

Correspondent: Suing the Pope

Tx Date: 19th March 2002

This script was made from audio tape – any inaccuracies are due to voices being unclear or inaudible.

It was slightly amended in February 2010 in order to protect the identity of one of the contributors.

00.00.00

Music

00.00.05

Sarah Macdonald

Irish Catholic priest, Father Sean Fortune was a bullying, serial paedophile who preyed on young boys.

00.00.11

Music

00.00.16

Sarah Macdonald

His boss, Bishop Brendan Comiskey knew children were at risk but failed to protect them.

00.00.22

Music

00.00.25

Sarah Macdonald

These men have been denied justice.

00.00.27

Music

00.00.28

Sarah Macdonald

I just wanted to know why didn't you stop Sean

Fortune...

00.00.28

Bishop Comiskey

I'm going to have mass at half past six. I, I, I...

00.00.33

Sarah Macdonald

...abusing young boys? Bishop Comiskey?

00.00.35

Music

00.00.38

Sarah Macdonald

Bishop Comiskey won't give them answers. Now they're suing the Pope.

00.00.41

Correspondent Theme Music

00.00.52

Title Page

Suing the Pope

00.00.58

Waves crashing

00.01.15

Colm O'Gorman

I hate this. Right now, driving along in this car, I feel awful and I don't want to be here.

00.01.27

Waves crashing/music

00.01.37

Aston

COLM O'GORMAN

I really, really resent having to do this but I do feel like I have to because it hasn't been dealt with and there are

people who are still suffering because of this.

00.01.51

Music

00.02.02

Sarah Macdonald

Colm O'Gorman is a thirty-five year old Irishman living in London.

00.02.07

Sarah Macdonald

Today he is revisiting his birthplace, County Wexford on the south east coast of Ireland.

00.02.14

Sarah Macdonald

This Catholic priest, Father Sean Fortune, sexually abused Colm when he was fourteen years old, assaulting and raping him for two and half years.

00.02.25

Waves crashing

00.02.34

Sarah Macdonald

Colm had met Father Fortune just once when the priest came to his house and asked to take the young boy away for the weekend.

00.02.44

Sarah Macdonald

Such was the power of the Church in Ireland; no one questioned this unknown priest's motivations.

00.02.53

Colm O'Gorman

He would pick me up and be the priest in front of my mother and my family. Five minutes later in the car he'd have me perform oral sex on him. And then, five minutes after that ended, stop off and again be the priest and walk into somebody's house with me in tow behind.

00.03.18

Sarah Macdonald

In 1981 Poulfur, Fethard-on-Sea became Father Sean Fortune's first curacy. A rural fishing community of around two hundred families. It's conservative and predominantly Catholic.

00.03.33

Sarah Macdonald

The parish priest is all-powerful in this country where the Church and the state are closely intertwined.

00.03.44

Sarah Macdonald

The parishioners were quickly drawn in by the dashing energetic young cleric. He soon had them divided into thirty-two different organisations, the children into a score of youth groups.

0.03.56

Sarah Macdonald

But their delight turned to horror as Father Fortune saw to dominate every aspect of this community. He stripped the elderly of their savings, cursed the unborn babies of parents who defied him and preached from the altar against those who would not cede to his demands.

00.04.14

Gemma Hearne

His aim was certainly money and power. He was obsessed with money and power.

00.04.23

Sarah Macdonald

Gemma Hearne has lived in Fethard for thirty years. She watched Fortune's every move.

00.04.29

Aston

GEMMA HEARNE

His modus operandi was that he was going to heal and cure and say masses and he had all sorts of prayer services and healing services and it was all for money. He blessed boats; he got money. He did, everything he did was for money.

00.04.48

Sarah Macdonald

In the early eighties, unemployment was especially high in small communities like Fethard-on-Sea. Father

Fortune managed to coax more than a million pounds from government employment schemes for this tiny parish.

00.05.01

Sarah Macdonald

But he embezzled the funds, claiming for people who didn't exist and docking money from those who did.

00.05.08

Sarah Macdonald

But it was his overt interest in the boys, which began to worry the locals.

00.05.13

Gemma Hearne

He became very, very much involved in the youth club. He formed his own youth club.

