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Sins of the Father: For years, Boston's cardinal kept on priests who had been accused of molesting children. Now Catholics across America are confronting similar scandals and questioning the secretive culture of the church

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Date: Mar. 4, 2002

From: Newsweek

Publisher: Newsweek LLC

Document Type: Article

Length: 3,763 words

Full Text:

Publisher clarification: 13 Mar 2002

In our March 4 cover story, we said that Cardinal Law's 1984 arrival in Boston immediately followed a posting as bishop in Washington, D.C. In fact, Law had most recently been posted in the Springfield-Cape Girardeau, MO., diocese.

Byline: Lisa Miller and David France

Patrick McSorley, an intense and troubled 27-year-old, remembers vividly the beautiful July afternoon in 1986 that "totally changed my life." He was 12. He was out playing ball in his Boston neighborhood when he heard his mother call for him out the window of their apartment. When he went inside, she introduced him to the Rev. John J. Geoghan, a priest and an old family friend who had just learned of McSorley's father's suicide, some years earlier. The priest offered to take him out for ice cream. Driving slowly home from Brigham's, Father Geoghan patted the youngster's leg. "I'm sorry to hear about your father's death," he said consolingly. "For a young boy like you, that's an awful loss." By the time he uttered that last word, the priest's hands were inside the child's shorts, McSorley says. Terrified, the boy said nothing. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the priest fondling himself, he says. He remembers staring out the windshield for a very long time, as ice cream melted down his elbow till nothing at all was left.

McSorley--who says he began suffering anxiety attacks and depression shortly after Geoghan's visit--is suing Geoghan and his superior Cardinal Bernard Law. Sitting last week in a Boston lawyer's drab office, McSorley remembered what he says were Geoghan's last words to him: "We keep secrets. We're good at keeping secrets. Would you like me to make a return visit?"

On the first Sunday of Lent, the season of repentance, Cardinal Law, the senior member of the U.S. Roman Catholic hierarchy, celebrated mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston and in his homily gave what seemed like his umpteenth apology for the scandal surrounding Geoghan (pronounced Gai-gan). "We do not always make holy decisions," he said, "and we turn to God for the forgiveness he is always ready to give."

At 70, Cardinal Law is in the midst of a massive, tragic, expensive and potentially career-ending controversy, and he looks it. When he shakes hands after the service, his grip is firm, his blue eyes piercing, but his face looks exhausted and scared. The crisis has been brewing for decades--long before Law arrived in Boston--but the floodgates opened on Jan. 6, when The Boston Globe published a page-one story alleging that the Archdiocese of Boston moved Geoghan, whom it knew to be a child molester, from parish to parish over 30 years. (Geoghan, 66, was sentenced last week to nine to 10 years in prison after being convicted of indecent assault on a 10-year-old boy, but lawyers say he may have had as many as 130 victims.) The cardinal, who had previously defended the archdiocese's handling of the case, recanted and apologized. The Globe also reported that the archdiocese had quietly paid \$10 million to settle some 50 cases against Geoghan. Again, the cardinal apologized and, according to people familiar with the situation, turned over to state authorities the names of between 60 and 70 priests who had been accused of abusing children over the past 40 years--reversing his own longstanding policy of handling such allegations quietly, within the church. Other Catholic leaders in Boston handed over about a dozen more, according to sources. The total number may top 80. The archdiocese won't talk specifically about lawsuits, but 86 civil suits are known to be still pending against Geoghan, and at least six claims have been brought against other priests in the archdiocese. Many of these also name the cardinal himself for failing to protect the children in his care. Law declined to be interviewed for this article.

