

## FR BRUNO: THE WHISTLE-BLOWER

*I am sorry to say that the legal and media specialists who are at present trying to act on behalf of the Catholic Church in Ireland are finding it extremely difficult to get any coherent replies from the Abbot and have now concluded that there is no way in which the Abbot or any member of his council can be even permitted to appear on the [television] Programme, for their total inadequacy would be plain for everyone to see.*

*Cardinal Cahal Daly, 29 September 1994, in private correspondence with Fr Bruno Mulvihill, O. Praem, member of the Norbertine Order, based in County Cavan.*

One Sunday morning after Mass had been celebrated in the church at Kilnacrott Abbey two figures sneaked round the back of the building for a secret puff on a cigarette and as they smoked they could hear peculiar noises coming from the sacristy. It was 1964 and according to

one of the two smokers breaking abbey rules, it was already an open secret among members of the Norbertine Order based there that the priest in charge of the mass servers, Fr Smyth, had a propensity to abuse children. At the time Fr Bruno Mulvihill was a nineteen-year-old novice filled with teenage enthusiasm for what he thought was going to be a journey through life committed to the work of God. Along with his smoking partner Fr Michael McKeon he reported the noises to the then Abbot, Fr Felim Colwell, who apparently told them they were 'imagining things'. This was the first time Fr Mulvihill says he attempted to warn the abbey about Fr Smyth but not the last. Today, at the age of forty-nine, he finds himself on the verge of removal from the Norbertine Order because he became a 'whistle-blower', apparently facing the wrath of his order for daring to tell the world he spent years trying to ring alarm bells about Fr Smyth's paedophilia. 'Alas, it was all to no avail,' says Fr Mulvihill, fearful of the risk of putting more children at risk and disgusted his warnings fell on deaf ears.

Bruno Mulvihill was born on 17 July 1945 in County Galway, the elder of two sons (both destined for the priesthood) born to Elizabeth, principal of Woodlawn National School, near Ballinasloe and James, an inspector with the Department of Agriculture. The sense of vocation that led him to the abbey at Ballyjamesduff followed a visit to Garbally Park School in Ballinasloe by the late Fr Philip Nash, then novice master at Kilnacrott, who said enough to hold the attention of a young and ambitious pupil. On 8 September 1963, the young pupil in question joined the Norbertine Order at Kilnacrott as a novice.

Bruno Mulvihill took his first profession at the abbey exactly two years later, thus beginning what is regarded as a three-year trial period of self-examination during which all those hopeful of becoming priests measure themselves against the three vows taken by members of the order: poverty, chastity and obedience.

This is not done in isolation, for throughout this crucial period there was regular consultation with the abbey's master of the professed who continued to be Fr Philip Nash. Bruno Mulvihill became Fr Bruno Mulvihill at ordination in July 1971, by which time he had chosen an academic path as the appropriate means of fulfilling his religious life, having first studied philosophy and theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, where his favourite lay subject was ancient classics. For four years from 1970, he was in northern Germany attending the Catholic Faculty of Theology at Münster University and where he says he was privileged to study with such distinguished theologians as Karl Rahner and J. B. Metz. Clearly fascinated by the history of mankind, his next move was to Bonn in 1974 for specialised studies focused on the interaction of the ancient world and early Christianity, covering the years 400BC to 400AD. The young priest remained at Bonn until 1979, when he accepted a variety of pastoral duties, each for a short period, before finally settling down that year as a teacher of ancient church history at the Protestant Faculty of Theology at Bochum University in the Ruhr Valley. His teaching post was concluded in 1988 when he moved to the Premonstratensian Abbey at Obermedlengen, in Bavaria, for a posting which lasted just three years.

Given his obvious fascination with the ancient history of the church, it seems fitting that my first meeting with Fr Mulvihill should be on the site of one of the oldest Catholic churches in the world, one which antedates the arrival of St Patrick in Ireland. Augsburg is a small German city about an hour's drive out of Munich and it was to the parish of St Ulrich that Fr Mulvihill reported in 1991 to commence what for him was a lengthy period of pastoral work. Historians have concluded that there has been a church on this particular site in Augsburg since the year 304 AD, although it has not always been the religious focus of the local Catholic population. At one time it was a centre for Protestant worship. Four years prior to the arrival of Fr Mulvihill, the present pope visited the church which has had a Papal basilica since 1937 and which thousands visit every year to marvel at the architecture and the beautiful ornate decor.

