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## An 'Immoral' Cover-up

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A grand jury yesterday excoriated the Philadelphia Archdiocese and its former top leaders, saying they allowed hundreds of sexual assaults against children to go unpunished and protected the priests who committed the crimes.

In searing language, the panel accused former church officials - including Cardinals Anthony J. Bevilacqua and John Krol - of "burying" abuse reports, ignoring warnings about abusive priests, and shuttling offenders from parish to parish, where some found new victims.

"Sexually abusive priests were left quietly in place or 'recycled' to unsuspecting new parishes - vastly expanding the number of children who were abused," the grand jury concluded.

The hierarchy "excused and enabled the abuse" for decades, the grand jury said in a 418-page report, while demonstrating "utter indifference to the suffering of the victims."

The grand jurors, who spent three years investigating, concluded that Krol and Bevilacqua were more concerned with protecting the reputation and legal and financial interests of the archdiocese than the children entrusted to its care.

"In its callous, calculating manner, the archdiocese's 'handling' of the abuse scandal was at least as immoral as the abuse itself," the grand jury stated in its report.

Yet the panel recommended no criminal charges, saying it was thwarted by the statute of limitations and a church hierarchy that keep silent about the abuses until it was too late for prosecutors to make a case.

"Regrettably, the perpetrators of these crimes and the people who protected them will never face the criminal penalties that they deserve," District Attorney Lynne M. Abraham said yesterday.

The report called on the legislature to enact a broad array of legislation, including a recall of the statute of limitations related to sexual abuse of minors.

The archdiocese angrily denounced the grand jury report as "incredibly biased and anti-Catholic." In a blistering 70-page response, the church officials and lawyers called it "a vile, mean-spirited diatribe."

While condemning the "abhorrent behavior" of abusive priests, the church vigorously defended Krol and Bevilacqua and said the report was "rife with mistakes, unsupported inferences and misguided conclusions."

Cardinal Justin Rigali, who succeeded Bevilacqua as archbishop in 2003, defended his predecessors, telling a news conference that the archdiocese under Krol and Bevilacqua had sought "to do what was thought to be the most effective thing at the time." But, he added, "we wouldn't do the same things today."

Abraham fired back at the church's rebuttal with a memo of her own, saying it was filled with the "all too familiar denials, deceptions and evasions" that she said had characterized the church's handling of the abuse crisis.

She said the response gave her no confidence that the church's responses to abuse complaints "will be better in the future."

Abuse victims praised Abraham and the grand jurors, saying its breadth and scope of the report were remarkable.

"I don't know how Lynne Abraham could have been more forceful," said John Salveson, a local spokesman for Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.

"The truth, as horrifying as it is, is now out in the open. We believe it will help survivors heal."

The grand jury report was startling in its expression of sheer outrage and striking for the depth of detail of the abuses.

"What we have found were not acts of God, but of men who acted in His name and defiled it," the grand jury said.

The grand jury concluded that at least 63 priests - and probably many more - abused hundreds of victims over the past several decades.

According to the report, victims of the abuse included:

An 11-year-old girl who was repeatedly raped by a priest who took her for an abortion when she became pregnant.

A fifth grader who was molested by a priest inside a confessional.

A teenage girl who was groped by a priest while she lay immobilized in traction in a hospital room.

A priest who offered money to boys in exchange for sadomasochistic acts of bondage and wrote a letter asking a boy to make him his "slave." The priest remains in ministry.

A priest who abused boys playing the roles of Jesus and other biblical characters in a parish Passion play by making them disrobe, don loincloths, and whip each other until they had cuts, bruises and welts.

A priest who falsely told a 12-year-old boy his mother knew of the assaults and consented to the rape of her son.

The grand jury found that many victims were abused for years and that many priests abused multiple victims, sometimes preying on members of the same family.

The Rev. Albert T. Kostelnick had 18 victims, according to the grand jury. The Rev. James J. Brzyski, whose conduct the report described as a "criminal rampage," abused 17 victims, many of them from a single parish. The Rev. Nicholas V. Cudemo abused 16 victims, staying in ministry for decades after the first abuse report came in 1966.

"We find it hard to comprehend or absorb the full extent of the malevolence and suffering visited on this community, under cover of the clerical collar, by powerful, respected and rapacious priests," the jurors wrote.

Files the church turned over to prosecutors as part of the investigation involved accusations against 169 priests made since 1967. Many, however, were incomplete, the grand jury said. In some, victims' names were not recorded, while others concealed the abuse with euphemisms. Attempted rapes, for example, were sometimes described as "touches," the grand jury reported.

The grand jury investigation, led by Abraham's prosecutors, chose to focus on 63 cases it was able to document, and outlined 28 in detail.

In those cases, the jurors found evidence that Krol - who was archbishop from 1961 to 1988 - routinely reassigned abusive priests in order to avoid scandal.

"For most of Cardinal Krol's tenure, concealment mainly entailed victims' persuading parents not to report the priests' crimes to police, and transferring priests to other parishes if parents demanded it or if 'general scandal' seemed imminent," according to the report.

Under Bevilacqua, who was archbishop from 1988 to 2003, the report said fear of costly lawsuits motivated church officials to conceal abuses from law enforcement authorities, parishioners and the public.

The grand jury reported that Bevilacqua had a "strict policy, according to his aides, that forbid informing parishioners... about any problems in a priest's background."

"Parishioners were not told, or were misled about, the reason for the abuser's transfer," according to the report. "...The result of the Archdiocese's purposeful action was to multiply the number of children exposed to these priests while reducing the possibility that their parents could protect them."

The files are replete with examples of cases in which Bevilacqua reassigned abusive priests or allowed them to remain in ministry.

In one case, he assigned an admitted abuser, the Rev. John J. Delli Carpini, to write homilies and speeches for him and to work in the archdiocesan press office, even as it fielded inquiries about the sex-abuse scandal.

Della Carpini, diagnosed with a "sexual disorder and severe personality disorder," had admitting to assaulting a boy for years. The victim reported the assaults to the church in 1998; Bevilacqua allowed the priest to remain in ministry and live in a parish until 2002, the report said.

Bevilacqua allowed known abusers to remain in ministry after receiving warnings about them, the grand jurors said. In three cases, the priests abused again after finding more victims in their new assignments, the panel said.

The grand jury said church officials did not call police to report assaults against children, even in cases in which priests admitted the attacks. Asked why the church had not alerted police, Bevilacqua told the grand jury that the law did not require them to.

"That answer is unacceptable," the grand jury said. "It reflects a willingness to allow such crimes to continue, as well as an utter indifference to the suffering of the victims."

The grand jury also observed that as recently as 2002, Bevilacqua and his representatives knowingly understated the extent of sexual abuse within the church.

The grand jury said it documented scores of crimes by dozens of priests. There was evidence of rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, statutory sexual assault, indecent assault, endangering the welfare of children, and corruption of minors.

But in all cases, the panel said, the abuse happened years, if not decades, ago, and the statute of limitations on any crimes had expired.

The panel said it had considered charging the archdiocese with endangering the welfare of children, corruption of minors, victim/witness intimidation, hindering apprehension, and obstruction of justice. But again, it said, the statute of limitations on any crimes had expired.

So the panel was left with what it described as "a travesty of justice, a multitude of crimes for which no one can be held criminally accountable."