Nothing like this has ever happened before in Boston, one of the country's most influential Catholic communities. Many priests are infuriated with Law's handling of the case; a few are said to be so humiliated that they've stopped wearing their collars in public. Half of Boston's Catholics, according to one poll, would like the cardinal to resign--a course that he rejected in a passionate homily at the Boston cathedral recently. "Our faith doesn't rest on the shifting winds of popular opinion," he declared. But the opinion of Rome matters, and Law's fate has almost certainly been the subject of anxious whispers along the marble corridors of the Vatican. Knowledgeable observers think it unlikely that Law, an influential member of the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, will be forced to resign. But scandals that involve an alleged cover-up have a way of mushrooming out of control, and the Geoghan case is already evoking comparisons not just to Watergate but a more contemporary debacle. "The church reacted as institutions often do--as Enron did--and that is to deny, to delay, to dissemble, to fool themselves into thinking that all was well," says Eugene Kennedy, a former priest and author of "The Unhealed Wound: The Church and Human Sexuality."

The soul-searching goes well beyond Boston, to an American Catholic hierarchy suddenly facing the same kind of recriminations over long-buried episodes of sexual abuse that in recent years have shaken other American institutions--including schools, sports teams, Boy Scouts and, most commonly, families. Following Law's lead, bishops in Manchester, N.H., and Portland, Maine, have agreed to turn over the names of alleged offenders to the authorities. On Friday the Archdiocese of Philadelphia said it had found "credible evidence" that 35 priests sexually abused children over five decades and that it had relieved several of them of their duties. Last week the Arizona Daily Star called for the resignation of Bishop Manuel D. Moreno of Tucson, after the disclosure that church officials had quietly paid millions of dollars in restitution to nine former altar boys. Plaintiffs' attorneys say they're receiving calls daily from victims in Maryland, New York, California, Iowa, Arizona and Illinois. To some civil libertarians, the avalanche of allegations calls to mind the day-care witch hunts of the 1980s. "We're in an atmosphere now where there's a substantial chance of accusations against, even conviction of, an innocent priest," says Harvey Silverglate, a board member of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts. "The problem with witch hunts is that everybody accused is suddenly found guilty."

How many other Father Geoghan's are still serving in parishes, instructing altar boys and making pastoral visits to families? That's a question for which statistics simply don't exist. "We don't really know that much about the sexuality of priests, period," says Dr. John Bradford, head of the Sexual Behaviors Clinic at the Royal Ottawa Hospital. The cases the church is grappling with now involve two phenomena that are psychologically distinct but often are lumped together for legal and moral consideration: pedophilia, defined as intense and recurrent sexual desire for prepubescent children; and sexual advances on sexually mature, but underage, boys and girls. The latter, troubling as it is, is part of the human condition; priests have always been in a struggle to keep their vows. Pedophilia, which researchers admit they know little about, is believed to afflict 5 to 6 percent of all men (and hardly any women). Of these, most never act on these impulses. After a sex scandal in the early 1990s, the Chicago archdiocese opened up records for all 2,252 priests who served there over a period of 40 years. Only one of the priests had allegedly assaulted a preteen. The most common complaints involved boys who were 15 or 16. But some researchers think the priesthood may hold a dangerous attraction for pedophiles--not because of the opportunities it presents to indulge their fantasies, but for the opposite reason, that they hope it can help control them. "A very small percentage of pedophiles may go into the priesthood thinking that celibacy will solve the problem they're dealing with," says Dr. Frederick Berlin, a psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins who deals with sexual disorders.

Kennedy, the former priest, has another theory: the church offers a comforting home to young men who are psychologically and sexually immature. Priests "gravitate toward male children because they're male children themselves," he says. "These men were promoted in the seminary because they were good boys... There was an inevitability for their erotic targets to become children." Geoghan fits that profile exactly. When he was a young seminarian in Boston, the rector wrote that despite a "very fervent spiritual life," the 18-year-old Geoghan had a "very pronounced immaturity."