This is the background of the man who was to reveal the extent of the cover-up taking place not only at Kilnacrott Abbey but elsewhere within the Church, the man who placed the truth of criminal wrong-doing before the interests of the Church or the order to which he belonged. By the time Fr Mulvihill arrived in Augsburg in 1991, Fr Smyth was already under police investigation and, as we shall see, Fr Mulvihill had made some startlingly accurate prophecies in his correspondence with senior Catholic clerics. It is not without irony that the conduit for our meeting was the Kilnacrott Abbey *News Letter*, distributed from the abbey to all members of its community. Its purpose was to keep them informed of the latest developments, to note the movement of priests from

Kilnacrott and to pass on anything considered newsworthy. By the end of the summer of 1994 there was one very newsworthy item to include, the conviction and jailing of a member of the order for seventeen offences of sexual abuse of children. As he scanned the latest edition in his apartment in Augsburg Fr Mulvihill's eye fell upon the brief report of Fr Smyth's recent incarceration in Her Majesty's Prison Magilligan in County Derry. Readers were informed the priest had settled in well given the circumstances and they were invited to write to Fr Smyth, his prison number listed along with the address. There was also mention of a forthcoming television documentary on the subject of Fr Smyth and to Fr Mulvihill this presented yet another opportunity to tell his story, this time publicly.

The editing of *Suffer Little Children* was already under way when the link to Fr Mulvihill was established, *Counterpoint* editor Tony Curry and I travelled to Germany on Saturday 24 September to meet this man who claimed to have an extensive knowledge of Fr Brendan Smyth's paedophile activities. We travelled in hope that this might be the breakthrough we had been seeking for several months but we brought with us a healthy scepticism. We were prepared for the worst - even for another let down in this seemingly never-ending saga.

In one of Augsburg's cobbled squares we found Fr Mulvihill's church and we settled down to two days of talking and scrutinising the priest's extensive range of correspondence. It made grim reading for anyone who still clung to the hope that leading Church officials had no prior knowledge of Fr Brendan Smyth's sexual assaults on

children. We filmed on Monday 26 September before returning to Belfast late that night.

Fr Mulvihill's story about the knowledge of Fr Smyth's sexual proclivities among senior Church figures suggests that their attitude was one of indifference and disdain. 'Even as we speak,' said Fr Mulvihill, 'members of the Catholic hierarchy are running scared in the aftermath of the Fr Smyth trial, trying to put a safe distance between themselves, the activities of the paedophile priest and their knowledge of those activities.' If what Fr Mulvihill told us in Germany was true, we could see that it represented a chronicle of missed opportunities by senior Catholic churchmen of bringing about an end to further abuse of children. Prior to our unexpected journey to Germany, no one from the Church or the order was prepared to make himself available for questioning in public.

Here we had for the first time somebody who seemed prepared to be open and for whom hanging up the telephone as an escape mechanism would be unlikely. Meeting Fr Mulvihill, accepting his reasoning and his ability to use his trained mind to extract order from chaos made it easier to accept that what he was saying was true. The clinching factor was his readiness to open his files to reveal his written record of many of the warnings he gave about Fr Smyth. Hearing 'peculiar' noises from the altar boys' sacristy as far back as 1964 at a time when a known paedophile was on the prowl was hardly an auspicious start to Fr Mulvihill's life as a Norbertine and as he was to discover there was worse to follow in the years ahead.

Four years later, in 1968, Fr Mulvihill said he had been acting in an official capacity as Abbot Colwell's secretary. One morning early in 1968 he happened to be closest to the telephone when it rang in the office, so he picked it up:

It was the Bishop of Providence, Rhode Island in the United States, Russell J. McVinney. He wanted to speak to Abbot Colwell but at the time the Abbot was very seriously ill and the bishop asked me to pass on an urgent message to him after I told him I would be visiting the Abbot at his place of convalescence. He said Fr Brendan Smyth was being put on a plane back to Ireland in disgrace after it was discovered that he had been sexually abusing children in Providence, Rhode Island.

Fr Smyth had travelled to the United States some time in 1965. After seven months the local paper, the *Providence Evening Bulletin*, carried a report about the new parish priest under two short headlines, 'Favor for Bishop McVinney', and in larger type, 'Eire Priest in E. Greenwich.' The opening paragraphs of the report read:

As a gesture of generosity from Holy Trinity Abbey in County Cavan, Ireland, the Rev. Brendan Smyth has been working as a parish priest in Our Lady of Mercy Church in East Greenwich. The favor is for the Most Rev. Russell J. McVinney, D.D., Bishop of Providence, whose family came from County Cavan.

