



ONLY CATHOLICS ABUSE CHILDREN

MOST ABUSE survivors surely could not have been taken in by the restrictive terms of reference in the scoping inquiry to determine the form of a statutory investigation into abuse in schools run by “religious orders” – except those who do not realise that it is only Catholic clerics that are covered by the term ‘religious orders’. And, of course, those in the media, and in the *Irish Times* in particular, who believe that child abuse is primarily a Catholic phenomenon.

The *IT*'s editorial the day after the report's publication referred repeatedly to “shocking” abuse but failed to endorse the report's proposal that all schools be part of the planned inquiry. This may indicate an anxiety about the cover up of abuse by Church of Ireland (CoI) institutions and the protection of its clerics who were moved around and away from scrutiny – thus free to reoffend – in the same manner as Catholic clerical offenders. The *IT* may also be concerned about a sharp focus on those in the media who invariably refused to expose this scandal unless it involved only Catholic clerics.

The latter's evasion of accountability was something the *IT* moralised about down the years – correctly – with vigour. Yet the newspaper minimised or turned a blind eye to many examples of corrupt behaviour by CoI individuals and institutions, despite being alerted to these on many occasions by Griffith College academic Niall Meehan and others, including Protestant survivors (see *The Phoenix* 29/1/21 and *passim*).

However, the scoping report and statements by others indicate that this censorship may no longer be possible. Even worse, the cover up by an inexplicably

dogmatic set of liberal journalists could come under fire, especially from Protestant survivors more concerned with their abuse than protecting the image of CoI institutions they suffered under.

Before he died in September 2023, Mark Ryan, who along with his brother, David, triggered the latest inquiry into child abuse, stated that a statutory investigation should include “all schools, not just Catholic schools. You can't differentiate because of religion. A whole generation has been affected.”

The *IT* and other media reported this month that senior counsel Mary O'Toole's scoping report had “made it clear that the new commission's work should not be confined to schools run by religious congregations” (ie not just Catholic schools). It is difficult to see how this demand can now be resisted but it will be interesting to see who insisted in the first place on religious congregations alone being investigated.

Equally interesting will be the reaction of the *IT*, which could – as more information about suppression of the truth tumbles out – become increasingly exposed to charges of censorship for professional reasons given its long-time identification with Protestant churches.

Another issue buried by the *IT* is that of the sparse contribution to compensation of survivors by *all* churches.

IT political editor Pat Leahy recently provided a breakdown of the miserly contribution of the ‘religious orders’ under an indemnity deal with the government 20 odd years ago to compensate victims of abuse in industrial schools. Leahy said the government deal with the orders initially meant that the estimated bill of €250m would be split 50:50, ie €125m each.

However, including €200m in legal costs, the actual sum eventually reached the dizzy heights of €1.45bn, over €1bn more than anticipated. Crucially, the deal meant the orders' contribution was capped at €125m. They promised another €120m or so in 2009 after the Ryan Report was published. This means that the orders promised €245m while the state has paid a cool €1.2bn.

Leahy was quite indignant in his arithmetic treatise about this travesty and the rip-off of public money by the orders. In typical *IT* mode, while a truthful account, it was not the entire truth.

In the period covered by this scheme due to abuse claims going back decades, the Protestant-run Smyly Trust that ran Mrs

Smyly's Church of Ireland Children's Homes was offered the same indemnity against prosecution granted to Catholic orders in return for a financial contribution to redress.

However, Smyly's application was rejected as it offered a miserly €100,000, which the department considered to be not “appropriate” (a nice euphemism). That did not bother the cynically astute Smyly trustees. Redress payments to Smyly's victims were a state obligation after which they were unlikely to individually pursue Smyly's in the Four Goldmines. The trustees were also probably aware that they would suffer little opprobrium compared to their Catholic counterparts and might even be forgotten.

Queue 20 years later and the *IT* is typically and selectively indignant.

Redress, the amounts to be considered and from whom, are issues that will again loom large as the statutory investigation proceeds. And it is unlikely that restrictive limitations of a religious nature will be again tolerated.

MATT'S MIGHTY MOOLAH

FILLING IN for Pat Kenny recently on his *Newstalk* morning show, Ivan Yates titillated listeners with the exciting news that his long-time colleague, Matt Cooper, would shortly be on air to discuss the upcoming general election. Even more thrilling for listeners was the promise that Cooper would be discussing the “fabulous live podcast show” that the duo are hawking around the country.

When asked if his fee for coming off the bench to substitute for Kenny was the lengthy, free advertisement for his podcast, Yates listed off the live audience shows he and Cooper have lined up this month. But when Goldhawk mentioned Cooper's typically self-effacing claim that the podcast sponsorship deal with aviation leasing company Aercap could be “the biggest sponsorship deal ever done for an Irish podcast” and asked how much the deal was worth, the normally voluble Yates went all coy. He did, however, say that the podcast was now moving to a subscription-based model.

Goldhawk also put questions to Cooper, inquiring in particular what was the biggest sponsorship deal for an Irish podcast before Aercap sponsored *Path to Power* and if the Aercap sponsorship was still extant. However, Cooper maintained a dignified silence in response to these intrusive questions.

Matt was not always so shy about discussing his financial remuneration. He told the *Sindo's* Niamh Horan last December that he had never reached the heights of payment he used to receive in 2009. A month later, in January 2024, accounts for his own media company, Munster Square Productions Ltd, showed that he paid himself €438,929 in director's remuneration in 2022.

The question mark over the level of payment from Aercap's sponsorship of *Path to Power* is intriguing when you consider that Cooper and Yates gave their agent, Noel Kelly (he famously used to ride shotgun for Ryan Tubridy in dealings with RTÉ), unstinting praise in the interview with Horan. It was Kelly who negotiated the “biggest sponsorship deal ever” with Aercap.



Mark Ryan



"You have it all wrong. Mozart is for intelligence, Salieri is for vengefulness."

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