

AFTER THE FALL

Faced with lawsuits and struggling to treat clerics accused of sexual abuse, the Catholic Church lags behind in forging a policy on priestly pedophilia



CALIFORNIA: The founder of the Santa Barbara Boys Choir, the Rev. Robert Van Handel, left, in 1986, was arrested in March on charges of molesting an unnamed seminary student.

By HOWARD CHUA-EOAN

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

—Jesus, according to Matthew's Gospel

OVER A PERIOD OF 14 YEARS, FATHER John Hanlon of St. Mary's in Plymouth, Massachusetts, would occasionally take boys under his charge to a nude beach. It was, a lawyer would later claim, the parish priest's way "to desensitize" them to their own nakedness. Hanlon, however, would subject his wards to

more dissolute initiations. He sexually abused 10 of them, ranging in age from 12 to 15, including William Wood, now 27. Eleven years of shame and silence passed before Wood realized "I couldn't deal with it anymore. I was drinking and dreaming. I was totally violent. I loaded a gun and originally planned to kill him. But I was too drunk to drive. I called the police, and they took it from there." Hanlon, now 65, denied the charges, but last week a jury in Plymouth County found the priest guilty, and he was sentenced to three concurrent life terms for the rape of Wood. Said district attorney William O'Malley: "He's a pedophile who happens to be a priest. The rape of a child involves some element of

betrayal of trust, whether it's a boy scout leader or a high school coach."

The harsh judgment on Hanlon is only the latest chapter in a plague of lawsuits that is bedeviling the Roman Catholic Church in America. The most famous case of sexual-abuse charges brought against a Catholic priest was dropped when the accuser of Chicago's Joseph Cardinal Bernardin admitted on Feb. 28 that he was not positive that the abuse, which he had remembered under hypnosis, had actually occurred. However, the church still faces hundreds of lawsuits around the country. Roderick MacLeish Jr., a Boston lawyer involved in civil actions against alleged child abusers, claims that of the 400 active cases handled by his firm, 250 involve clergy—and the vast majority of them belong to the Catholic Church.

Over the last few years, the church has been forced to pay out tens of millions of dollars in fines and settlements. Meanwhile, if they are not subjects of criminal investigation, most fallen priests are sent into therapy and are either retired or dispatched to posts that do not put them into regular contact with children. "I don't believe the church should dump pedophiles out onto the street," says Bishop John Kinney, head of the Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. "We have a responsibility for them. The church should be able to find some way to care for them."

Nonetheless, the church still has not designed an effective nationwide policy to remedy its troubles. While pedophilia is considered a grievous sin, it is also seen as disobedience to the celibacy rule. The American Catholic Church does not even have a grasp of the numerical dimensions of the situation. How many pedophilia cases is the church dealing with? "I don't know," says Bishop Kinney. "We don't have the statistics yet." Each of the 188 dioceses in the U.S., he explains, is its own de facto principality, reporting directly to Rome. Thus, Kinney says, the U.S. bishops' organization cannot easily impose its will on any of them. Each diocese is also its own corporation and thus an attractive target for lawsuits. Does the church know how much money has been paid to settle claims of sexual abuse? "I don't know," repeats Kinney. "There has been no great effort to get at that figure." Estimates range from \$60 million to an astronomical \$500 million. Two weeks ago, a jury in Pennsylvania ruled that the Altoona-Johnstown diocese had to pay \$1.57 million to a man who was sexually assaulted when he was a youngster by a local parish priest. The jury said the diocese was responsible because it deliberately ignored complaints of abuse.

The church has usually preferred to settle in secret and hush up scandal. Accord-

ing to a well-placed church insider, over the past quarter-century, at least five U.S. Catholic bishops were accused of sexual involvement with boys under 18. In each instance the bishop was deemed guilty by officialdom, called on the carpet but not removed from his post. Information about each case was restricted to a small circle of church officials in Rome and the U.S. Today the hierarchy can still resist suggestions to learn more about pedophilia. For example, there are no good data on pedophile recidivism. Dr. Leslie Lothstein of the Institute of Living in Hartford, Connecticut, proposed to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops three years ago that a study be conducted to learn, once and for all, what the rate is among pedophiles. The bishops declined the idea, according to Lothstein.

