

WHEN THE CHURCH SINS

priests who molest children commit a crime that's hard to forgive—but must be understood

By JAMES R. PETERSEN

When you search in Nexis, a data base of magazine and newspaper articles, for stories on priests who molest children, the screen goes blank and returns with the message: "Your search will retrieve more than 500 documents. Do you want to continue?"

If you do, the computer responds with a torrent of pain: the story of evangelical preacher Tony Leyva, who roamed the South in a dark-blue Cadillac, wearing a Superman costume, claiming he was Super-Christian, swapping young boys with his associates. His victims number in the hundreds. One reads about Father James Porter, a man who gave altar boys rum-soaked cake, then raped them. Porter also brushed up against girls in the hallway and finger-fucked them. His victims began to tell their stories when a former altar boy placed an ad that asked: "Remember Father Porter?" Porter had victims in four states, the result of being moved by the church—at the first hint of scandal—from parish to parish.

Then there's Gil Gauthe, a Louisiana priest who worked his way through families, victimizing 36 children.

After a week of reading, "molest" seems an obscenely weak euphemism for a monstrous act. The stories don't simply convey pain, they embody pain. One of Gauthe's victims would sit for hours at the window of his darkened home "watching for the black Camaro that used to come for him. He was afraid the man would come back, the man who did those strange things to him. The man with the black car and the black gun. The black suit. And the white collar."

One of the stories from 1988 tells of a victim, a 12-year-old boy abused by a religious brother at a Boy Scout camp, who hanged himself.

We have lived through media blitzes before: stories that suggest Satanic cults abuse children in dark rituals, stories of runaway children lured into a

sexual underworld, stories alleging that day-care providers regularly abuse their charges. Most of those articles were false. The hysteria was misdirected. Out of respect, fear or simple denial, the press, by and large, neglected the genuine sexual tragedy unfolding within the church. Now we face the undeniable.

Jason Berry, author of *Lead Us Not into Temptation*, reports that more than 400 priests have been accused since 1982 of sexually molesting children.



AMY CREHORE

He estimates that since 1985 the church has paid more than \$350 million in damages, health care and legal expenses.

Court records reveal that more than 200 pedophile priests have sought—or been forced to undergo—treatment at a monastic center in Jemez Springs, New Mexico.

Perhaps the most eloquent book on the church and sex, A. W. Richard Sipe's *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*, reports an estimated two percent of the nation's 57,000 priests are pedophiles and another four percent are sexually preoccupied

with adolescents. That's 3420 predators at play in the fields of the Lord.

Defenders of the church insist there are no more pedophiles in the priesthood than there are in the general population. They charge the press with indulging in another feeding frenzy, causing an epidemic of church- and priest-bashing.

One reader asked *The Boston Globe*: "Do we need all these stories to get the obvious point that it's not right and the church should do something?"

What the church has and has not done is largely the result of one man.

Jeffrey Anderson, a lawyer in St. Paul, Minnesota, has brought 100 cases against Catholic priests (and 40 more against other denominations), arguing in each that the church has created a climate that fosters abuse.

Anderson began seven years ago when the bewildered parents of a boy abused by a priest wandered into his office. They told him that they had complained to the bishop. And after a few months, the church finally responded—by sending them a check, nothing more. Shouldn't something more be done? the parents asked.

Anderson investigated and came away convinced there was a pattern of abuse,

that there was a conspiracy of complicity and concealment at the highest levels of the church. "The church is closed, covetous of its image, dark, powerful. Its response is to close ranks and protect its own," says Anderson. He concluded that priests were shunted to new parishes to molest again. This policy created the numbers—and only when hundreds had been sacrificed to maintain appearances did victims come forward.

Most abuse cases don't make it to trial or to headlines. A sealed settlement buys the silence of victims and protects the priests' identities. We asked Anderson to describe these monsters. He said



WHERE ARE WE ON AIDS?



the epidemic under a microscope

Dr. Jonathan Mann, the Harvard University researcher who co-chaired the eighth international AIDS conference in Amsterdam this summer, put it this way: "We are all working on the twigs, the leaves, the branches. But no one sees the forest."

More than 1000 speakers addressed the conference; 5000 papers circulated among the world's top scientists. The result?

