

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">10VATICAN33</a>	<a href="#">2010-02-26 16:04</a>	<a href="#">2010-12-10 21:09</a>	<a href="#">SECRET</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Vatican</a>

VZCZCXRO4523

PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHSL

DE RUEHROV #0033/01 0571632

ZNY SSSSS ZZH

P 261632Z FEB 10

FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1265

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0135

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0098

RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 1305

Friday, 26 February 2010, 16:32

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 VATICAN 000033

SIPDIS

EO 12958 DECL: 2/26/2035

TAGS PREL, PHUM, SOCI, KIRF, VT, EI

SUBJECT: SEX ABUSE SCANDAL STRAINS IRISH-VATICAN RELATIONS, SHAKES UP

IRISH CHURCH, AND POSES CHALLENGES FOR THE HOLY SEE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Julieta Valls Noyes, DCM, EXEC, State. REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: The November 2009 report of cover-up by local bishops of revelations of physical and sexual abuse of children by Irish clergy appalled Catholics and others worldwide. Vatican and Irish officials' first concern was for the victims, but that reality was sometimes obscured in the events that followed which also cast a chill on Irish-Vatican relations. The Vatican believes the Irish government failed to respect and protect Vatican sovereignty during the investigations. Much of the Irish public views the Vatican protests as pettily procedural and failing to confront the real issue of horrific abuse and cover-up by Church officials. The resulting profound crisis in the Irish Church, meanwhile, required intervention by Pope Benedict, who met with Irish Church leaders in December 2009 and in February 2010 to discuss next steps. Although the Pope will address a pastoral letter on the situation to Irish Catholics in the next few weeks, both the Vatican and the local Catholic Church agree that further follow-up should be handled domestically in Ireland. The Vatican's relatively swift response to this crisis showed it learned key lessons from the U.S. sex abuse scandals in 2002 but still left some Catholics - in Ireland and beyond -- feeling disaffected. The crisis will play out for years inside Ireland, where future revelations are expected, even as new clerical sex abuse allegations are being made in Germany. End Summary.

## Origin of a Scandal: Horrific and Endemic

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¶2. (U) The Irish scandal broke in the 1990s, following a series of criminal cases and Irish government enquiries that established that hundreds of lay persons and priests had abused thousands of children in Ireland for decades. In 1999, Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern announced a program to respond to the abuse, including a compensation scheme into which the government and various religious orders made contributions. In announcing this program, Ahern was the first Irish official to apologize to the victims. He also launched a study into abuse at Irish institutions run by religious orders but overseen and funded by Ireland's Department of Education. After nine years of investigation, the Ryan Commission issued a report in May 2009 that detailed horrific abuses, including 325 alleged cases of abuse by priests, and concluded they were "endemic." With the crisis unfolding, Irish Catholics and Irish investigators turned to Rome for additional answers.

## Political Reaction: Inquiries Offend Vatican and Irish Public

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¶3. (SBU) After release of the Ryan report, the Irish Government ordered an investigation of the Ryan Commission's allegations against priests in the Archdiocese of Dublin, to be conducted by the independent Murphy Commission. Sidestepping diplomatic channels, the Murphy Commission sent a letter requesting further information to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), which follows issues relating to clerical misconduct and crimes. The Commission also asked the Vatican Nuncio in Ireland to answer questions. (Judge Murphy argued that the body did not have to follow normal inter-state procedures in making its requests because the independent commission was not part of the Irish government.)

¶4. (S/NF) While Vatican contacts immediately expressed deep sympathy for the victims and insisted that the first priority was preventing a recurrence, they also were angered by how the situation played out politically. The Murphy Commission's requests offended many in the Vatican, the Holy See's Assessor Peter Wells (protect strictly) told DCM, because they saw them as an affront to Vatican sovereignty. Vatican officials were also angered that the Government of Ireland did not step in to direct the Murphy Commission to follow standard procedures in communications with Vatican City. Adding insult to injury, Vatican officials also believed some Irish opposition politicians were making political hay with the situation by calling publicly on the government to demand that the Vatican reply. Ultimately, Vatican Secretary of State (Prime Minister equivalent) Bertone wrote to the Irish Embassy that requests related to the investigation must come through diplomatic channels via letters rogatory.

¶5. (S/NF) The Irish Embassy to the Holy See offered to facilitate better communications between the Irish commission and the Holy See, but neither party took any further action. Irish Ambassador Noel Fahey (formerly ambassador to Washington) told DCM this was the most difficult crisis he had ever managed. The Irish government wanted to be seen as cooperating with the investigation because its Education Department was implicated, but did not want to insist that the Vatican answer the requests because they had come outside of regular channels. In the end, the Irish government decided not to press the Vatican to reply, according to Fahey's Deputy, Helena Keleher. Moreover, Keleher

told Polchief the CDF probably did not have much to add to the inquiry. Regarding the request for the Nuncio to testify, Keleher said the GOI understood that foreign ambassadors are not required or expected to appear before national commissions. Nevertheless, Keleher thought the Nuncio in Ireland made things worse by simply ignoring the requests.

¶6. (C) The resentment caused by the Murphy Commission tactics - and failure of the Government of Ireland to temper them -- now has worn off a little in Rome. This is in part because the legal and diplomatic questions posed by the Commission's demands are now moot since the Murphy Commission released its report in November 2009. It substantiated many of the claims and also concluded that some bishops tried to cover up the abuses, putting the interests of the Church ahead of those of the victims.