The Irish priest was described as 'speaking in a brogue

with American colloquialisms', the article informing readers that he was 'too perceptive' to generalise easily about Ireland or America. The report continues, quoting the priest:

The Irish are building a new country since English suppression of Gaelic traditions and political domination ended in the beginning of the century.

Reporter Laurie Lisle provides a brief biographical profile of Fr Smyth, mentioning his parish work in Scotland and Wales, but not in Ireland where, as she quotes Fr Smyth, 'Priests are plentiful'. The story concludes with Fr Smyth's assessment of the 'currents of change' in the Catholic Church, with the final two paragraphs quoting the priest as saying:

Today superiors are less authoritarian than ten years ago. For instance, I was given the choice whether to come here or not - and I was delighted at the chance. I don't look for strange places necessarily and I love to go back to places where I've worked - but a new experience wouldn't be turned down.

Sadly, as we all now know only too well, there are few places where he would be welcomed back. Three years later the *Providence Journal* covered the story of the priest's departure from Rhode Island in its edition dated 25 February 1968. Under the heading, 'Their Best Fan Is Going Home', Richard A. Beardsley wrote:

He will take with him memories both fond and perplexing and leave behind the memory of a man whose love of children and lilting 'r's and 'e's brightened the town and the lives of many in it.

Fr Smyth's interest in leisure activities are especially singled out for mention by the reporter:

Recreation, especially children's recreation, has played a big part in his stay locally. Since his arrival in the summer of 1965, he has helped rejuvenate the local CYO and given hour after hour of unofficial time to the girl scouts.

The Irish priest is quoted expressing his fondness for basketball; college and professional games on television hold his attention although he goes on to say he has 'become most enthusiastic about basketball at the parish level'. The story continues:

During his stay in East Greenwich he has organised teams for both boys and girls at Our Lady of Mercy. And last Friday night, less than a week before his departure, he was still giving his own time to be with the youngsters at the gym.

While Fr Smyth was in the United States lavishing all this attention on 'children's recreation', back home in Ireland his propensity to molest children sexually was known to his order. That was confirmed for Fr Mulvihill when he took the message from the Bishop of Providence to Abbot

Colwell who, according to Fr Mulvihill, spoke of having such problems before. Fr Smyth had 'returned to the abbey under a cloud from service in the diocese of Galloway in Scotland and the diocese of Menevia in Wales'. Whilst no one has come forward in Scotland to level allegations of abuse against the priest from Ireland who served in Annan for two years from 1957, the same cannot be said of Wales, where John Russell (his real name) says he met Fr Smyth as an eleven-year-old altar boy in 1958. Mr Russell, who now lives in Australia, went public on his allegations. He was an altar boy at St Mary's Church, Wrexham, Clwyd in North Wales. Fr Smyth was staying at the presbytery and would make an effort to befriend the altar boys, plying them with tubes of sweets in exchange for hugs. At the time Mr Russell had his sights set on becoming a priest but unfortunately for him, he made the mistake of telling Fr Smyth of his ambitions. The priest invited the boy to holiday in Ireland and visit Kilnacrott Abbey in County Cavan. The boy was delighted to accept the offer and with the opportunity to look around the abbey. Fr Smyth picked John Russell up at his home and the pair set off in the priest's car towards Holyhead to travel by ferry to Dun Laoghaire but long before the ship berthed at the Irish port, the young boy had reason to regret taking the priest up on his offer.

Once at sea Fr Smyth got the boy into a berth and here the abuses began: the priest insisted on the boy sleeping in the same bed every night, even when they got to Ireland and were staying at hotels, like the Gresham in Dublin. In fact, the only night Mr Russell got a bed to himself was during the overnight stop at Kilnacrott Abbey.

Naturally, Fr Mulvihill had no knowledge of these events in Wales in 1958 but he could confirm that Fr Smyth had just returned from a tour of duty in Wales in August 1963 when he arrived at the abbey to make his retreat prior to entry into the novitiate. It was not possible to verify Fr Mulvihill's story about Rhode Island with Abbot Colwell; he died at just fifty-four years of age on Christmas Eve, 1968, plunging a deeply saddened abbey into limbo for much of 1969 before the appointment of a successor. Before Fr Kevin Smith even had a fitting for his abbatial robes something happened which has become the subject of intense speculation as to whether a certain document exists or not. And Fr Mulvihill was to be the main actor in the drama.