Time looked at the scientific setbacks. Its August 3rd cover story seemed actually to celebrate the human immunodeficiency virus as the Virus of the Year. From the story's title, "Invincible AIDS," to a description of the virus as "a fiendishly fast-moving target, able to mutate its structure to elude detection drugs and vaccines," the article was a breathless account of the tense chess match between science and nature.

U.S. News & World Report cut to the bottom line: The worst-case scenario predicts that AIDS will have a total cost of \$514 billion. "The dollar loss equals 1.4 percent of the entire world's gross domestic product."

Stories such as those just make you reach for a condom, don't they? What does the world's gross domestic product have to do with love and sex? To borrow a phrase from the ecology movement, we must think globally but act locally. Nothing in that coverage brings AIDS down to the personal. And that is where the conflict occurs.

Stories that cover the personal are troubling.

Newsweek gave us the human face of teenagers with AIDS, profiling a young black woman who, when she found out she had AIDS, told each of the 24 men she'd slept with in the previous year. None went for testing.

The Wall Street Journal lectured *Newsweek*: "Any pointed reference to the relation of sexual promiscuity to AIDS is not to be found in the media

or among our educators. It is repressed because it might seem to be judgmental—i.e., having a moral connotation. . . . What did *Newsweek* have to say about such promiscuity? Nothing, absolutely nothing. It reported the facts but strenuously avoided any suggestion that she had been wrong in her behavior. The tone of the story was such as to imply that her mistake was in not insisting that those men practice safe sex."

What help have we offered that

grams. It's simply not a question of money at all."

In the middle of this, we read an editorial in *The New England Journal of Medicine* called "AIDS and Absolutism—The Demand for Perfection in Prevention." The authors, Willard Cates and Alan Hinman, who are doctors at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, point out: "Nothing in medicine, or in life for that matter, always works." Taking on the critics of sex ed and condom use, they charge: "[There are those] who argue that abstaining from sex until marriage and practicing monogamy thereafter provides our only hope against the further spread of HIV. We

agree that abstinence and mutually faithful sexual relationships with uninfected persons are the only guaranteed methods of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV. This does not mean, however, that we should withhold information about ways of reducing risk from those who do not find this approach feasible. Moreover, the absolutist line of reasoning does not take into account that condoms may be effective more than 90 percent of the time, and that even delaying the transmission of HIV is beneficial, both to individuals and in changing the dynamics of the epidemic as a whole.

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"Voltaire's phrase 'The best is the enemy of the good' applies to HIV prevention. . . . Until we have more effective (or even perfect) approaches, we should more fully implement the partially effective approaches we have, such as condom use, HIV counseling and testing, partner notification, methadone maintenance and the use of bleach [to sterilize needles]. We do not live in a perfect world, and our quest for solutions must recognize the fact."

In other words, we must do what we can.

woman? One of the stories reported that last year the nation spent \$2.70 per person—about the price of a bottle of aspirin—on AIDS prevention.

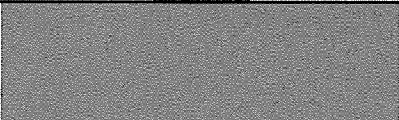
The articles following the conference were filled with despair and frustration. An AIDS specialist told *Newsday*: "As long as we define AIDS narrowly as a personal-risk issue, we will not have an effective strategy for control. We have to get away from the fixation of putting more and more money into AIDS-prevention pro-



**CUDDLE, CUDDLE CUDDLE, KISS, EMBRACE,
KISS, BED, TOUCH, STRIP STRIP, FONDLE,
FONDLE, SEXUAL INTERCOURSE,
SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, SEXUAL INTERCOURSE,
SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, SEXUAL INTERCOURSE,
BLOOD TEST, HIV POSITIVE, AIDS, AIDS, REGRETS,
REGRETS, REGRETS, REGRETS, REGRETS.**

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EDDIE WOODS AGENCY



they seem to share certain qualities. Among Catholic offenders, the men come from devout families. A strong mother pushed them into the priesthood. They seem to suffer an arrested development. They have no healthy sense of sexual identity.

"Their level of understanding is so superficial. They are ignorant about their own sexuality. They have no idea that what they do is sex, is abuse. One priest thought that his actions did not violate his vow of celibacy, since he didn't marry the victim. Some enter the priesthood thinking celibacy will protect them from these urges, but in this climate they act out. Repression and denial breed behavior. The silence and complicity of the church protect that behavior."

