

Mount Cashel was worst-case scenario for boys: expert

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New York forensic psychologist Alan M. Goldstein, in his last hour testifying at the Mount Cashel civil trial in Newfoundland Supreme Court Wednesday, painted a scene at the orphanage that became the “worst-case scenario” in which boys there lacked love, support and stability.

With some 200 boys placed in the facility due in many cases to the death of a parent, Goldstein questioned the training the Irish Christian Brothers had to handle the boys — some of them troubled — and speculated about their ability to manage with counselling rather than with yelling and beating.

For the four men at the centre of the civil case, Goldstein said they had memories of life before Mount Cashel and were vulnerable because of the pain of loss and the need to adjust.

And he said superimposed on the situation were certain Brothers who had a proclivity to abuse boys.

“It appears to be a culture that tolerated it,” Goldstein told Will Hiscock, a lawyer for the former orphanage residents.

Goldstein noted the evidence the court has already heard in which some boys said they told a parish priest and/or orphanage principal about the abuse.

“Apparently no one took any steps that had any effect. I am not implying they didn’t speak to abusing Brothers,” Goldstein said.

“Whatever actions that were taken, the abuse continued — both physical and sexual.”

The four men — test case John Does — represent about 60 former residents from the 1940s to ‘60s who say the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corp. of St. John’s should be held liable for the physical and sexual abuse they say they suffered at the hands of certain members of the lay order Christian Brothers.

The church contends it wasn’t involved in the orphanage’s operation.

A John Doe left the courtroom Wednesday morning, followed by his friend and fellow John Doe, during cross-examination of Goldstein.

The man left quietly and returned after a break, rubbing his face. He told The Telegram outside court he understands the principles of what lawyers do to break down liability, but said, “It all gets too much.”

The man, retired from the military, was hearing his file come up in the cross-examination of Goldstein by Chris Blom, who represents the Episcopal Corp. At the point Doe left the room, Blom had been asking a series of questions in which Goldstein allowed he did no intelligence testing on Doe. Blom had also pointed out none of Doe’s siblings had gone to college or university.

It was part of a line of questions seeming, as a defence strategy, to point the cause of the man’s issues in a direction other than abuse at Mount Cashel, specifically sexual abuse, or to point out a lesser

impact on his life of any abuse.

Blom also tackled the subject of the man's failure to move up in the ranks of the military. Blom, for example, pointed out to Goldstein that the man's specific job was noted in military records to not provide opportunity for advancement.

And Blom challenged Goldstein on using opinions of John Doe's sister and a clinical psychologist that had treated him in his report's conclusions connecting the man's issues (including alcohol abuse, some trauma symptoms and mild depression) to Mount Cashel when they are not experts capable of testifying on a diagnosis.

Goldstein maintained he used the information not as fact, but in corroborating his own opinions.

Later, Blom was quicker going through the cases of the two other John Does, but has consistently pointed out facets of the men's lives — including the initial loss of a parent and, later, financial and career setbacks — that could have caused issues such as anger, depression and anxiety, and any genetic factors that might have contributed to the likelihood of abusing alcohol.

The trial entered its 26th non-consecutive day Wednesday and continues Thursday.

Look for digital updates at www.thetelegram.com.

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