Of course, priests have no monopoly on child abuse; by coincidence, just a day before Geoghan's sentencing, police in New York arrested the cantor of the country's most prominent Reform synagogue, Temple Emanu-El, charging him with abusing his own 3-year-old nephew. He maintains his innocence. But clergymen have unique access to young people. Anthony Muzzi Jr., a 47-year-old construction worker with a broad South Boston accent, remembers Geoghan as the beloved family priest and a frequent guest for dinner at his home. He was among Geoghan's first victims, beginning in the 1960s, when Muzzi was "13 or 14," he says. "He would make friends like you can't believe. People loved this guy," Muzzi recalls. At night, he says, Geoghan would bless the children in their beds, sometimes whispering strange things as he fondled them. "He made it from me to my brother to my cousin next door to another cousin," Muzzi charges. None of the boys said a word. "Knowing what I know now, you feel embarrassed and stupid," he says. "How did I let this happen? I wouldn't let a bus driver do this to me, so how did I let this priest do it?"

And to be attacked by a priest is a double betrayal; the victims harbor the outrage and shattered innocence of a child abused by a parent. Mark Keane, 32, says he was raped by Geoghan when he was 14 in the changing room of a Boston-area boys-and-girls club. He didn't know the identity of his attacker, who was naked. But several weeks later he saw the man again, this time in priest's robes. That's when he cried. "It really is a rape of your soul," he says. "It is not just physical abuse, it's a betrayal of your faith. It's the most damaging thing imaginable. I can't have faith now, and if I wanted to, I have no place to turn."

The anger among Boston's 2 million Catholics was stoked by the reams of documentation unsealed by the courts--after journalists fought to see it. To a woman who said her nephew was molested by Geoghan, Law wrote in September 1984: "The matter of your concern is being investigated and appropriate pastoral decisions will be made." But to Geoghan, he wrote in 1989: "I am confident that you will again render fine priestly service to the people of God in Saint Julia Parish." To Geoghan again, in 1996, after approving his retirement status: "Yours has been an effective life of ministry, sadly impaired by illness... God bless you, Jack." These polite missives seem to confirm people's worst fears: that the see-no-evil culture of the church is so entrenched, and the unwillingness of some priests to look honestly at themselves and their colleagues is so pervasive, that even the most compassionate people can fail to protect those they've vowed to serve.

Is the failure of the church to confront the problem of sex abuse bred in its bones--an inclination to see neglect or violence as "sin" instead of "crime" and therefore respond with prayer instead of punishment? Perhaps. But secrecy and silence have always

characterized the Catholic Church, and in many of these cases the church does all it can to prevent the charges from coming to light--sometimes to the point of writing threatening letters to outspoken priests, or advocating that incriminating documents be shipped out of U.S. jurisdiction. The vast majority of these cases are settled outside court, and most settlements come with gag orders. In court cases, the church often moves to seal all the files--even though in cases against secular child molesters, usually only the victim's name and identity are concealed. A spokesman for the Archdiocese of Boston says victims' families often preferred discretion because "they were loyal Catholics, and because they loved the church." But Jason Berry, author of "Lead Us Not Into Temptation," and an authority on priests and sexual abuse, has another theory, rooted in the bureaucratic self-interest of the hierarchy. "By Vatican lights," he says, "the worst thing a bishop can do is become publicly associated with a scandal."

Cardinal Bernard Law arrived in Boston in 1984, an ambitious bishop fresh from a post in Washington. Geoghan had already been allegedly molesting children in the diocese for years. Court documents show that Cardinal Humberto Madeiros, Law's predecessor, ordered counseling for Geoghan in 1980, but shortly afterward named him associate pastor of St. Brendan's, in Dorchester, where he allegedly continued preying on young men. In 1984, the story of Father Gilbert Gauthé, a child-abusing priest in Louisiana, exploded into the national press. The same year Cardinal Law moved Geoghan from St. Brendan's to St. Julia's.

Two years later, in response to the Gauthé debacle, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, a loosely organized group that recommends policy for the American church, held a conference on the sex abuse of minors. Father Thomas Doyle, then a canon lawyer in Washington, had been investigating the problem. What he concluded was staggering: at the present rate, he estimated, child-sexual-abuse settlements would cost the church \$1 billion over the following 10 years. The Linkup, a Chicago-based organization for victims of clerical sexual abuse, claims the church has, in fact, paid out at least \$800 million since the 1980s--a figure hotly disputed by Mark Chopko, general counsel for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, who puts the real number at "somewhere closer to \$250 [million] to \$300 million... it's still a whole lot of money," he adds. "We advised, urged, banged our heads against the wall," recalls Doyle, now an Air Force chaplain based in Germany. "We advised that the public be dealt with honestly and openly. The bishops conference rejected the whole report and everything that was in it." Months later Patrick McSorley went for ice cream with Father Geoghan.

