

HYSTERIA OVER IRISH CLERGY ABUSE

At the end of May and after nine years of investigation, Ireland's Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse published its findings. More than 30,000 children, most of them delinquents, passed through one or more of Ireland's Catholic-run institutions from the 1920s through the 1980s.

Reuters reported that "Irish Priests Beat, Raped Children," yet the report did not justify this wild and irresponsible claim. Four types of abuse were noted: physical, sexual, neglect and emotional. Physical abuse included "being kicked"; neglect included "inadequate heating"; and emotional abuse included "lack of attachment and affection." Not nice, to be sure, but hardly draconian, especially given the time line: fully 82 percent of the incidents took place before 1970. As the *New York Times* noted, "many of them [are] now more than 70 years old." And quite frankly, corporal punishment was not exactly unknown in many homes during these times, and this is doubly true when dealing with miscreants.

Regarding sexual abuse, "non-contact including voyeurism" (e.g., what it labeled as "inappropriate sexual talk") made the grade as constituting sexual abuse. Moreover, one-third of the cases involved "inappropriate fondling and contact." None of this is defensible, but none of it qualifies as rape. Rape, on the other hand, constituted 12 percent of the cases. As for the charge that "Irish Priests" were responsible, some of the abuse was carried out by lay persons, much of it was done by Brothers, and about 12 percent of the abusers were priests (most of whom were not rapists).

The Irish report suffers from conflating minor instances of abuse with serious ones, thus demeaning the latter. When most people hear of the term abuse, they do not think about being

slapped, being chilly or being ignored. They think about rape.

By cheapening rape, the report demeans the big victims. But, of course, there is a huge market for such distortions, especially when the accused is the Church.