00.05.19

Music

00.05.20

Gemma Hearne

He took them on retreats, allegedly, retreats and one of them being to Loftus Hall where I am told that it was horrific. That it was a mixed retreat and that they there had pillow fights and all sorts of orgies and he showed very, very explicit videos.

00.05.43

Music

00.05.45

Sarah Macdonald

In Ireland it would have been scandalous to defy a priest. But in Poulfur, as their sons became more withdrawn, parents turned to the Bishop for help. He did nothing.

00.05.56

Sarah Macdonald

Desperately, they wrote of their fears to the Pope's Ambassador to Ireland, the Papal Nuncio.

00.06.01

Music

00.06.09

Colm O'Gorman

The one thing that I always wanted was for somebody to take this back, for somebody to take responsibility, for somebody to say; actually, we should have done something here, we didn't.

00.06.21

Sarah Macdonald

When Doctor Brendan Comiskey became Bishop of Ferns in 1984 there was renewed hope that he would act against the now bizarre and dangerous behaviour of Father Sean Fortune.

00.06.33

Gemma Hearne

There were complaints every single day about Father Fortune in some shape or form.

00.06.39

Sarah Macdonald

And some of that would have been about sexual abuse of the children?

00.06.42

Gemma Hearne

Yes. Absolutely, absolutely. But see parents didn't realise, in the beginning, what was happening because they thought that here we have a great young man coming in.

00.06.56

Gemma Hearne

Nobody seemed to be able to do anything about it.

00.07.04

Sarah Macdonald

Doctor Brendan Comiskey is still the Bishop of Ferns. He's admitted being informed of allegations of child abuse against a number of priests, including Sean Fortune, when he was first appointed.

00.07.18

Gemma Hearne

I went to Bishop Comiskey, myself. I wrote to Bishop Comiskey first of all and I followed it up with a visit and

Bishop Comiskey, his first question to me at that visit; had I any reason to believe that Father Fortune was homosexual?

00.07.41

Music

00.07.50

Sarah Macdonald

Fortune trained for the priesthood in the seventies at Saint Peter's in the heart of Wexford. The priests and seminarians taught pupils at the school attached. Fortune learned more here than just ecclesiastical duties.

00.08.03

Music

00.08.11

Sarah Macdonald

It now looks like a paedophile ring, whether formally or informally, was operating within the seminary and for years exploiting the boys.

00.08.21

Sarah Macdonald

Father Donal Collins, the school principal and another priest were both later separately convicted of sexually abusing young children.

00.08.30

Aston

GER WALSH

Managing Director,
'Wexford People'

The diocese has had more than its fair share of problems in this regard. One has to wonder about the selection process for priests in this diocese and also, you know, what they were exposed to in, in, in the seminary.

00.08.51

Sarah Macdonald

Father Fortune used to teach Ger Walsh religious studies at school.

00.08.58

Ger Walsh

I would have been aware of his reputation and his bizarre

conduct really. It certainly, to us as, as teenage pupils at the time it would have been quite clear that this man wasn't, probably not fit for any position of responsibility, let alone to be a priest, to be ordained a priest. But despite that and despite all the, that was known about him, he went on and was ordained and was given a parish.

00.09.28

Sarah Macdonald

And it is clear that the Church knew of Sean Fortune's sexual predilection. He was exposed two years before his ordination when he was a scout leader in Wexford.

00.09.39

Aston

PAT JACKMAN

We went away on camp together with the scouts and we were in a tent one day and Sean started playing with one of the boys and when I say playing I don't mean football, he was interfering with him sexually in front of us. There was about, say there was about six kids in the tent ranging from about ten to twelve.

00.10.05

Sarah Macdonald

Allegations of indecency reached both Saint Peter's Seminary and Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland national headquarters.

00.10.13

Sarah Macdonald

The CBSI has told Correspondent that after informing the church hierarchy, Father Fortune was asked to remove himself from the association forever.

00.10.23

Sarah Macdonald

But at exactly the same time, Fortune was ordained and sent to Belfast to work with children. He immediately defied the scouting ban.

00.10.33

Aston

DAMIEN MacALEEN

He asked to play a game and the game was patting each other in the groin area. So I was maybe thirteen, fourteen, didn't know what I was at, so I agreed and thought it was a game. And then all of a sudden, like after a couple of minutes he started groping, you know

literally rubbing me up and that went on for another couple of minutes until I turned and said stop. So as I stood up he more or less tried to force me back to the ground.