¶7. (C) The Irish people's anger, however, has not worn off. The refusal of the Holy See to respond to the Murphy Commission questions caused a furor of public disbelief in Ireland when it became known. Foreign Minister Martin was forced to call in the Papal Nuncio to discuss the situation. The Irish public was not mollified. Resentment toward the Church in Rome remains very high, particularly because of the institutionalized cover-up of abuse by the Catholic Church hierarchy. In the wake of the scandal, four of the five bishops named in the Murphy Report have resigned; the fifth has refused to quit. Archbishop Martin's Christmas Eve Midnight Mass announcement of the resignation of two of the five key bishops named in the Murphy report was met by thunderous applause, which he had a hard time quieting.

Pastoral Reaction: Meetings with Clerics and Messages to Catholics

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¶8. (C) Meanwhile, the normally cautious Vatican moved with uncharacteristic speed to address the internal Church crisis. The Pope convoked a meeting with senior Irish clerical leaders on December 11, 2009. Irish Cardinal Sean Brady and Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin came to Rome and met with the Pontiff, who was flanked by Cardinal Bertone (the Vatican Prime Minister equivalent), and four other Cardinals whose duties include oversight over some aspect of the Irish situation. At the end of the meeting, the Vatican issued a statement saying that the Pope shared the "outrage, betrayal, and shame" of Irish Catholics over the deliberations, that he was praying for the victims, and that the Church would take steps to prevent recurrences. Archbishop Martin told reporters afterwards that he expected a major shake-up of the Church in Ireland.

¶9. (SBU) The Vatican's next move was to call a broader, two-day meeting with Irish bishops, February 15-16, to discuss the crisis. There, the Pope urged the bishops to address the sexual abuse with resolve and courage, to prevent any recurrences, and to bring healing to the victims. Meeting participants examined and discussed a draft of the "Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father to the Catholics of Ireland" that the Pope will issue by the end of March. A later Vatican statement said the abuses in Ireland were a "heinous crime and also a grave sin."

¶10. (U) At a press conference on February 16, Vatican spokesman Lombardi said the meeting was aimed at dialogue and direction-setting, and was not intended to

produce specific policy decisions. The statement quoted the bishops' assurances that "significant measures have now been taken to ensure the safety of children and young people." The full text is available at <http://212.77.1.245/news/services/bulletin/news/25154.php?index=25154&po date=16.02.2010&lang=en>

Public Reaction: Vatican Response Helps, but More Needed

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¶11. (C/NF) Judging by media commentary, many non-Irish Catholics felt the Vatican's response to the crisis was a good start but more was needed. Irish Deputy Head of Mission Keleher told polchief on February 18 that she sympathized with victims' groups' criticism of the Vatican statement, because it was not more focused on the pain caused to the victims. Victims' associations also have complained that the Pope did not issue an apology for the abuses and that he did not order the removal of the remaining bishop accused of the cover-up. (Archbishop Martin's comments in December apparently had convinced many that the Vatican would remove the errant bishops if they did not quit.)

Comment: Some Lessons Learned, but Crisis Will Play Out for Years

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¶12. (C) In keeping with the Catholic practice of making local bishops ultimately responsible for the management of their dioceses, we expect that the locus of the crisis and measures to address it will remain largely with the Catholic Church in Ireland. One exception will be on decisions of whether to accept or reject resignation offers from the implicated bishops -- or the removal of the bishop who refused to offer his resignation -- which rest with the Pope. The other big exception will be the Pope's pastoral letter to Irish Catholics, in which the Vatican may address concerns and criticisms about statements and actions undertaken to date. After this, though, the Vatican will return to the background - while keeping an eye on the Irish bishops and continuing to urge them to speak with one voice. Our contacts at the Vatican and in Ireland expect the crisis in the Irish Catholic Church to be protracted over several years, as only allegations from the Dublin Archdiocese have been investigated to date. Investigations of allegations from other Archdioceses will lead, officials in both states lament, to additional painful revelations.

¶13. (C) In Ireland, these abuse scandals occurred at the end of a long period of increasing secularization of society - and may further reduce the influence of the Catholic Church. Indeed, the great vehemence of the Irish reaction to this crisis reflects how far the Catholic Church in Ireland has fallen. Once ensconced in the Irish Constitution, the Irish Catholic Church reached the height of its prestige and power with the 1979 visit of Pope John Paul II but it has been falling ever since. At the same time, the Murphy Report reflects Irish shame over the collaboration of Ireland's state bodies, including its schools, courts and police, in the appalling abuses and cover-up that occurred for decades.

¶14. (S) Vatican analysts, meanwhile, agree that the Holy See's handling of the Irish scandal shows the Vatican learned some important lessons from the U.S. sex abuse scandal of 2002. By acting quickly to express horror at allegations, to label the alleged acts both crimes and sins, and to call in the local leaders to

discuss how to prevent recurrences, the Vatican limited - but certainly did not eliminate - the damage caused to the Church's standing in Ireland and worldwide. Unfortunately, given the growing abuse scandal in Germany, it may need to deploy those lessons again before long. End Comment.

¶15. (U) Embassy Dublin contributed to and cleared this cable. DIAZ