

Resignations, then a housecleaning

By SHERYL McCARTHY
Newsday

IT'S TIME for them to go: All the old, self-serving men in the Catholic Church who, while the sparks of sexual abuse by the priests in their charge were flickering all around them, bobbed and weaved and hid the evidence, and fiddled until now the whole church is going up in flames. Who are they?

Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston, to begin with. Under Law's leadership, persistent allegations against the likes of the Revs. John Geoghan, Paul Shanley and Joseph Birmingham were ignored, covered up and dismissed, and the priests were shifted from job to job, where they abused more children and teen-agers.

I'm talking about Cardinal Law's lieutenants, John B. McCormack, now bishop of Manchester, N.H.; Robert J. Banks, now bishop of Green Bay, Wis.; William Murphy, now bishop of Rockville Centre on Long Island, N.Y.; Alfred Hughes, now archbishop of New Orleans; and Thomas V. Daily, now bishop of Brooklyn in New York. As auxiliary bishops, they handled the complaints against the priests more directly and were more privy to the sordid details than Cardinal Law.

Daily was forced only by bad publicity and the Brooklyn district attorney to agree last week to hand over the names of priests in his diocese who've been accused of sexual misconduct over the years.

I'm certainly talking about Cardinal Edward Egan, the archbishop of New York, who was cavalier about reports of sexually abusive priests when he was bishop of Bridgeport, Conn. The most recent case to come to light involved a 15-year-old girl who was impregnated by a local priest. The priest, who should have been charged with statutory rape, was instead allowed to quietly resign, while the girl was fired from her receptionist job with the archdiocese.

As charges of widespread sexual abuse by priests in Boston and Bridgeport surfaced around Easter, Egan remained silent for days, forced into tepid moralizing only as the public outrage licked closer to his heels.

I'm definitely talking about the pope, a kindly and well-meaning man. Whether or not Pope John Paul II realized the full extent of the sexual abuse, he surely knew about the payoffs — more than \$30 million to settle charges against one Boston priest alone.

These princes of the church have hidden behind the charade of showing compassion toward errant priests, who in their view just needed a little rest and some therapy. They run a huge bureaucracy that's more concerned with protecting its reputation and hiding ugly secrets than with the pain of the children and teenagers who were picked off by these priests, and of their families.

These old men are like the captains of most industries, who are unwilling to police themselves. They're no different from Kenneth Lay or Jeffrey Skilling at Enron, who either claimed ignorance of the crimes that were going on around them or found ingenuous ways to cover them up.