00.11.04

Sarah Macdonald

Concerned about persistent rumours, a priest was despatched to ask questions about Father Fortune but clearly only in a cursory manner.

00.11.14

Damien MacAleen

He'd ask me the question; did I see any strange behaviour was going on with Father Fortune or any funny games, you know strange games? And I denied ever knowing anything about Father Fortune playing games, you know. It was just because my friend was there with him; I didn't want to get embarrassed.

00.11.38

Sarah Macdonald

Whatever was discovered, Father Fortune was pulled out of Belfast and given his own church and curacy; Saint Aiden's in Poulfur, Fethard-on-Sea.

00.11.56

Colm O'Gorman

The only sense that I can make of that is that a bunch of men who had powerful privileged positions were much more interested in protecting their power, their position and their institution than they were in any way in protecting the people that they were due to minister to or the people that they spoke of in terms of love or compassion. There's no love or compassion there. There's an absolute disrespect and disregard for people and it makes me sick.

00.12.25

Sarah Macdonald

Such abuse has become an international scandal.

00.12.28

Aston

Fr TOM DOYLE

It almost always happens to children or young adults, young adolescents who are very close to the Church. They are raised in a, in a church environment, they implicitly trust the Church and the hierarchical members, the Bishop, the priests. When they are sexually abused

by a priest it's a profound betrayal of trust.

00.12.49

Sarah Macdonald

Father Tom Doyle is an American Catholic priest. He was a rising star at the Vatican Embassy in Washington in the eighties when the first case of clerical abuse broke in the United States.

00.13.00

Music

00.13.03

Sarah Macdonald

As a canon law expert he watched as the Church moved to protect the priest and turn on the victims. He became an outspoken critic of the Church's response to child abuse and as a result was fired from his job.

00.13.19

Sarah Macdonald

He's now an army chaplain in Germany.

00.13.23

Father Tom Doyle

There's been very aggressive action taken by the institution against victims and their families when they have initiated law suits. Very aggressive action by the attorneys to try to, in a sense beat the people down. Parents and families who've made disclosures have been threatened, they've been intimidated, they've been, they've been, they've been put into a very fearful stance to try to coerce them into, into not going public.

00.13.56

Sarah Macdonald

Pat Jackman was eleven when he witnessed Father Fortune abusing boy scouts. As a fifteen year old student at Saint Peter's he was aware of the rumours surrounding not just Fortune but other priests as well.

00.14.09

Sarah Macdonald

Fortune ingratiated himself into Pat's family, a ploy he used with many of his victims. He became especially good friends with Pat's mother.

00.14.20

Aston

PAT JACKMAN

When he arrived at the house and my mum and dad weren't there either myself or my brother were potentially in trouble. I said something to my aunt and uncle, if this guy makes any sort of suggestion that we go away with him for a day or a night or anything just say no, I can't tell you why, just, just say no.

00.14.42

Pat Jackman

So, as it turned out as he was, as he was walking out the door it's exactly what he said. He turned to my aunt and uncle and he said, oh by the way, I've got this new, I've got this new organ that I want to show, unfortunate choice of words, but I've got this new organ that I want to show Pat because he knew I was into music, do you mind if he comes out and spends the weekend out in Poulfur.

00.15.01

Pat Jackman

And, and God love my aunt and uncle and my aunt still feels bad about it to this day and she said, no, yeah, sure, sure Father. I mean you don't imagine that a priest is going to do anything to a kid, you know.

00.15.17

Pat Jackman

As I walked out the door my brother was standing in the hallway and the look of shock on his face. He knew and I knew and we were kind of looking at each other and Martin was like, didn't say anything but it was like; God help you Pat, I don't know what to do. And I was like, you know, just get me out of this, you know. Walked out the door anyway, drove off into the sunset.

00.15.37

Singing

00.15.54

Pat Jackman

There wasn't a phone in the place. If I ran out screaming in the middle of the night I didn't even know where the nearest house was. I didn't know if I went and knocked the door whether they'd wake up, I didn't know if they did wake up whether they'd believe me or not.

00.16.03

Singing

00.16.04

Pat Jackman

And the sense of being trapped and you know, and caged.
It was, you know, bloody horrible, absolutely bloody horrible.

