

Only 44 percent would

Priests and Abuse

The sins of the Fathers: the Roman Catholic Church is starting to confront a lingering scandal

IT MAY BE THE SWEETEST SCENE IN the Gospels. As parents brought their babies to Jesus for a blessing, his disciples—history's first overprotective advance men—turned the families away. Quickly, Jesus put a stop to that. "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not," he says, according to Luke. "For of such is the kingdom of God."

It took two millennia and men like Father David Holley to corrupt that message. Beginning in the early 1970s, even as he was finishing up a stay in a "treatment" center, Holley was molesting boys as young as 11. On the secluded roads of rural New Mexico, in the back of his parish church, on his cool kitchen floor, according to court testimony, he fondled them, he masturbated them, he performed oral sex on them. He showed them sexually explicit photos and announced, "I'm going to teach you guys how to be men." He did something rather different. "At 11 or 12, you don't know what's going on," says Noel Clark, one of Holley's victims. "The priest who's been approved by your parents is saying, 'It's OK, this is normal.' I don't know if anyone can understand the guilt you feel at a moral level. You can never have a good day." In March, Holley, now 65, pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting eight boys. Two months

ago a judge in Alamogordo, N.M., sentenced him to 275 years in prison; Holley will be eligible for parole in 18 years.

By then, perhaps, the fallout from the worst clerical scandal in the modern history of the U.S. Catholic Church will have passed. It's been building now for a decade. Stunning, mortifying charges have wounded many of the nation's 188 dioceses. Covenant House, the program that serves runaway children, was badly damaged after its founder, Father Bruce Ritter, was forced to resign amid allegations of sexual and financial misconduct. (Ritter denied the charges.) While allegations have been lodged against an estimated 400 priests since 1982, some churchmen extrapolate that as many as 2,500 priests have molested children or teenagers. Compounding the crisis, the church was slow to recognize the seriousness of its problem and the furious backlash that was building among a network of "survivors," some of whom are now seeking—and winning—big damage awards.

More than money, the scandal has cost the church severe embarrassment—and some of its moral authority. The priesthood remains a caste apart, one that renounced all sexual activity, let alone deviant behavior with minors. The errant priests, then,

appear guilty not only of perversion but hypocrisy, too. "We grew up with such respect for 'Father,'" says Rhode Island attorney Richard Cappalli, who is pressing several abuse suits. "We looked up to our teachers, to our Scout leaders, but not like we did to the priest. He was next to God." The scandal suggests that at critical times the church seemed most concerned with protecting its own personnel. The clerical hierarchy and the church's therapists failed to deter sexual abuse, averted their eyes or, amazingly, covered up the sins of their fathers. Indeed, documents uncovered in lawsuits show bishops recommending the purging not of priests but of their personnel files, lest they become weapons in lawsuits. The result, critics charge, is plain: the church failed its children.

The church has taken a fearsome beating in the courts, the press and the pews. According to the NEWSWEEK Poll, about two thirds of the American Catholics surveyed think that the church has treated abusive priests too leniently. They also think abusers should be defrocked immediately, rather than sent off for treatment.

Now the church has begun to respond. Leading bishops—including Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago and Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston—have ordered searches of diocesan personnel records to root out evidence of clerical abuse. In February, the National Conference of Bishops heard a panel of 31 experts describe "the sustained crisis" in the church and issued a detailed call for action. In June, the bishops appointed a committee to draft an action plan. Two weeks later New York's Cardinal John O'Connor—like many diocesan leaders before him—announced a program to



like a child to become a priest or nun

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BILL POWERS—SIPA, ALLAN TANNENBAUM—SYGMA, FERNANDO T. GARCIA

streamline the investigation of abuse charges. "It is long since time," he declared, "to get down on our knees, to beat our breasts, to ask God's mercy."

Pope John Paul II spoke publicly for the first time on the issue in June, expressing sorrow for the victims and dismay over the demoralization of the church. While the American bishops publicly welcomed the pope's words, NEWSWEEK has learned that privately they had hoped for more. American emissaries to the Vatican had urged the pope to speed procedures for defrocking sexually abusive priests. Instead he appointed another commission to explore the issue.