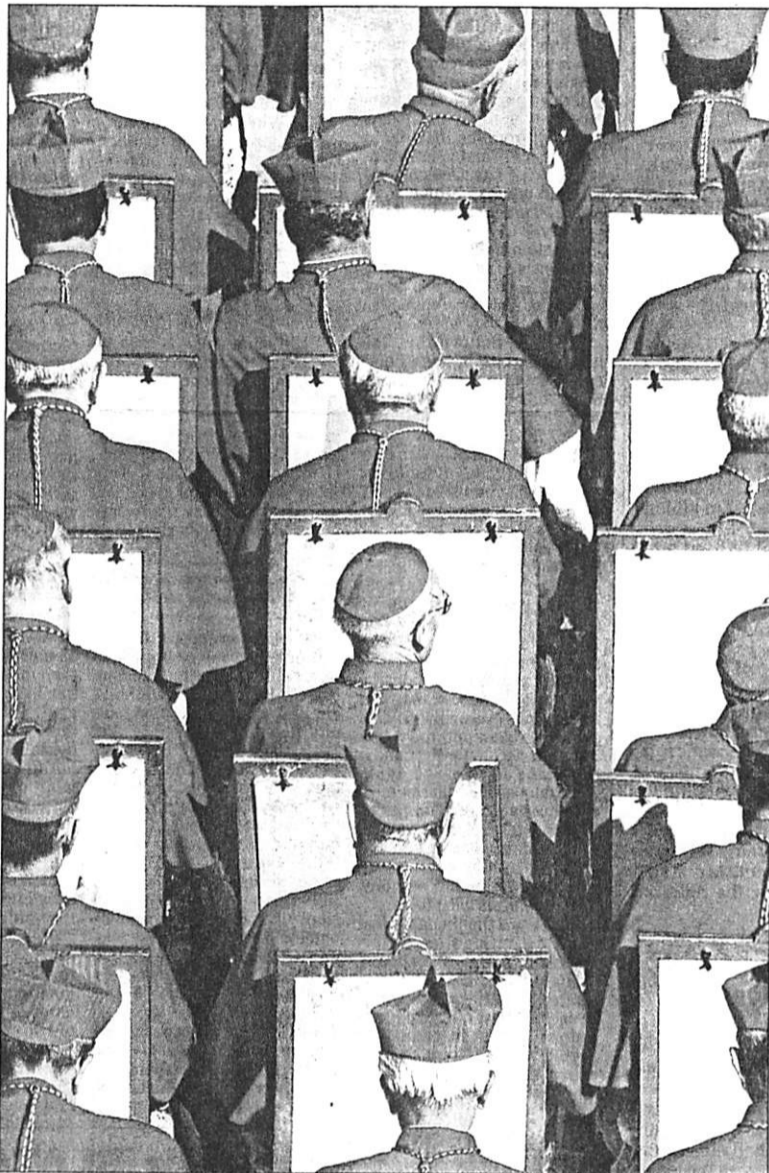
They remind me of Bernard Bergman, the notorious New York nursing-home czar who donned a yarmulke and read aloud from the Torah during his trial for making the elderly miserable in his scabrous nursing homes. They're like the heads of the big tobacco companies, who lied through their teeth when Congress was investigating the effects of nicotine on smokers, and like the Ford and Firestone executives, who hid the evidence that their trucks and tires were a fatal combination.

And, as with the corporate crooks, the revelations about the church came not from the higher-ups, but from the newspapers, district attorneys and a handful of lower-level priests who risked their jobs by coming forward.

These tarnished bishops and cardinals need to step down, like the Florida bishop who recently resigned after being outed about a longago sexual liaison.

Their exits would provide some small balm for the hundreds of young people who were violated while church leaders looked the other way. And perhaps the bishops and cardinals who follow will clean house, changing the qualifications for becoming a priest, for a start.

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Members of the Roman Catholic Church's College of Cardinals, listening to the Pope speak outside St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Therapists, others also violate sexual trust of their patients

By LEON HOFFMAN
Special to Newsday

'SEXUAL ABUSE of minors by priests is once again making national headlines. No news story about the church is more shocking and scandalous...

This expression of shock, in an editorial in the Feb. 18, 2002, issue of *America*, the weekly Jesuit publication, reflects not only the reaction of many Catholics, but also of much of the public to the growing pedophilia scandal in the priesthood.

Common wisdom, outside the church hierarchy at least, is that priests' sexual issues — their struggles with celibacy and the pervasiveness of homosexuality in a culture of celibacy — must have led them all astray. But sexual misconduct by persons in positions of authority occurs all the time in many different venues, and the tendency everywhere is to conceal it — in families, the workplace, schools and doctors' and therapists' offices. Neither the abuse nor the cover-up is really so surprising.

We have read about a cantor in New York accused of molesting his young nephew; a female teacher accused of raping a blind male student; coaches involved romantically with pubescent athletes; patients disclosing abuse by their psychiatrists and analysts. Only the imminence of Sept. 11 removed the Gary Condit-Chandra Levy tragedy from the front pages,

and only the Mideast conflagration competes with the Catholic Church for today's lead story. Considered in this context, celibacy has to be, at best, only a partial explanation for priests' inappropriate behavior.

What connects their problem to other instances of sexual abuse is a dynamic that psychologists and psychoanalysts call "transference," a phenomenon that occurs in all interpersonal relationships, including the one between the therapist himself and his client. When a person in need asks an authority figure for help, he or she often ascribes magic-like powers to the helping person. The feelings seem to be connected to our experience of childhood relationships to parental figures, particularly the all-embracing, absolute trust an infant has for his mother or other early caretakers.

