

Canadian Prelate Quits In Clerics' Sex Scandal

By JOHN F. BURNS, Special to The New York Times
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TORONTO, July 19— The Archbishop of Newfoundland has resigned after charges that the Roman Catholic Church's hierarchy ignored or failed to deal effectively with three years of scandal involving allegations of sexual abuse against altar boys, orphaned youths and others by Roman Catholic priests and church laymen.

The resignation of the Archbishop, Alphonsus L. Penney, comes as a total of 20 priests, former priests and Catholic laymen have been charged or convicted as a result of investigations of sexual abuse that began in 1987.

About half the charges have been placed against members of the Christian Brothers, a Catholic lay order that ran the Mount Cashel boys' orphanage in St. John's, the capital of Newfoundland, until it was closed under pressure from the scandal this year. An inquiry has heard evidence that boys as young as six were abused at the orphanage, on one occasion within hours of being admitted.

Newfoundland, an island province that is the easternmost landfall in North America, has been badly shaken by the scandal, as has the entire Catholic Church in Canada, which claims roughly half of Canada's 25.5 million people as adherents. While church officials have said the situation in Newfoundland is a special case, they have also said that steps are being taken to tighten vigilance against similar abuses elsewhere in Canada.

Church Attendance Falls

In Newfoundland, where one-third of the population of 570,000 is Catholic, the scandal has rocked an institution that has exercised extensive power since the 17th century, when missionaries and priests accompanied Catholic settlers from France, and later from Ireland and Scotland.

But with attendance at many churches in Newfoundland reportedly falling as a result of the scandal, many Catholics say it will be years before the church retrieves popular trust. Some say the scandal has broken the church's influence on secular matters, much as the church lost authority in neighboring Quebec in the 1960's.











Last year, a judicial inquiry into activities at the Mount Cashel orphanage revealed physical and sexual abuse of boys, and also the failure of police and government officials to act decisively against the offenders over nearly 15 years. The orphanage inquiry is expected to publish its report this year. A separate police investigation has already resulted in charges against 26 people, including 10 of the lay brothers who ran the institution.

In the meantime, a separate church inquiry into the cases of five priests who have been charged with sexual offenses, or convicted of them, has concluded with a report that is harshly critical both of Archbishop Penney, the 65-year-old head of the Newfoundland church, and of the church hierarchy in general. The report charges that the church leaders ignored, rejected or failed to deal effectively with reports of sexual abuse by priests for years, and that any actions that were taken were motivated more by concern for the offending priests than for their victims.

The church inquiry, led by a former Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland, Gordon

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Winter, offered a scathing look at the way in which the church protected its priests, citing one instance in which a youth was denounced as "the scum of the cove" for accusing a cleric who was later convicted of sexual offenses. The report also condemned the priests involved, saying they had "abused their priestly status and power by acting out their regressed sexuality against children."

Three Cases Are Cited

Archbishop Penney has said he heard no allegations of sexual abuse until 1987, but the report cited three cases in which instances were said to have been brought to his attention, in 1979, 1984 and 1986.

The priest involved in the 1979 case, Kevin Bennett, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in May after pleading guilty to 36 charges of gross indecency. The mother who charged in 1986 that a priest had molested her infant son maintained, according to the church report, that Archbishop Penney had accused her of spreading gossip.

The church report urged the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, whose headquarters are in Ottawa, to "fully, directly, honestly and without reservation" examine the problems created by the requirement that priests be celibate.

But for now, Newfoundland's Catholics have been left to ponder Archbishop Penney's candid admissions in his resignation statement on Wednesday. "We are a sinful church," he said. "We are naked. Our anger, our pain, our anguish, our shame are clear to the whole world."

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