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Many pages and many millions



Ontario Attorney-General Chris Bentley, left, and Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services Rick Bartolucci speak about the final report of the public inquiry into sexual abuse in Cornwall, Ont. Nathan Denette/The Canadian Press

There is no price tag on truth, but perhaps for the taxpayers' sake, there should be

A \$53-million public inquiry on child abuse, or was it child-abuse hysteria, in Cornwall, Ont., is unlikely to produce a public benefit worthy of the price tag. It seems part of the same temporary madness that created the hysteria (or was it justified fears?) around an alleged pedophile ring in the small, eastern Ontario city in the 1990s and before. There is no price tag on truth, but perhaps for the taxpayers' sake, there should be.

This was not the Mount Cashel Boys Home in St. John's, Nfld., featuring decades of abuse, and police and church officials engaging in a conspiracy of silence. Not even close, yet the four-volume report fills 1,600 pages. By comparison, the 9/11 Commission Report, based on 1,200 interviews in 10 countries, ran to just 585 pages, and cost just \$12-million (U.S.). And while commissioner Normand Glaude begins with a 55-page "statement," the reader is left uncertain whether hysteria, or abuse, is at the heart of it, and if so, how it all got started.

Commissioner Glaude, an Ontario Court judge, makes a surprising finding about an Ontario Provincial Police investigation, Project Truth, that claimed to have definitively

disproved the existence of a pedophile ring; Project Truth did not, in fact, investigate whether such a ring existed. “This does not mean that I find there was a ring of pedophiles. It is not my role to make such a finding.”

But something awful does seem to have happened. Exactly by what and to whom requires reading the full 1,600 pages, the commissioner suggests.

The controversy began when a young man who had been allegedly abused by a priest and a probation officer received a cash payment from the local Catholic diocese, in return for an illegal benefit, his withdrawing of criminal charges. Later, a crusading local police officer, Perry Dunlop, became convinced of a vast conspiracy. Neighbour turned against neighbour, commissioner Glaude recounts. Mr. Dunlop refused to answer questions at the inquiry and spent several months in jail for contempt.

With unintended irony, the commissioner suggests his five-year, \$5-million plan for healing and reconciliation could be a form of economic development, with capital projects worth up to \$200,000. A few more public inquiries like this one will surely be all the stimulus the Canadian economy can handle.