

SCANDAL IN THE CHURCH: Prelates Speak Out

BOSTON

Besieged Cardinal Discusses 'Anger and Broken Trust'

By PAM BELLUCK

BOSTON, April 21 — In his first public appearance in two weeks, Boston's archbishop, Cardinal Bernard F. Law, gave his most direct speech to date about the sex abuse scandal crippling the church, acknowledging that many people feel "anger and broken trust" toward him and drawing parallels between the church crisis and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"Some have likened the situation facing the Catholic Church in Boston and across the country to last year's Sept. 11 tragedy, a crisis which shocks the heart and soul and which must spark immediate and decisive changes in order to prevent possible recurrence in the future," the cardinal said at a Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross here.

"Regrettably, I and many others have been late to recognize the inadequacy of past policies, the dimensions of the crisis and the changes required to restore a sense of trust. The repeated public calls for my resignation are a clear signal that many feel my leadership efforts in

long he would stay.

Today's statement was the closest the cardinal has come to responding to the anger and betrayal felt by Catholics across the archdiocese, and the closest he has come to acknowledging some of the systemic changes many Catholics have been pressing for.

Calling the crisis "a wake-up call for the church," he said that he would tell those attending the unusual and hastily called convocation in Rome that "the crisis of clergy sexual abuse of minors is not just a media-driven or public perception concern in the United States, but is a very serious issue undermining the mission of the Catholic Church."

He said he would call for "greater openness" to ensure the protection of children, and would make the point that "the laity should have a stronger voice in the life of the church." Those are issues that have come up repeatedly in the wake of the scandal.

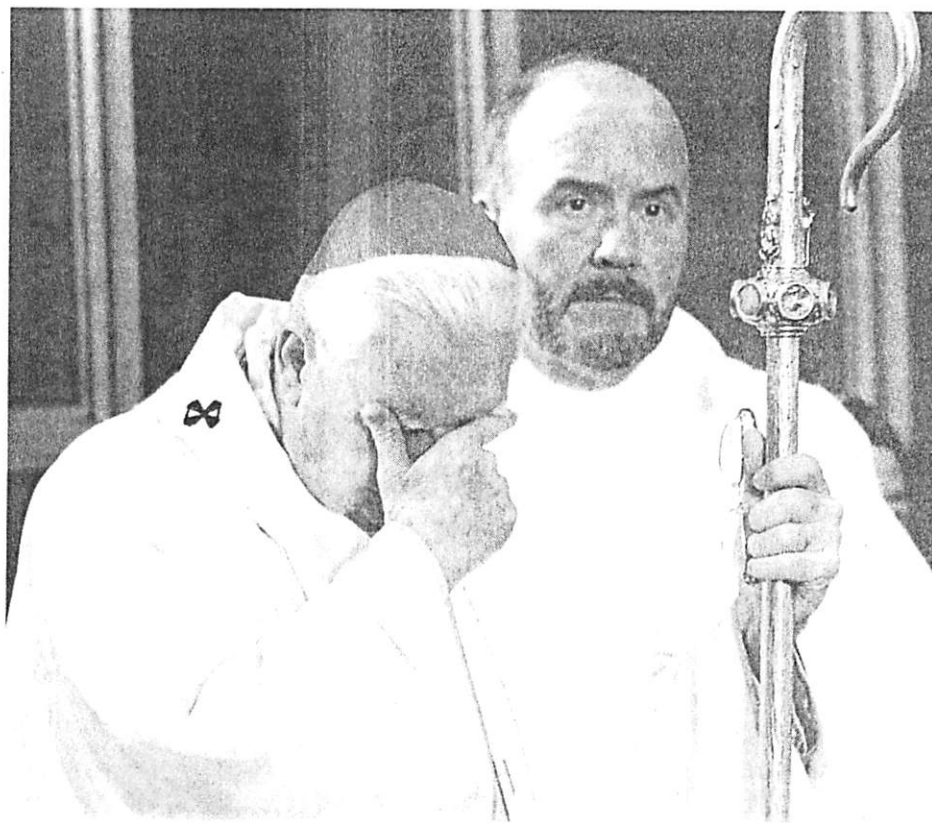
"Some critics will say this is just an attempt to mollify the critics by hitting the right notes," said Stephen J. Pope, chairman of Boston College's theology department. "Those who are more optimistic are going to say this is the beginning of a new Bernard Law."

