christianity.

?The work of the Council was really meant to overcome this form of Christianity and to rediscover the faith as a deep personal friendship with the goodness of Jesus Christ,? he said.

The Eucharistic congress has been underway in Dublin since June 10. Also in today's message, Benedict XVI announced that the next international Eucharistic congress will be celebrated in 2016 in the city of Cebu in the Philippines.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/06/2015 - 23:23*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/pope-calls-irish-abuse-crisis-appalling