

# Catholic Church shamed by Irish abuse report

**Nine-year probe says child beatings, molestation, rape were endemic**



Peter Morrison / AP

**John Kelly of the Survivors of Child Abuse group, right, and Kevin Flannagan, brother of Mickey Flannagan, an alleged victim of child abuse, react after being turned away from a news conference Wednesday by a government-appointed commission looking into abuse at Roman Catholic Church-run institutions.**

**AP** Associated Press

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**DUBLIN - Eleven-year-old Tom Sweeney kept skipping school. Eight-year-old Mannix Flynn got caught stealing a box of chocolates. And Christine Buckley, barely a month old, was found guilty of being the child of an unwed mother.**

**In the morally rigid Roman Catholic Ireland of old, such sins were sufficient to land all three children — and more than 30,000 others throughout the 20th century — in Dickensian workhouses for girls and boys run with an iron fist by Catholic religious orders.**

**A 2,600-page report, published Wednesday following a nine-year probe into child abuse by Ireland's fading Catholic religious orders, painted a damning portrait of a system that protected child-molesting church officials while consigning generations of Ireland's poorest children to misery.**

**The five-volume report on the probe — which was resisted by Catholic religious orders — concluded that church officials shielded their orders' pedophiles from arrest amid a culture of self-serving secrecy.**

**"A climate of fear, created by pervasive, excessive and arbitrary punishment, permeated most of the institutions and all those run for boys. Children lived with the daily terror of not knowing where the next beating was coming from," Ireland's Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse concluded.**

**'Named and shamed'**

**Victims of the abuse, who are now in their 50s to 80s, lobbied long and hard for an official investigation. They say that for all its incredible detail, the report doesn't nail down what really matters — the names of their abusers.**

**"I do genuinely believe that it would have been a further step towards our healing if our abusers had been named and shamed," said Buckley, now 62.**

**She spent the first 18 years of her life in a Dublin orphanage where she said children were forced to manufacture rosaries — and were humiliated, beaten and raped whether they achieved their quota or not. She didn't track down her parents, an Irish mother and Nigerian father, until her 40s, when she became one of the first to break silence and demand justice for her stolen youth.**

**"I didn't have a childhood," said Buckley, who recalled being constantly cold and hungry. She was severely beaten by a nun for trying to smuggle out a letter detailing the abuse, she said — which included being forced by nuns to have a "date" with a pedophile on staff.**

**The Catholic religious orders that ran more than 50 workhouse-style reform schools from the late 19th century until the mid-1990s offered public words of apology, shame and regret Wednesday. But when questioned, their leaders indicated they would continue to protect the identities of clergy accused of abuse — men and women who were never reported to police, and were instead permitted to change jobs and keep harming children.**

**The Christian Brothers, which ran several boys' institutions deemed to have harbored serial child molesters and sadists on their staff, insisted it had cooperated fully with the probe. The order successfully sued the commission in 2004 to keep the identities of all of its members, dead or alive, unnamed in the report. No real names, whether of victims or perpetrators, appear in the final document.**

**The Christian Brothers' leader in Ireland, Brother Kevin Mullan, said the organization had been right to keep names secret because "perhaps we had doubts about some of the allegations."**

**"But on the other hand, I'd have to say that at this stage, we have no interest in protecting people who were perpetrators of abuse," Mullan said, vowing to "cooperate fully with any investigation or any civil authority seeking to explore those matters."**

**'Very damaged'**

**Buckley, whose abuse occurred at an orphanage run by the Sisters of Mercy, which ran several refuges for girls where the report documented chronic brutality, said the religious orders for years branded the victims as money-seeking liars — and were incapable of admitting their guilt today.**

**She criticized Mullan for suggesting that "today, having read the report, he doesn't mind if the abusers are named and shamed. Isn't that a little bit late for us?"**

**Other victims emphasized the cold reality that for some of their former schoolmates, the end came far too soon. Their graves are inside the grounds of the workhouses, where they died of disease and malnutrition.**

**"There's a lot of people who didn't survive here, and a lot of people who left very damaged," said Flynn, who spent two years at a Christian Brothers school in remote western Ireland.**

**No refuge**

**On Wednesday he revisited the closed school grounds, where dozens of residents and staff are buried, their plots marked with small heart-shaped headstones.**

**"The whole place was a place of abuse. There wasn't any sanctuary here. It was constant trauma and constant fear of attack," said Flynn, now 52 and a playwright, author and artist in Dublin.**

**Of the chronic sexual assaults that he and friends suffered, he said: "It was regular, aggressive and violent, but it was mainly an act of violence. That's what people need to know."**

**The Irish government, which in 1999 apologized for its role in permitting decades of abuse and established the commission to nail down the full truth of the matter, has tried to use money to bring closure to the victims.**

**'Never forget'**

**A government-appointed panel has paid 12,000 survivors of the schools, orphanages and other church-run residences an average of \$90,000 each — on condition they surrender their right to sue either the church or state. About 2,000 more claims are**

**pending. Irish Catholic leaders cut a controversial deal with the government in 2001 that capped the church's contribution at \$175 million — a fraction of the final cost.**

**Some victims emphasized that nothing — not even criminal convictions of their long-ago tormentors — would ever put right their psychological wounds and make their nightmares go away.**

**Sweeney, who spent five years in two Christian Brothers-run institutions where he was placed for truancy, says he suffered sexual abuse and beatings. He also has bitter memories about more everyday humiliations — such as being forced to wrap his urine-stained sheets around his neck and parade in front of other children when he'd wet his bed.**

**"It's something you'll never forget, the way you lived in these industrial schools," he said.**