After he obtained his degree in ancient classics in the autumn of 1968, there came a change in emphasis in his life. For a year he travelled daily to Navan to study theology in St Columban's College but he admits to having become profoundly bored at the kindergarten style of study. He preferred to perform such menial chores as preparing visitors' rooms, cleaning corridors or working in the sacristy. One day it was his lot to prepare a room recently vacated by Fr Brendan Smyth to accommodate a visitor.

What happened next is undoubtedly one of the most controversial events in the story of Fr Brendan Smyth because it places Fr Bruno Mulvihill in direct conflict not only with senior members of his religious order but also with some archivists at the Vatican who thus far have not been able to trace the document as described by Fr Mulvihill. It is one of the key mysteries of the whole

scandal as it raises crucial questions about who knew about Fr Smyth's paedophilia and when they knew about it. What Fr Mulvihill says is that he discovered in a drawer an official document, a decree issued in Rome against Fr Smyth and issued by the Congregation for Religious, the Catholic Church body which is charged with overseeing the life of religious orders within the Church. It is this body which also deals with wayward religious. Fr Mulvihill is adamant that the decree exists and said so publicly when his view was transmitted in the programme. He told us that discovery of the document convinced him that the abbey gossip about Fr Smyth was not just speculation but was obviously founded on factual information. This is what he told us:

I discovered the decree that had been issued by the Congregation of Religious. I think one of the terms was that his faculties for confession were to be rescinded for life and that he was not to leave the abbey precincts on his own - only in the company of a trusted priest member of the community - because he was a very real danger as far as sex abuse of children was concerned.

When I asked if these were the words he had read in the document, Fr Mulvihill said, 'Yes'. He then described where it had been found:

I found this document in a room in which Fr Brendan had been living. He did not take this document with him. I was not expecting to find it.

The prior was not in the house. I gave the document to the superior, Fr Kilian Mitchell, who put it in Fr Brendan's file in the Abbot's office.

According to Fr Mulvihill, this document was discovered after the death of Abbot Colwell, but before the election of Fr Kevin Smith as Abbot.

Two more years passed before Fr Mulvihill himself was ordained, with Fr Brendan Smyth acting as master of ceremonies for the occasion, and he says it was shortly after this happened that he asked the new Abbot, Fr Smith, about the document he claims he found:

After my ordination in 1971, I approached Abbot Smith about this decree, told him I knew of its existence and its terms, asked him why Fr Brendan was driving around in a Northern Ireland registered car, and leaving the abbey on his own at all times. Abbot Smith's response was that Fr Brendan had been penalised enough and was a good priest. At that stage I gave up completely.

The day after we returned from Germany (Tuesday, 27 September 1994) I contacted Abbot Smith to thank him for his fax of the previous day and to ask him for his comments on the allegations being made by a member of his community that there was a decree from Rome dating back nearly thirty years in relation to Fr Smyth. Abbot Smith denied all knowledge of a decree; he told me he had never heard anyone discuss it and said that it had never been brought to his attention, further claiming that

this was the first he had heard of any such document. I sent him a fax detailing the questions raised by allegations from Fr Bruno Mulvihill and contacted him next day. The Abbot repeated his denials of knowledge of any decree and in denying Fr Mulvihill's allegation that he had raised the issue with him after his ordination in 1971, the Abbot had this to say:

I never, he never spoke to me about it at all. I wasn't even his boss at the time. No way, that's a complete and utter lie. I'm talking about from '69 onwards. Fr Mulvihill never talked to me. I never saw the decree, never heard of it, never got word of it until you mentioned it yesterday.

When I explained that Fr Mulvihill said he had taken a call from the United States when he was secretary to Abbot Colwell, Abbot Smith replied, 'Ah, no, bullshit.' The Abbot said Fr Mulvihill was never secretary to anyone at the abbey and advised me that as a novice he would not have had access to a decree. Bruno Mulvihill's novitiate was from 8 September 1963 until 8 September 1965.