Why now? "Historically, nobody could believe that priests abuse. When they are able to believe, the church wields such power that nothing happens. Police don't prosecute. The press does not report."

That has begun to change.

Both the Catholic Church and most major denominations have responded to the lawsuits the way major corporations respond to sexual harassment penalties. They form committees, issue guidelines, offer to pay for the victims' therapy, promise treatment for the offenders. And stonewall on guilt.

A case in point: Chicago's Cardinal Joseph Bernardin created the Commission on Clerical Sexual Misconduct with Minors to recommend church policy reforms. Even though the archdiocese had received at least 21 allegations in the past year alone, the commission issued a statement that "the church is generally neither legally nor morally obligated to report the matter [of abuse allegations] to criminal justice authorities for prosecution." Cardinal Bernardin later reconsidered this stance, saying once "a priest is an abuser, he should never again return to parish ministry or any ministry which might place a child at risk." He has now formed an independent lay committee that will report allegations.

Perhaps it is more than ironic that the same leaders rail against the sexual revolution, pornography, permissiveness and sex education—as though these were the sources of all evil.

The honor for uncovering this shame, according to Sipe's *A Secret World*, goes to the sexual revolution: "The change in the sexual climate during the past quarter century has challenged sexual meaning and practice and has made a formerly mute population articulate in describing their own

sexual practice and questioning assumptions of others, including priests and clerical celibacy in general," he writes. "Explicitness of sexuality, popularly accepted, challenges the denial of sexuality that many celibates must use to keep their practice somewhat in place. It also threatens, not entirely in a hostile way, the structure of celibacy. Explicitness can be an invitation to truth, nonsecrecy and accountability—delicate areas, to be sure, for [the] religious."

Sipe, who retired from the priesthood to practice psychotherapy, has worked with hundreds of sexually troubled priests. He believes the church's twin silences—on the nature of human sexuality and on the nature of celibacy—create the crisis.

Sipe quotes Dr. Leo Bartemeier: "We take promising young men from thir-

and guilt proliferate."

Add to that the unique approach to confession: The church typically has viewed sexual misconduct as isolated acts, lapses to be forgiven and forgotten after the sacrament of reconciliation, or confession. This view—that sexuality stands apart from self—is a sure prescription for tragedy. And it may help explain how a priest can do so much good and yet remain the occasional, or repeat, predator.

The problem extends beyond the church into religion as a whole. According to a report based on a decade of research into pedophilia ("The Cruellest Crime," published in *Life* in 1984), a disproportionate number of pedophiles are outwardly religious. Gerald Kaplan, director of a treatment center for molesters, told *Life*: "[Offenders] will even distort Bible passages to indicate to their kids that they should be having sexual contact, or use the passage about 'forgive and forget' when their daughters are angry." They have neither a sense of control nor responsibility—they shift blame to their deity or to the Devil and never accept it themselves.

Sipe cites I. F. Stone's comment about the Iran-contra affair: "You cannot have secrecy and accountability at the same time.' There is no other single element so destructive to sexual responsibility among clergy as the system of secrecy that has both shielded behavior and reinforced denial."

Sipe believes that nothing less than a new sexual theology will save the church. He offers as a guide the 1983 statement prepared by the Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops: "To be a human person is to be a sexual person—the marvelous mystery of human sexuality permeates every moment of human existence. . . . The human person is so profoundly affected by sexuality that it must be considered as one of the factors that give to each individual's life the principal traits that distinguish it."

One therapist has come up with a novel treatment. He videotapes pedophiles as they reenact their crimes with a stuffed doll. When forced to watch the videotape of their actions, the molesters feel—for the first time—shame and empathy for their victims.

Perhaps the church, as it watches its crimes acted out in the press, will feel some shame.

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teen to twenty years of age, feed them well, educate them diligently, and eight to twelve years later we ordain them, healthy, bright, emotional thirteen-year-olds." Priests swear to celibacy, oftentimes with no more articulation than "Celibacy means no sex, hetero, homo, auto, *basta cosi*."

Concerned about sex? Pray about it. Don't think about it. Play sports.

"The lack of basic education about sex and celibacy," Sipe continues, "creates a situation where adolescence is protected or postponed, or where the celibate priesthood becomes a hiding place for unresolved sexual conflicts. . . . Without living role models with whom to identify explicitly in the area of handling one's sexual drive, the priest is left to the secret arena and isolation of his own fantasy, where fear