

AN IRISH TRAGEDY

By Joe Rigert

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Reviewed by Thomas Doyle

A number of books have been written about sexual abuse by Catholic clerics. Some are the gut-wrenching stories of victims themselves, told in their own words or through another. Some are polemical in that they confront the official Church for its hypocritical response while demanding both recognition and action to help solve the problem. Still others are scholarly ventures into the mysterious depths of this unique socio-cultural phenomenon by academics from a variety of disciplines. All are seeking answers as to "why." The answers are much more complex and elusive than simply saying "celibate priests are sexually dysfunctional" or "bishops only want to protect their turf."

Both are true statements but there are many more "whys."

Joe Rigert is an investigative journalist with an uncanny ability to ask the right questions and a tireless capacity to find the answers. With *An Irish Tragedy* he has moved into territory not yet explored by those seeking answers, namely the ethnic component to clergy abuse. The Irish clergy are a natural subject of inquiry. I must admit that I underestimated and undervalued the causal relationship between the Irish Catholic culture and the fact that a significant number of clergy abusers in the U.S. are either Irish immigrants or of Irish descent. The author did much more than simply provide a well documented exposition of sexual abuse by Irish priests in the U.S. He went to Ireland to look at the roots and in doing so he became immersed in the Irish expression of Catholicism, especially the rather bizarre brand of sexual morality.

An Irish Tragedy is an apt title for this book because it describes precisely the end result of the continuum of excessive and superstitious piety, toxic clerical control and a twisted sexual morality which has all converged into too many cases of sexual abuse of minors and deceitful cover-up by bishops.

Sex abuse by Catholic clergy is not limited to a "church" problem. It is a deeply rooted, complex flaw in society in general because the results impact so many aspects of our daily lives. Many have arrived at the conclusion that expecting the official Roman Catholic Church to accomplish anything like a basic change of attitude marked by an honest recognition of the problem followed by concrete and realistic steps to help bind the wounds and reduce the chances of future abuse is completely futile. It is left to writers like Joe Rigert to probe deeply into the dark, mysterious and malignant shadows of the Church to find more answers.

This book is foundational to comprehending the breadth of sexual abuse, the rank duplicity of the hierarchy from the popes on down and the deep roots the causality has in our culture, both religious and secular. *An Irish Tragedy* will have a long shelf life because it will remain an invaluable resource for those who are compelled to probe deeply in order to find the answers to the "whys". The answers are pivotal as we strive to move past the institutionalized dishonesty of the Catholic Church in order to create a religious environment where children and the vulnerable are safe, not only from dysfunctional clerics but from a dysfunctional Church.

Please note the book is available on www.amazon.com, but not in bookstores.