The Abbot warned me about Fr Mulvihill, stating I should be careful about believing everything he said and pointing out that the issue of a decree was a very serious matter and even though Fr Smyth was now in prison there had been no decree from Rome. The Abbot offered some advice: 'My advice, and now it's up to yourself . . . don't take that man's word, OK? 'Cause you are on very shaky ground, that's my advice to you, OK? I don't mind what you do, but if you do it you might be in trouble, OK? Right?' Next day a

more formal written response arrived by fax from the abbey:

*Thank you for your letter of September 27th. As I have already said, I believe that Fr Brendan Smyth commenced offending against children early in his religious life. I am unable to say with certainty if he abused children in each of the locations you mention. [Scotland, Wales and Providence Rhode Island, USA] Sadly, it is clear that Father Smyth has a very long history of offending.*

*I am not aware that a decree regarding Father Smyth issued from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome. Lest this may have happened prior to my appointment as Father Smyth's religious superior in 1969 I made an enquiry with this congregation. I am informed that the congregation maintains careful and complete records of such matters but that it has been unable to trace any record of a complaint or decree pertaining to Father Smyth.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Kevin A. Smith, O. Praem, Abbot.*

What is missing from Abbot Smith's accounts of events is any mention that Fr Mulvihill had been a constant thorn in the Abbey's side ever since that day he had a contra-band cigarette near the altar boys' sacristy thirty years before. He did not mention two separate occasions in the early seventies when Fr Mulvihill saw the paedophile emerge from separate rooms with young children and that on both occasions these children were sobbing.



The Abbot did not indicate if he had been made aware of complaints Fr Mulvihill made to two prelates during a ceremony at Kilnacrott Abbey in 1974 to mark the golden jubilee of the property as a house of religion, one of whom was the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Gaetano Alibrandi, who did not acknowledge receipt of Fr Mulvihill's letter. The other was the Bishop of Kilmore, Dr Francis MacKiernan, who, according to Fr Mulvihill, did not wish to discuss such a matter with a junior priest, and instead referred to his friendship with his old school friend Abbot Kevin Smith. Just after getting back from Germany I contacted Bishop MacKiernan at his home in Cavan. The time was 10.35 am on 28 September. This is the conversation:

*Author:* Is that Bishop MacKiernan?

*Bishop:* Yes.

*Author:* My name's Chris Moore, I'm calling from Ulster Television in Belfast. I work for *Counterpoint*. It's a current affairs programme.

*Bishop:* Yeah.

*Author:* I'm calling actually about a story we're doing on Fr Brendan Smyth from Kilnacrott Abbey.

*Bishop:* Yes.

*Author:* I'm wondering if you could help me with it; it's in relation to apparently someone we've spoken to who claims there was a decree from the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in the late '60s concerning Fr Smyth. I wonder if you had any knowledge of it?

*Bishop:* I haven't. No. I'm afraid you'd have to contact his legal people.

*Author:* Right . . .

*Bishop:* I wouldn't know anything about it.

*Author:* I mean do you know of a priest called, er, Bruno Mulvihill?

*Bishop:* Yes, he's in Germany.

*Author:* He says he had a conversation with you about Fr Smyth and this decree. Do you ever recall that?

*Bishop:* No, I don't I do not I'm afraid. OK? Then bye, bye.

[Call terminated by Bishop at this point.]

According to Fr Mulvihill, he followed up these 1974 conversations with the two prelates by putting his concerns to them in writing but he says he never got any replies to his letters. As he continued his studies in Germany Fr Mulvihill says there was a lengthy period when he put the matter of Fr Brendan Smyth to one side, but it was revitalised during the mid-'80s when Fr Mulvihill had communications from various individuals at Kilnacrott Abbey expressing concern over the whispered stories of Fr Smyth's sexual activities with children. In 1985 a visit to the abbey by Fr Mulvihill ended with his being taken before the Abbot's Council for disciplinary action and he says this followed prolonged discussions with young members of the Norbertine Order at the abbey who were deeply concerned about, among other serious irregularities rightly giving cause for concern, the stories of Fr Smyth's sexual misconduct with children.

Fr Mulvihill was not alone during this visit; he brought

with him a German friend and for the duration of their stay they were based at the abbey, but after they returned to the continent that priest was forbidden to communicate with anyone at the abbey because of the punishment of Solemn Warning issued by the Abbot's Council. Any letters he wrote to seek removal of the disciplinary measure were ignored. There may be another reason for Abbot Smith's council admonishing the priest from Germany: during 1984 Fr Mulvihill says he made another attempt to alert those responsible within the Norbertine Order, this time travelling to an abbatial blessing in California where he met with the Abbot General of the Norbertine Order, Marcel Van de Ven and his right-hand man, Abbot Benjamin Mackin of the De Pere Abbey in Wisconsin, USA. He recounts the detail of this meeting in a letter to Abbot Smith dated 9 November 1985, in which he also complains at some length about his treatment by the Abbot and his council at Kilnacrott. Fr Mulvihill began this part of the letter by referring back to the conversations he had been having with the younger members of the Norbertine Order at the County Cavan abbey:

*The main topic of conversation between those in training and me was the serious matter of Fr Brendan Smyth who apparently is not just travelling around in a Belfast-registered car but is also misusing children. This was well known as far back as 1964 when I was a novice and things have not got better. It is at present a cause of major scandal among the juniors: I brought the matter to the attention of the Abbot General and Abbot Mackin when I was in California. The reaction*

*of the Abbot General was: 'I do not believe it,' Abbot Mackin said he would look into the matter and take it up with you. I have also discussed the matter at length with the Pater Abbas of Kilnacrott, Abbot Noyens of Tongerlo, Belgium, who said he would monitor the situation even though he could not interfere with matters pertinent to an independent canonry even if it be a daughter canonry of his own abbey. Sooner or later this bubble will burst, child misuse is a dangerous matter. I feel very hurt that you refused to talk to me about Fr Brendan when we met in Postel Abbey: you cut me off and asserted that Fr Brendan was a zealous priest who had done a lot of good work in many dioceses around the world and who had 'had a problem in the past.' You seem to think that this sexual orientation is a matter which one can lay off as easily as a shirt, this is a misguided approach. Over and above that, Father Brendan is a brash man who has wound you around his little finger: some fine day these children will have psychic problems which we cannot now foresee and may not want to be bribed into silence. It is not for any personal reason that I am documenting this now: should the bubble burst at any stage, then I have my documentation. My protest is timely, to have answered it by forbidding me to speak to particularly those members of the community who are genuinely concerned because they do not know if it is wise to bind themselves to a community where such a man can have free play is nothing short of being utterly irresponsible.*

Fr Mulvihill concluded the letter by warning that should knowledge of the Fr Smyth affair ever become public, he would use his letters and other documentation at his own discretion to provide proof that he had taken the right steps at the right time. Prophetic words indeed from someone who says he is motivated solely by his disgust of paedophilia and his desire to protect children from abuse by a trusted member of his own order. It was a warning call which seems to have been ignored by a number of the superiors who were the addressees of this letter. Perhaps if they had taken action, children like Alison, her brother and her cousin would not have been forced to endure the unwelcome attentions of the paedophile priest while they were using the children's library at Kilnacrott. Admittedly, their experiences happened in the late fifties, before Fr Mulvihill began his personal crusade against the paedophile but, as we know now, the Norbertine Order knew of the priest's 'propensity early in his religious life'. Alison acknowledges she was one of the lucky ones, but even though the interference from Fr Smyth was mild in her case, she hated having to see him inside the abbey every time she went there for her library book. This is her story:

I come from a very religious family and so we all visited the abbey at Kilnacrott. I was there quite a bit as a child, attending devotions or going to concerts, and I liked going to the children's library they had. It was here that I met Fr Smyth. When we returned our books he would take time to ask us how we got on with the book, just chatting about

the story. He was always pulling my ear or squeezing my nose. It hurt a bit sometimes but then he would ask me to go into a small room off the library where there was a table and chairs. In here he would lift me up on to his knee and then he would turn me over, lift my skirt and slap my bottom. This went on for a year when I was eleven years of age, that would have been around 1957. He always lifted my skirt and I did not like it but I told no one about it. Every time he did this he would give me loads of sweets he kept in another room. Once he had finished with me he would open the door to let me out to pick my next book and then he would take my brother into the room. What we did not realise until the whole Fr Smyth story broke last year on television was that he had been interfering with my brother as well. In fact, there was a gathering of the family last year at about the time the Smyth story hit the headlines and during conversation at that meeting, I discovered that my brother and two other men (one is my cousin and another very close family friend) all had problems with the priest. You can imagine the shock of sitting chatting and suddenly discovering that four people in the room had difficulties with Fr Smyth. My cousin said the priest fondled him, his private parts. He said he could not go to his family because he did not think they would believe him. They were all afraid to speak up against Fr Smyth. I have not gone to the police because what happened to me was so minor by comparison to what others had to endure

and there are good priests at the abbey, very good priests and I would not want to hurt them. He was a very bad apple and I hate him. Some time around 1957 or 1958 he disappeared off the scene and it was seven years before I saw him again. He asked my mother about me when he got back and he asked to see me, to offer me extra lessons to help with my Latin. But this time before I went to the abbey I made sure there was someone with me... I took my sister and would not let her out of my sight. She doesn't know why, but that was my way of making sure I was not alone with him. I was eighteen years of age at this point, but I just did not want to be alone with the priest in his room. From that day he has never spoken to me and even though he still called at our house regularly to see my father, he would ignore me completely. I hate the man.

