

German Bishops Cancel Study Into Sexual Abuse by Priests

By REUTERS

PARIS (Reuters) — Germany's Roman Catholic bishops on Wednesday canceled a study into the sexual abuse of minors by priests, prompting the investigator to accuse them of trying to censor what was to be a major report on the scandals.

The independent study, examining church files that sometimes date to 1945, was meant to shed light on undiscovered cases after about 600 people filed claims against priests in 2010 following a wave of revelations of sexual abuse. The German scandals were part of a series of abuse scandals that also shook the Catholic Church in Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands and the United States, forcing Pope Benedict XVI to issue a public apology.

Bishop Stephan Ackermann, a spokesman on abuse issues for the German Bishops' Conference, said that the hierarchy had lost confidence in the researcher, Christian Pfeiffer, a criminologist, and that it would look for another specialist for the study.

"We will have to find a new partner," Bishop Ackermann said in a statement that blamed Mr. Pfeiffer's "communications behavior with church officials" for the breakdown.

Mr. Pfeiffer told German Radio that the bishops wanted to change previously agreed-upon guidelines for the project to include a final veto over publishing its results, which he could not accept.

Officials made "an attempt to turn the whole contract towards censorship and stronger control by the church," said Mr. Pfeiffer, head of the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony.

One lay Catholic organization, known as the International Movement We Are Church, called the decision "a devastating signal for the credibility of the church leadership" that showed the bishops could not accept an independent inquiry into the scandals. The German justice minister, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, said that the church's effort to clear up the scandals should not end in "a halfhearted inventory."

"It's high time that the Catholic Church opened up and let outside experts look at its archives," she told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper.

Investigations into the records of priests accused of molesting children have been conducted in recent years in other countries, sometimes with devastating results for the reputation of the church involved.

Ireland was shocked when several inquiries conducted by the government revealed widespread abuse and a pattern of secrecy to cover them up. Three bishops resigned as a result. An official Dutch report said that up to 20,000 children had been sexually abused in Catholic orphanages, boarding schools and seminaries between 1945 and 2010.

A commission set up by the Belgian church received 475 reports of abuse before its premises were raided in 2010 by the police seeking evidence for possible criminal cases against predator priests. It reported 13 victims had been driven to suicide.

Revelations of sexual abuse cases in the United States starting in the 1990s led to a wave of court cases, costing the church \$2 billion in settlements.

Speaking to German Radio, Bishop Ackermann said the bishops feared that Mr. Pfeiffer would publish results without their permission. "We weren't trying to hold things back," he said. "We want a similar project to go ahead."

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/world/europe/german-bishops-cancel-study-into-sexual-abuse-by-priests.html?_r=0

Zuletzt geändert am 10.01.2013