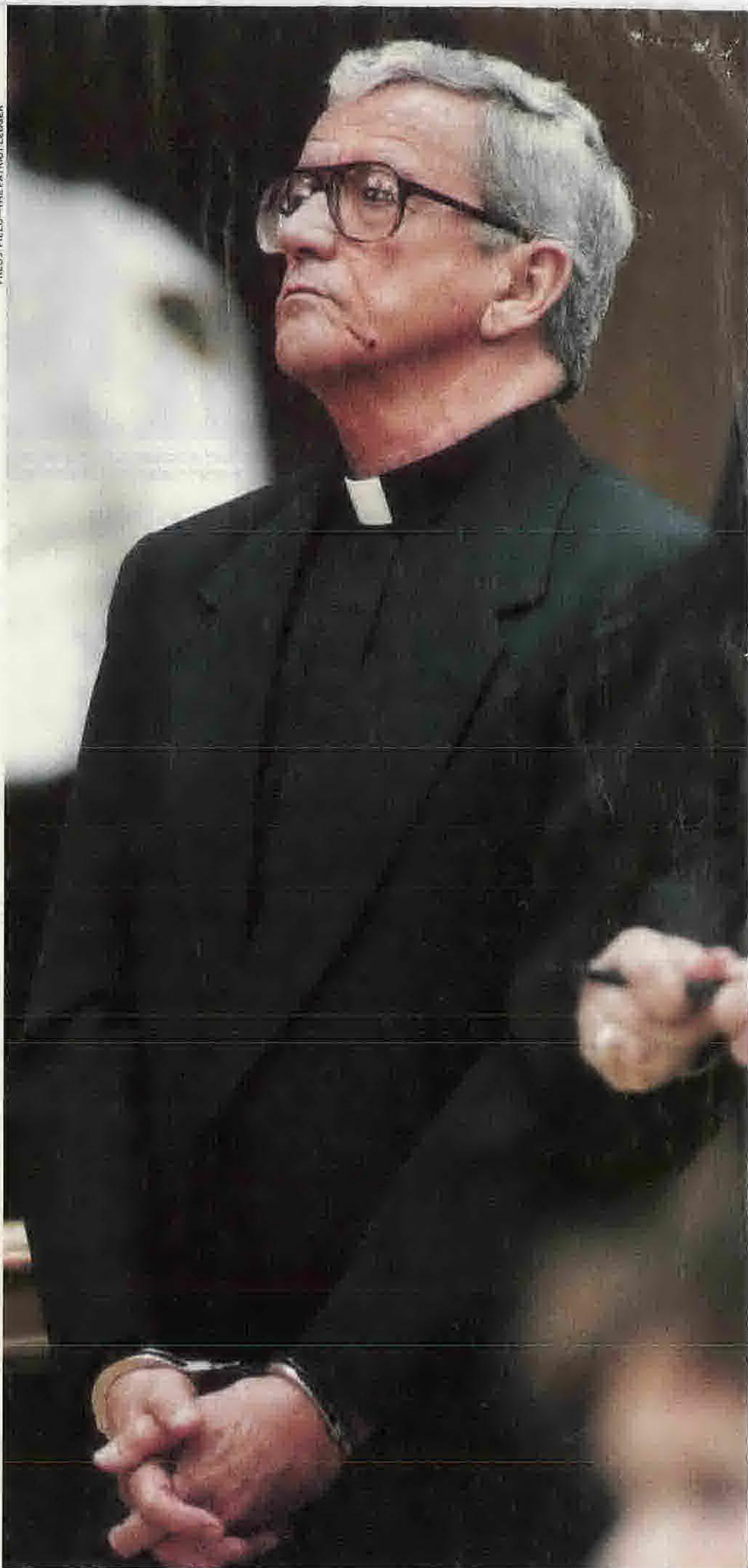
Furthermore, the church applies no set psychological standard for the selection of priests. Virtually every seminary uses some kind of test today to help identify the most obvious cases of potential pedophilia. (The test most often mentioned is the Minnesota Multi-Phasic Personality Inventory.) Still, says the Rev. Canice Connors, director of the St. Luke Institute in Suitland, Maryland, a treatment center for priests with psychological problems, there are dioceses today where "if you're 18 and breathing, you're in." The church may have a practical reason not to set too rigorous a standard for applicants: their ranks are thinning. In 1966 the number of preordination seminarians was 8,361; by 1992 it had plummeted to 3,651, a 56.3% drop.

"There is a major dispute about whether or not it [sexual abuse] is a moral question," says Connors. "As long as Rome sees it only as a moral violation of the celibate commitment," little will change. Says Dr. Gene Abel, a psychiatrist who last spring participated in a church-sponsored think tank on sexual abuse by clergy: "I was startled. They didn't talk about pedophilia. They talked about celibacy. They hadn't looked into pedophilia. They hadn't conceptualized it that way."

For the most part, the Catholic Church uses two treatment centers in America for pedophilic priests: St. Luke Institute in Maryland and the facility operated by the Servants of the Paraclete in Jemez Springs, New Mexico. At St. Luke the regimen involves breaking down denial and incorporates 12-step programs to control sexual addictions. It also provides drug therapy involving Depo-Provera, a synthetic compound, similar to the female hormone progesterone that lowers the sex drive. In its nine years St. Luke has treated 137 priests for pedophilia and ephebophilia, the sexual

MASSACHUSETTS: Father John Hanlon in Plymouth Superior Court last week as he was sentenced to three concurrent life terms. He will be eligible for parole in 15 years.

FRED J. FIELD—THE PATRIOT-LEADER



obsession with postpubescent children. The center operated by the Servants of the Paraclete has treated about 400 clergymen for "psychosexual issues" over the past 12 years.