As children and adolescents grow, they interact with trustworthy benevolent parent-surrogates, such as priests, rabbis, teachers and coaches on whom they can rely for guidance and comfort. The psychoanalyst Erik Erikson taught us that, without such relationships, a sense of mistrust may haunt a person throughout life. In adulthood, we continue to need trusting bonds, particularly in times of stress, when we turn to authorities such as therapists,

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clergy or supervisors for emotional support and guidance. The greater the distress, the more power the person imbues on the authority figure.

Potential abusers take advantage of this central human need for trusting relationships. While abuse takes many forms, including physical and emotional battering, it is often sexual. This doesn't mean that the abuse is just about sexuality, though. It is also about boundaries being crossed by these parental figures, who invade the victim's personal space and violate the trust conferred on them, inflicting harm that is often irreparable.

A great deal of abuse involves stimulation of the sexual organs, because of the great physical and psychological pleasure this provides. In all of us there is an ongoing struggle between instinctual forces that press for immediate erotic gratification, without any sense of the needs of other people, and those forces (mainly from parents and our social contract) that urge us to delay gratification until a more appropriate time. Abusers cannot delay their erotic desires.

In the case of priests, since sexual feelings and drives are central to everyone's life, adapting to celibacy is an important and potentially very difficult task. And in response to the scandal, seminarians are now undergoing criminal background checks, being interviewed about their sexual history and being offered courses on sexuality and celibacy.

But priests also need to understand the power of transference and how their parishioners will view them as authoritative, omniscient and omnipotent parental figures, directly or metaphorically saying, "Father, please help me!" and "Father, forgive me for my sins!"

Young seminarians need to learn not to be overwhelmed by nor abuse the power imbued on them by parishioners. Because people in need are emotionally vulnerable, they are in a poor position to advocate for themselves should the boundaries of the professional relationship break down.

Sometimes the less powerful person even will appear to invite abusive behavior. Acting in a flirtatious manner — and this applies to a parishioner, patient, student or employee — may be a way of trying to attract the more powerful person's affection. The person in need may even wish, consciously or unconsciously, to have the superior respond in a physical or sexual manner.

We see this kind of confusion expressed in trials, where a person accused of abuse will argue that the personal interaction was "consensual" or that he or she was "seduced" by the victim. These descriptions are misnomers — not only because the authority figure may have real supervisory authority over the other person, as in the case of an employer or coach — but because the person in the subordinate position often attributes to the authority figure power far beyond the latter's actual responsibilities.

Ethical guidelines have been developed by the helping professions — teachers, doctors, psychoanalysts, clergy — to avoid abuse of trust. Still, too many lapses occur, either from loss of judgment or because of a personal crisis in the life of the healing person. In such cases, the authority figure can become needy himself and develop inappropriate ideas about the trusting relationship.

Just as the church stonewalled at first, bystanders often will discount, deny or minimize what they see and hear in an abusive situation, despite

clear signals that something untoward is happening to a child, a student, a patient or an employee. With some justification, there is a fear of sounding a false alarm, as has occurred many times when child-abuse allegations against a teacher or day-care worker proved to be the result of the malleability and suggestibility of children as witnesses.

Colleagues often are reluctant to interfere because of their own complex relationship to the abuser, and the wall of silence can extend to friends and families of the victim, because of the feelings of anxiety, guilt and horror that these kinds of incidents arouse in us.

The solution is not to go on witch hunts, particularly in ambiguous situations. However, keeping track of obvious ongoing misbehaviors is a healthy reaction. When the ethical boundary is crossed, reporting and testimony becomes a way both to discipline perpetrators and deter potential abusers.

All of us need healers, mentors and supervisors at various times. Healers, too, will inevitably have to deal with crises in their personal lives. We cannot expect the healers to always be able to heal themselves; we cannot ignore early signs that a colleague is in trouble.

The openness with which the Catholic Church has been forced to deal with the problem of pedophilia can be a positive force, a model for other professions, so many of which are dealing with the same issue every day. First, we need to acknowledge that it isn't just the church's problem.

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