Throughout the church's damage-control campaign, bishops complained that the press was making too much of a handful of cases. At one point, Cardinal Law even "called down God's power . . . on the [Boston] Globe," one of the most aggressive pursuers of the story. But for the victims, most of whom say they had either repressed their memories or suffered in silence, retribution—divine or otherwise—was long overdue. Survivors, as they call themselves, readily share tales of indifference and hostility from church leaders when they tried to tell their stories. Barbara Blaine, director of the 1,200-member SNAP (Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests), says she felt vilified by the church's comments to the press after she reported an alleged incident of abuse. Jeanne Miller of The Linkup, another victims group, says that it took nine years, other incidents and a criminal indictment before the archdiocese in Chicago removed from parish work the priest she sued for

allegedly molesting her son. After the indictment, Cardinal Bernardin apologized publicly. For a decade, the priest had been shuffled among parishes, despite accusations of sexual misconduct.

These cases have a powerful effect on families and parishes. David Clohessy, now 36, says that in 1989 he began suffering flashbacks to three years of abuse that he says he suffered at the hands of a Missouri priest when he was a teenager. When Clohessy brought his memories to the local diocese, he says he was rebuffed. Frustrated, he filed suit against the diocese and the priest, who refused to comment. His family was badly divided. His wife worried that

Priests in trouble: Porter (left) and Holley (far right) went to jail, Ritter resigned

NEWSWEEK POLL

It would be a good thing if women were allowed to be ordained as priests.

In 1974 . . .	In 1993 . . .
29% Agreed	62% Agree
65% Disagreed	31% Disagree

It would be a good thing if married men were allowed to be ordained as priests.

In 1974 . . .	In 1993 . . .
53% Agreed	71% Agree
36% Disagreed	25% Disagree

GALLUP, 1974; THE NEWSWEEK POLL OF CATHOLICS, AUG. 3-5, 1993

people would think "he was gay." Clohessy's parents stood by him but relations were severed with his brother, a priest. "Many people leave the church, but I feel I was almost driven away," he says. "I was helpless as a kid; I'm not helpless now."

The scandal has forced a sense of caution on innocent, active Catholic priests. "I know a lot of priests who work with youth who don't do things now that they would have done 10 years ago," says the Rev. Dr. John Beal, a Catholic University professor. "I don't know anyone who would go camping with the Boy Scouts without another adult present." Maybe that's not so bad, think some ardent parishioners. "I don't feel bad that parents feel more concerned about their children," says Barbara Violante, a mother of five daughters in Chicago, who has grown more cautious, too. "It's actually a good thing for the kids."