Pedophilia and ephebophilia "are not curable but can be contained," explains Curtis Bryant, in-patient director at St. Luke. After treatment, patients are re-assigned and put under direct supervision of local bishops. St. Luke insists that none are placed in positions where they will come into contact with children. What happens if a patient is seen cruising a playground? "We consider that a relapse," says Dr. Stephen Montana, director of St. Luke's out-patient services. There is no guarantee against recidivism. Indeed, at the center run by the Servants of the Paraclete, several former patients committed abuses after their release. One of these was James Porter, a patient in 1967, who was charged by 21 Minnesotans of molesting them. Sued by Porter's victims, the Servants of the Paraclete, while admitting no wrongdoing, eventually agreed to pay an average of \$21,000 to each victim.

Already the dioceses are being adversely affected by squeamish insurance companies that expected church liabilities to include only tumbles down rain-soaked steps. Now they are reluctant to extend coverage and even to remit payment for expensive lawsuits. New Mexico's Santa Fe archdiocese has settled 48 cases within the past year against priests who served there. Some insurers, however, are stonewalling over payments. Just before Christmas, Archbishop Michael Sheehan claimed that bankruptcy loomed and asked for added financial assistance from parishioners at all 91 parishes in the archdiocese.

The diocese-by-diocese approach has created a babel of reactions. Rather than go into the problem piecemeal, says Lisa Cahill, professor of ethics at Boston College's theology department, "the missing piece is for the church to take responsibility as an institution." At the moment, however, Rome considers pedophilia a local American problem.

In the face of expensive court proceedings, says Cahill, "the mind-set is, first, how to respond effectively to a lawsuit. They think about undermining the credibility of witnesses as opposed to really giving people a sense that they are being heard. The first thing victims want is recognition from the church in an immediate, honest way. Too often it's 'See my lawyer.' The church will probably be better served by exhibiting less belligerence and greater openness. Says Connors: "It's the lie that is killing us. You can't lie and expect change. This issue can't thrive without secrecy." —*Reported by Sam Allis/Boston, Richard N. Ostling/New York and Elizabeth Taylor/Albuquerque*



SILENCED? Contradicting his former employers, DeNoble (right, with Mele) said of nicotine, "There's an overwhelming body of evidence that it does produce an addiction in humans"

■ INVESTIGATIONS

Is That Smoke, or Do I Smell A Rat?

Two scientists say their research was snuffed out by Philip Morris

By SOPHFRONIA SCOTT GREGORY

THIS IS A TALE OF RATS AND MEN. FIRST the House committee hearings on the effects of smoking saw a procession of tobacco-industry executives standing shoulder to shoulder, swearing up and down that their products are not addictive. Then, last week, the laboratory rats testified otherwise—by way of two researchers, Victor DeNoble and Paul Mele. Before the committee, the duo outlined years of secretive addiction experiments done at the behest of Philip Morris in the 1980s, work that was later allegedly suppressed.

In 1980 DeNoble and Mele were hired to find a substitute for nicotine that would have a less harmful effect on the heart. Philip Morris insisted on intense secrecy, so much so that laboratory rats were smuggled into the Richmond, Virginia, facility sometimes under cover of night. The researchers were instructed not to discuss the project with anyone.

DeNoble and Mele set up an experiment in which rats could administer nico-

tine to themselves by pressing one of two levers. DeNoble said rats would thump the bar as often as 90 times in 12 hours to get the nicotine, vs. just 12 times a day for a saline solution. Even more telling, the researchers found that for nicotine combined with acetaldehyde, a product of burning cigarettes, the rats would press 500 times in 12 hours as opposed to 120 times in 12 hours for nicotine alone. "Our results demonstrated for the first time that nicotine shared common characteristics with other drugs that are delivered intravenously," says DeNoble.

It was not welcome news to the industry. At about the same time—the summer of 1983—the family of Rose Cipollone, a lifetime cigarette smoker who died of lung cancer, had filed suit against Philip Morris and other tobacco companies, contending that they falsely represented the health risks of cigarettes. Philip Morris flew DeNoble and Mele to New York City to brief company executives on their research. According to Mele, however, when DeNoble explained that the rat experiment was a strong indication of the addictiveness of nicotine, one executive said, "Why should I risk a billion-dollar industry on a rat pressing a lever?" (In 1992 the Cipollones dropped the case.)

The scientists returned to Richmond only to hear talk of moving the experiments out of Virginia and as far away as Switzerland. Then in April 1984 a supervisor summoned DeNoble and ordered him to turn off the machines, kill the rats and turn over his notes. A few days later, DeNoble came to work and found that "the animals were gone; the data was gone. Everything was gone." Attempts by DeNoble and Mele to publish their findings were blocked.

As a result, a safer cigarette may have been lost. The researchers say they developed the nicotine substitute they were hired to find: 2'-methylnicotine, which supposedly provides a nicotine-like high without distressing the heart. The discovery was never pursued.

—*Reported by Dick Thompson/Washington*