Given Fr Smyth's track record as a paedophile, it seems unlikely that Alison and her relatives were the last local children to face abuse inside the abbey, but precisely when the priest finally stopped his abuses there is impossible to determine. In order to get reaction to Fr Mulvihill's story that he had spoken to the superior general of the Norbertine Order in 1984, I tried to make contact with Abbot General Marcel Van de Ven. But tracking him down has not been an easy task and it proved to be impossible prior to transmission of our programme. I resumed my search for him early in 1995, tracing him via his home abbey of Berne in Holland to an abbey in the United States but just missing him by minutes; then to a private house

in Canada where he declined to engage in any conversation about Fr Brendan Smyth in the presence of his hosts and finally, on 6 February 1995 to a restaurant of some kind within the Vatican itself. He told me he did not believe a decree had ever been issued against Fr Smyth and said his office could find no trace of it when conducting a search in the Vatican. He also told me he would not be prepared to record a television interview, stating that enough had already been said in statements issued to the media in the aftermath of the Fr Smyth story breaking in the autumn of 1994.

*Author:* What I am interested in is to find out if there is a possibility that we could come and do an interview with you in Rome about this matter.

*Abbot General:* No, no, no, I don't do that.

*Author:* Why not?

*Abbot General:* There has been enough publicity... I, eh, I eh, don't do it and I, I, will be away from Rome for three weeks...

*Author:* Doesn't the order feel that someone should be answerable, I mean no one has really gone on record on television to speak on behalf of the order to explain what went wrong with Fr Brendan's case.

*Abbot General:* That, that is the duty of the Abbey of Kilnacrott eh, as I told you, I, I, I, know only since April or May and I now, I, I, feel sorry for the families and so on and I said that but I'm not going to speak on television, I have said...

*Author:* Why don't you say sorry in front of a television audience, why won't you say sorry there?

*Abbot General:* I, I have said that to so many newspapers that the people know that ...

Abbot General Van de Ven said he knew nothing of the money which Fr Smyth sent to the family in the United States and expressed doubt that this was true but said he would be concerned if it were so because members of the Norbertine Order took a vow of poverty.

*Abbot General:* If ... if this is true that he paid, was it twenty thousand dollars? ... I don't know ... I can only say that is not correct. We have a vow of poverty and of communal life.

*Author:* But he did pay twenty thousand dollars - that is correct.

*Abbot General:* Are you sure?

*Author:* Yes. I have spoken to the people who have received the money.

*Abbot General:* I see, I see ...

*Author:* And I've spoken to their lawyer and the money was paid in four equal payments of five thousand dollars each time and at an interval of six months.

*Abbot General:* Yes, yes ...

*Author:* How could he accumulate such money?

*Abbot General:* Yeah, yeah, I can only say that it's against his vow of poverty like, like what he did with the children is against his vow of chastity, but yeah, people do it. But I agree that according to our vows it would be impossible if he had twenty thousand dollars for sure.

*Author:* And have you tried to find out where he got the money?

*Abbot General:* No. No.

*Author:* What do you intend to do about Fr Smyth if you say he was working against his vow of poverty by having such wealth? And if you say he went against his vow of chastity by abusing children, why isn't he being removed from the order?

*Abbot General:* I will wait the outcome finally when the cases are, em ... eh ... there are accusations against him. I don't know what will come out in the court cases and then I will, I will surely handle what I think I have to do. I am about to say that I cannot remove him from the order: that has to go to the Vatican. Of course, I can say something to the Vatican but I cannot remove him ... because some newspapers have asked me that also. That I cannot ... I have not ... that's beyond my jurisdiction so to say.

Amazingly, this was not the only area of authority over which the Abbot General told me during this conversation that he did not have jurisdiction. He also claimed that he did not have the authority over an abbey because to use his words, 'Our abbeys are autonomous and I, in the first place, I am the delegate or the representative of the order in Rome, but I have not immediate jurisdiction on the abbey.'

This was the second time I was informed of the authority of the Abbot as major superior of an abbey. The other was in a letter from Cardinal Daly, dated 26 August

1994, when he finally washed his hands of Kilnacrott Abbey. Cardinal Daly had, I thought, taken his time in preparing his letter to me, I had first written on May 20 and by 15 August I felt it was time to prompt him again with a letter asking him to reconsider his and the Church's decision not to make anyone available for interview. In the meantime, however, I learned from other sources that he was genuinely out of circulation for a considerable time due to a prolonged and painful illness.