In 1993, another molesting priest made national headlines--this time a lot closer to home. Father James Porter was convicted of sexually abusing 28 children in the Diocese of Fall River, just 50 miles from Boston, and was sentenced to 18 to 20 years in prison. This time Law jumped into action. He put together a panel of experts to establish a formal policy, and invited all the parish priests for their input. He published the policy, which was basically procedural guidelines, and gave a copy to each priest. Allegations were still handled in-house; nowhere did the policy advise turning abusers over to civil authorities. The local press's obsession with the Porter case sent the cardinal around the bend, and he went after the Globe with a holy wrath. "By all means, we call down God's power on the media, particularly the Globe," he said.

By 1995, a treatment center had advised that Geoghan "should have no interpersonal contact with male minors that is unsupervised." For the next several years, barred from parish work, he moved among rehabilitation centers and retirement homes as the charges mounted against him. And he kept racking up victims, charges Mitchell Garabedian, who represents 118 people suing Geoghan, including McSorley. Finally, around the time the diocese paid \$10 million to Geoghan's accusers, Law took extraordinary action. He flew to Rome and asked that the priest be relieved of his collar. Defrocking is usually a long judicial process, with room for appeal, but Law made sure in this case it was irrevocable. He told the press in the summer of 1998 that "as long as I am archbishop, I will be haunted by those persons who have been victimized."

Early last year, as criminal cases against Geoghan moved through the courts, reporters in Boston began sniffing around the story in earnest, publishing reports that the cardinal knew of Geoghan's behavior. In the diocesan newspaper last summer, the cardinal denied it: "Never was there an effort on my part to shift a problem from one place to the next," he wrote. In the fall the Globe filed a motion to unseal the documents in the case and the archdiocese appealed. The Globe prevailed, and the apologizing began.

Law's own culpability lies in what "knew" means. He has said publicly that although he was aware of Geoghan's behavior, he genuinely believed in those days that such a priest could be helped with therapy and rehabilitation. His belief was reinforced by the doctors assigned to examine Geoghan--although they were not experts in the field, critics say. The cardinal's allies support this view. "He made his decision in a place and at a time when he thought it was the very best thing to do," says Father Patrick Farrell, pastor at St. Peter's Cathedral in Jackson, Miss., and one of the cardinal's oldest friends. "I could never imagine that man doing anything other than have the deepest interest of the child at heart." Donna Morrissey, spokesperson for the Boston archdiocese, agrees, characterizing the cardinal as "generous" and "kind."

Disaffected Catholics usually are reluctant to air their grievances in public, but this case is different because parishioners can vote their unhappiness with their pocketbooks. Law's advisers say pending claims may run to more than \$30 million, but plaintiffs' lawyers put the number much higher. The archdiocese made the extraordinary announcement that payments to sex-abuse victims would not come out of the collection plate or previously existing diocesan fund-raising drives. So where will they come from? The church says it has insurance, but sources say coverage has been spotty over the past several decades and the archdiocese is in litigation with one of its former insurers and is in disputes with several others. Former Clinton appointee Mary Jo Bane, a longtime member of St. William's Parish in Dorchester, is circulating a petition urging local Catholics to withhold contributions to the archdiocese until the church gives a full accounting of its financial plan. So far 175 people have signed. Concerned that his contributions to archdiocesan funds might end up in plaintiffs' attorneys' pockets, one prominent local businessman said he had decided to direct all his current and projected donations, about \$20,000 in 2002, to his local parish.