The cardinal referred three times to calls for his resignation, saying that "many feel I cannot effectively fix the problems for the future," but he did not mention his own plans to stay or go.

"Despite the anger and broken trust that many feel toward me, and despite perceptions that next week is simply a gathering of aged, conservative cardinals and Vatican officials," he said, "please know that as long as I am in a position to do so, I will work tirelessly to address this crisis and to underscore its severity."

The cardinal's address drew a standing ovation from the half-filled cathedral, where many, including critics of Cardinal Law, had come because the Mass was dedicated to couples who were celebrating their 25th or 50th wedding anniversaries. Some, like Mary Van Neste, 61, and her daughter Brianne, 28, came deliberately to show support for him.

"It's great the way he's taking it



Reuters

Cardinal Bernard F. Law, left, addressed the sexual-abuse scandal roiling his archdiocese at a Mass yesterday.

all on, and not striking back," Ms. Van Neste said.

But outside the cathedral stood about 30 protesters, including one who said through a bull horn: "Indict Law now! Throw the bum in jail!"

Joseph Gallagher, a member of St. Julia's parish in Weston, where another sexually abusive priest, John J. Geoghan, was assigned, said the cardinal "is so isolated."

"Certainly the fact that he delivers letters that are so unbelievably disingenuous suggests to me that he's more isolated than we could have imagined," he said. "Now he's gone two more weeks without seeing anybody and I can't imagine he's had an epiphany in that time."

The leaders of the New York, Baltimore, Miami and Detroit archdioceses, part of the group of 13 American cardinals meeting with Vatican officials on Tuesday and Wednesday, also conveyed messages of encouragement and explanation to their

congregations today.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C., spoke on television about his hopes for the meeting in Rome, saying it should give Pope John Paul II the chance to convey his concern for the victims, his disappointment in letting down faithful Catholics, and his pain over the tarnishing of the church's image and its good works.

Just before Cardinal Adam Maida of Detroit boarded a plane to Rome today, he told reporters that he hoped this week's meetings would lead to a more comprehensive policy to protect the "little ones." "I hope that when I come back from Rome I can initiate some things that will make stronger our commitment to the safety of our children and the love we have for them," he said.

In parishes across the Archdiocese of Detroit today, priests read a letter from Cardinal Maida in which he acknowledged the mistakes of

church leaders, "here and elsewhere," and asked those who have been abused by priests for forgiveness.

In a taped message played during Sunday Masses at the 155 parishes of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Cardinal William H. Keeler urged Catholics to report cases of suspected abuse by priests.

"We are committed to vigilance, with your assistance," Cardinal Keeler said in a five-minute address. "If you are aware of instances of wrongdoing, please let us know. We stand with you in unwavering concern for the safety of our children."

He asked parishioners in the archdiocese, with 484,000 Catholics in the Baltimore area, to pray for victims of "the crime and sin of sexual child abuse."

"Prayer, compassion and assistance for the victims of abuse are essential," he said, "but not enough."

A cardinal says many find his leadership lacking.

this area have been inadequate."

It was Cardinal Law's first public appearance since the release of the most incriminating documents in the scandal, which showed that he allowed a priest with a known background of sexual abuse, the Rev. Paul R. Shanley, to continue ministering, not only in Boston, but also in California and New York.

Cardinal Law left for Rome shortly after the Mass.

A week ago, after writing a letter to priests saying he would stay on "as long as God gives me the opportunity," Cardinal Law made a secret visit to Rome to discuss the scandal and the possibility of his resignation. On his return, he reiterated his intention to remain as archbishop, although the statement left room for ambiguity on the question of how