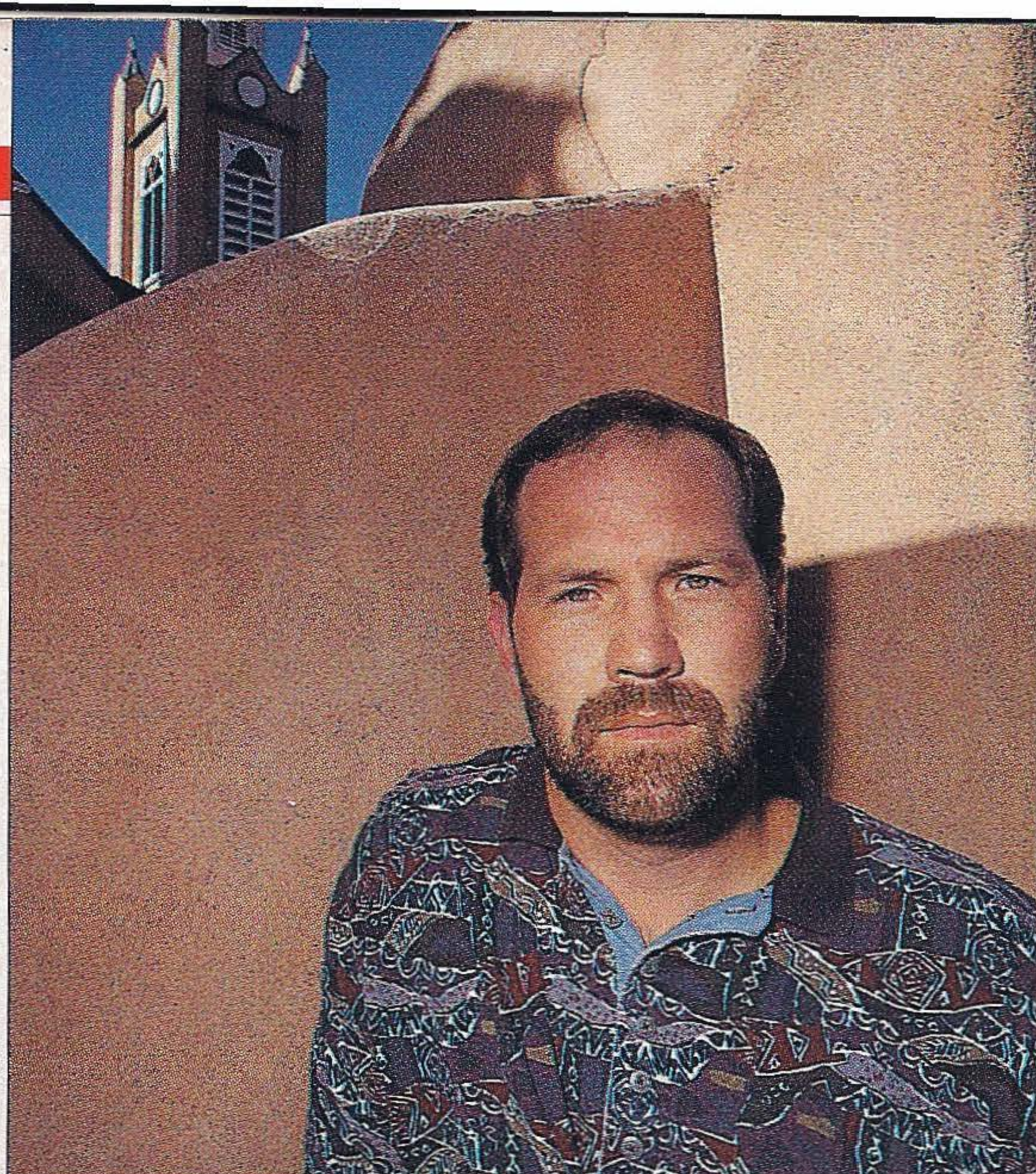
How did the church allow itself to get into this position? Part of the explanation is historic: in the not-so-distant past, claims of child abuse were not taken as seriously as they are today. And that's as true for schoolteachers as for clerics. Also, the church clearly felt—and feels—a duty to its priests. These are, after all, Christians who celebrate the possibility of redemption and forgiveness. And the church has a system of rules—canon laws—that require care and due process in the filing of charges. Sadly, these attitudes and procedures allowed the scandal to grow. In the case of Father Holley, for instance, good intentions paved the road to disaster. In a sworn affidavit he filed last month, Holley says that his "psycho-sexual disorder" first appeared in 1962 when he was just a young assistant pastor in the diocese of Worcester, Mass.

"On at least two occasions," he says, his bishop called him in to discuss "the allegations . . . that I had sexually molested boys in the . . . parishes." Holley was cautioned, he says, against causing a "scandal." In 1968, the bishop sent Holley to a priest-psychiatrist, claiming he had molested two teenage boys. A month later he was transferred to another parish and instructed to see a doctor "on a regular basis." The next year he checked himself into a psychiatric institute. Upon release, the bishop refused him a parish assignment. In 1971, the bishop sent him off for help again, this time to a church-run treatment center in New Mexico. A cover letter from the bishop expresses doubt that Holley will be able "to resume an effective ministry for a long time, if ever."

That mild warning wasn't heeded. Once in New Mexico, according to his affidavit, Holley was sent to a residence where he received little therapy. He says that almost immediately he was given weekend assignments in Albuquerque's surrounding parishes. His supervisor

sent positive reports back to Massachusetts. In 1972, with the approval of the Worcester diocese, Holley started working in Alamogordo, and, as the criminal case showed, his pattern of child abuse resumed. Besides his jail term, Holley and the church face at least 17 civil actions brought by Bruce Pasternack, an Albuquerque lawyer. The church said it could not comment.

Warnings of cases such as these were raised at the highest level of the American church. In 1985, two priests, one a canon lawyer, the other a psychiatrist,



DAN PEEBLES

Two thirds say abusive priests are a serious problem

wrote a prescient and alarming report for the semiannual meeting of the bishops. According to Jason Berry, author of a history of the sexual-abuse scandal called "Lead Us Not Into Temptation," the report called for more serious counseling, recommended that guilty priests be removed from the church and urged the bishops not to cover up. The report was largely ignored and now, says Berry, "the church is in a historical crisis."