Still, Law has hardly run out of resources. On Valentine's Day, he held a meeting of his finance committee, a blue-chip group that includes famed money manager Peter Lynch. He asked for their help raising money to pay for the litigation--and went over a list of assets that could be liquidated or mortgaged, including a choice multiacre plot behind the cardinal's fortresslike residence in Brighton. "He's not going to walk away from this problem," says Robert Popeo, the high-powered Boston litigator who was called in as a pro bono consultant to the archdiocese, and may represent Law in cases where he's named as a defendant. "He regards this as his

problem to solve."

Elsewhere across the country, the church also seems to be starting to learn its lesson. Last week the bishop of Manchester called a meeting of the diocese's priests to discuss restoring parishioners' faith in the wake of sexual scandals there and in Boston. And the Catholic bishops issued a public apology: "on behalf of all of the bishops, [we express] our profound sorrow that some of our priests were responsible for this abuse under our watch. We understand that your children are your most precious gift. They are our children as well, and we continue to apologize to the victims and to their parents and their loved ones for this failure in our pastoral responsibilities." To his constituency, the bishop of Tucson issued an extraordinary statement admitting to "failings in the past" and acknowledging that parishioners have "suffered greatly." Catholic leaders worry that recent events may damage their future ability to recruit priests. "A scandal like this makes parents very weary of promoting their sons into the priesthood," says Sister Mary Ann Walsh, spokesperson for the Catholic Bishops Conference.

In Boston, Law's belated efforts to deal with the problem have impressed at least some of his associates, such as John McNeice, a major Catholic donor who was at the cardinal's Valentine's Day crisis meeting. "I believe in the church," he says. "We're going through a difficult period, but the church has gone through them before, and we'll face them again." Unfortunately, it is all coming too late for McSorley, who saw Geoghan again last week at the priest's appearance in a Boston courtroom. At the sight of the now elderly, slightly befuddled-looking ex-priest, McSorley broke into a sweat, and within minutes had fled outside. While the church hierarchy deals with the public-relations and financial implications of decades of neglect, McSorley has to put together the rest of his life.

This story was reported on by Lisa Miller, David France, Lynette Clemetson, Suzanne Smalley, Mary Carmichael, and Julie Scelfo. It was written by Lisa Miller and David France

PATRICK MCSORLEY, HYDE PARK, MASS., 27

At the age of 12, McSorley says, he was molested by Geoghan, an old family friend, during a trip to get ice cream. The priest's visit was prompted by the earlier suicide of McSorley's father, William, seen with his son in a snapshot (left). McSorley is suing Geoghan.

PHIL SAVIANO, JAMAICA PLAIN, MASS., 49

Saviano, who says he was molested in the 1960s by Father David Holley in Worcester, Mass., founded a chapter of the Survivors Network, a group for those abused by clergy. In 1993, Holley got 275 years in prison for abusing eight boys in the 1970s.

ANTHONY MUZZI JR., SCITUATE, MASS., 47

Another of Geoghan's alleged victims, Muzzi remembers well the priest's remarkable knack for making friends. He also remembers how, when he was a boy, Geoghan would bless him and his brother as they lay in their beds at night, and, he says, fondle them as well.

MARY GRANT, COVINA, CALIF., 39

'When you are abused by your priest, the trauma is tenfold,' says Grant. As a 13-year-old, she was molested by the Rev. John Lenihan, she says, a priest in her Orange County parish. In 1991 she settled a suit against Lenihan, who was stripped of his collar last September.

By Lisa Miller and David France

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Source Citation (MLA 9th Edition)

Miller, Lisa, and David France. "Sins of the Father: For years, Boston's cardinal kept on priests who had been accused of molesting children. Now Catholics across America are confronting similar scandals and questioning the secretive culture of the church." *Newsweek*, 4 Mar. 2002, p. 42. *Gale Academic OneFile Select*,

link.gale.com/apps/doc/A83283937/EAIM?u=mmln_b_bpublic&sid=bookmark-EAIM&xid=87e9f1cf. Accessed 8 Nov. 2021.

Gale Document Number: GALE|A83283937