In spite of my request for the Church to provide someone to answer publicly to its people, there is no change in the position adopted by the Abbot or the Cardinal. In his letter of 26 August, Cardinal Daly acknowledged the 'immense hurt caused to many people over a long number of years' by Fr Smyth and he said he was acutely aware of the impact of sexual abuse on the natural development of a child or adolescent. He wrote of the 'exploitation by a priest of the trust placed in him by a child' as an 'appalling occurrence', adding:

*Fr Smyth's conviction and imprisonment is, I believe, a painful but important step in the vindication of those children against whom he offended. I fervently hope and pray that each who has suffered will, in time and with help, recover from what has happened.*

But when it came to dealing with the specifics of our programme, what the Cardinal said was that what happened at the abbey was beyond his control:

*In the context of your programme and the specific issues which it addresses, I believe it is important that you understand the particular position which a member of a Religious Order holds within the structure of the Catholic Church. Whilst Diocesan Priests are directly subject to the authority of the Bishop of the Diocese in which they are incardinated, the position for members of religious orders is different. They are subject as regards disciplinary matters to the Superior of their Order. Accordingly at all relevant times Fr Smyth was, as he still remains, bound under obedience and subject to authority and rule of his Superior, Abbot Kevin Smith of Holy Trinity Abbey. In the light of that fact I do not feel it is appropriate for me to comment on the facts of this particular case.*

The Cardinal's candour was the clearest indication yet that he did not want to accept any blame. The Abbot was being hung out to dry. There was no further doubt in my mind that this was being put forward as official policy. No one from the abbey or the Church ever did make themselves available for our programme but after it had been transmitted the Cardinal and other Irish bishops were suddenly confronted by an outraged public and they were forced into making themselves publicly accountable. The public's outrage turned to anger when Fr Smyth's postings to hospitals in Cork and Kerry were made known and Cardinal Daly found himself being questioned about the whole affair on RTE radio on 16 October 1994. He was asked if he could understand how people could say, as

the Minister for Health Brendan Howlin had said, that he was shocked to learn this was allowed to happen. Speaking on the telephone from Rome, the Cardinal said he too was as shocked as anyone could possibly be, adding he was appalled to think that over such a long period of time this priest was tragically allowed to go from place to place wreaking havoc. He described this issue as one of the most distressing he had had to deal with in his experience as a bishop.

The message was clear: the Catholic Church in Ireland, its bishops and even the Cardinal had no mandate of control over a priest in a religious order and could only make representations to the superior of the order to seek remedy of the problem. That being the case, however, how then could the Catholic Church in Ireland forbid the Abbot at Kilnacrott - or any member of his council - to appear before television cameras to answer questions about their handling of the Fr Smyth affair. At least that is one possible interpretation of the facts as explained by Cardinal Daly in his reply to a letter from Fr Mulvihill, dated 24 August 1994.

Fr Mulvihill told the Cardinal that the scandal surrounding the paedophile priest was not an isolated matter but that the burden of guilt must be shared by those superiors who permitted ongoing crime. Fr Mulvihill took the opportunity to repeat his efforts to gain the attention of Abbot General Norbert Calmels and Abbot General Marcel Van de Ven. He mentioned also his efforts to attract the attention of Bishop MacKiernan of Kilmore and Papal Nuncio Archbishop Gaetano Alibrandi which produced no results.

Pressure of work and illness delayed Cardinal Daly's

response to Fr Mulvihill but eventually on 29 September 1994 he replied to say that because of the fact Fr Smyth pleaded guilty no evidence was called at his trial. This meant there was as yet little public attention focused on the case. The Cardinal went on to say that this would change soon with transmission of a UTV programme which would show from research that every place Fr Smyth served coincided exactly with his areas of abuse. This was in fact a massive incrimination of the conduct of Fr Brendan Smyth's religious superiors and their collaborators. Cardinal Daly told Fr Mulvihill that in his view the programme would have the potential of being a dreadful exposure of inner-ecclesiastical modes of operation which in this case would focus on a malfunctioning abbey, its present head and his consistent failure over a long period of years to take necessary and effective action against Fr Smyth.

According to Fr Mulvihill the Cardinal was deeply concerned about the lack of reasoned explanation from the Abbot and his council and to quote Fr Mulvihill:

He expressed his sorrow that the legal and media specialists of the Catholic Church in Ireland were finding it extremely difficult to get any coherent replies from the Abbot and had therefore concluded that there was no way in which the Abbot or any member of his council could even be permitted to appear on the television programme for their total inadequacy would be plain for everyone to see.