As the scandal drags on, it has become subject to exaggeration. Some key questions:

Is child abuse a disease of the celibate, Catholic clergy? The short answer is no. Until recently, children were taught to stay away from strange men wearing raincoats, not Roman collars, and that advice is still sound. "Pedophiles cut across all socioeconomic, educational and professional groups," says Dr. William Foote, a forensic psychologist in Albuquerque. In addition, says Margretta Dwyer of the University of Minnesota's Sex Offender Treatment Program, research shows that at least one third of pedophiles are married. The problem—or fear of the problem—is now held so widely that next month the Boy Scouts will hold a national conference on the prevention of abuse. "Child abuse is a problem that affects organizations that deal with youth," says spokesman Greg Graze. "The Scouts remain far safer than the outside world, but we can't afford to turn our backs on the issue."

"Unfortunately, pedophilia is ecumenical," says Episcopal priest Margaret Graham, who served as president of the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse before she was ordained. Indeed, the Cranston, R.I.-based Survivor Connections group has tallied reports of 508 cases of alleged clerical abuse of youngsters. While most involve Catholic priests,

Like Noel Clark, some victims no longer suffer in silence

their records include charges lodged against Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist and Greek Orthodox clergy. But in at least one sense, there may be an unexpected connection between celibacy and child abuse, according to Dr. James Gill, a Jesuit and psychiatrist at the Institute of Living in Hartford, Conn. "Just like a criminal might become a policeman, some young people deep down fear their sexual inclinations and think the ambience and lifestyle of the priesthood will protect them from acting out their sexual urges."

Are the priests accused of abuse in fact pedophiles? Actually, nearly all fall into a different category of perversion, technically known as "ephebophilia." The difference has to do with age and development. Pedophiles are attracted to prepubescent children; ephebophiles are attracted to youngsters in puberty or just emerging. The

NEWSWEEK POLL Do you or do other Catholics you know personally use artificial birth control?

63% Yes
24% No

Do you personally know any Catholic woman who has had an abortion?

34% Yes
62% No

THE NEWSWEEK POLL OF CATHOLICS, AUG 3-5, 1993

appeal, explains Brainard Hines, a Miami sexual-abuse counselor, "is the innocence of a child in a more adult body." Nearly all the abusers are men; most victims are boys.

Can priest abusers be cured? Professional counselors compare the illness to alcoholism or drug addiction: tendencies that can be arrested but never fully eradicated. Counseling, group therapy, behavior modification, sex-suppressant drugs, even electric shock all form elements in a treatment plan. But the church and its therapists have learned two important lessons: don't expect to solve the problem through prayer alone, and don't reassign errant priests to work with kids.

Is the church screening seminarians more effectively? By all accounts, it is. The

church has been helped by advances in psychological testing that are aimed at uncovering potential sexual abusers. "It's like night and

day," says Father Ron Wolf, chancellor of the Santa Fe archdiocese. "We're taking a laser-beamed eye at people who want to enter our seminary." And, he says, the archdiocese now demands to know about any history of sexual misconduct of priests seeking to transfer in. "In the old days, we didn't even ask," he says.

Will there be more scandals? Yes. In October, the trial of ex-priest James Porter is due to begin in Massachusetts. He's charged with 41 counts of sexual molestation, and has pleaded not guilty. (In related civil suits; the church has reportedly already settled 68 claims for \$5 million.) The Porter trial will revive the issue because in many respects his case brought the scandal to national attention. In May 1992, police investigators say Porter told them that while he was a priest in New England he had molested many children. After that disclosure, 127 adults stepped forward, asserting that they had been some of his victims. In December, Porter was convicted for molesting his daughter's teenage babysitter in Minnesota. His new trial will be well covered by the media and may lead to other cases. Law firms around the country have developed specialties in suing the church; in one case, plaintiffs even used the federal racketeering law, alleging an official cover-up of sexual abuse by priests.

It is some comfort for the church that nearly all these cases involve old-school priests and years-old crimes. The wounds to the victims are deep, the stain on the vestments indelible. Fair or not, the sins of the Fathers will continue to be visited upon a new generation of clergy and congregants.

ARIC PRESS with CAROLYN FRIDAY in Boston, NINA BIDDLE in Albuquerque, TODD BARRETT in Chicago, SUSAN MILLER in Miami and bureau reports