00.16.11

Singing

00.16.18

Pat Jackman

It was eleven hours of, of a constant torture, which ended up in sexual acts of sorts.

00.16.33

Sarah Macdonald

And then you went home, he took you home.

00.16.36

Pat Jackman

Eventually, yeah, yeah. He, after dragging me round the parish. And I still say to this day, I mean those parishioners were looking at me, like, like you know, another little boy, you know, as if I was kind of encouraging him, you know, in a sort of way. Having to face them and having to be normal, you know. And he eventually said he'd, he'd bring me home.

00.17.09

Pat Jackman

Ah you know Pat, you know, yourself and your mother, yourself and your mother, you know we're getting on great, we're great mates, you won't say anything to her, it'll, it'll, it'll kill her, it'll hurt her feelings and you'll ruin our friendship.

00.17.21

Pat Jackman

And I said to him, look Sean if you, if you promise not to do to anybody else what you did to me I'll have no problem in saying anything. And he just smiled at me and he says, ah come on Pat.

00.17.37

Pat Jackman

The man was unrepentant. It wasn't even a question of lying about it, it wasn't even, if he'd lied to me at that moment, if he said yeah you're right Pat, I'm very sorry, it won't happen again, I don't know what happened to me or whatever, if he'd made some excuse I wouldn't have said a bloody word.

00.17.56

Pat Jackman

But, no he planned to continue and he made no bones about it. Right, bugger you, says I, I'm going home and telling bloody everybody. I didn't tell him that like but sure the minute, the minute, the second that I was in the door. I went up to my auntie.

00.18.19

Sarah Macdonald

And said what?

00.18.23

Pat Jackman

Well, Sean Fortune queered me up.

00.18.33

Sarah Macdonald

Pat Jackman's father was and still is closely associated with the Church. He complained directly to Bishop Herlihey about the sexual assault of his fifteen year old son.

00.18.46

Pat Jackman

The Bishop thought it was ludicrous that a man of the cloth would act like that.

00.18.54

Sarah Macdonald

After Bishop Herlihey died, Pat's father complained to Bishop Comiskey. To this day no one from the Church has asked Pat Jackman about Father Fortune or the events of that night.

00.19.09

Colm O'Gorman

On Sunday mornings, after Fortune had abused me on Saturday night, he'd leave me in his bed in the bedroom in the house there and come down and say first mass. And I remember that he used to come back after saying first mass and sometimes abuse me again and then I'd

have to go downstairs with him and have breakfast and then come down here for the second mass and sit and watch him say mass.

00.19.48

Colm O'Gorman

It was so hard to make sense of what was happening.

00.19.54

Music

00.20.43

Sarah Macdonald

Colm has returned to Fethard-on-Sea in search of answers. He's shocked to discover that the majority of the community knew what Fortune was doing.

00.20.52

Sarah Macdonald

Gemma is one of the few locals willing to talk to him.

00.20.59

Aston

GEMMA HEARNE

A priest is somebody whom you look up to and how do you tell your parents that something is going on. Now it's much easier because it's coming out in the open, thankfully.

00.21.10

Aston

COLM O'GORMAN

I didn't even understand that I was being sexually abused. I just thought something really bad was happening and I was doing it. You know, I blamed myself for what was happening. And he was good at that. I mean he made me feel like he, he, really manipulated me into a position where I accepted total blame for what was happening. He told me it was my problem and he needed to help me. And he actually threatened to tell my parents. So, the idea of my parents knowing was in always in the form of a threat and being told by a priest what I was like. And even though it doesn't make any sense now, at fourteen years of age, fifteen years of age that was terrifying for me. So I couldn't tell them, no.

00.21.50

Sarah Macdonald

That night Colm again returns to the parochial house where Father Fortune abused him.

00.21.56

Colm O'Gorman

Not only do I, I suppose, have to deal with the fact that I was abused by Fortune, the fact that ultimately I feel I was abused by the Church and the fact that that whole society, that my own society abandoned me because an awful lot of people knew exactly what was happening but chose not to do anything about it.

00.22.12

Sarah Macdonald

The current priest of Poulfur can't bring himself to live in this house. He's building a new one.

00.22.21

Sarah Macdonald

Fortune was abusing and blackmailing many young boys but still he received total backing from his church superiors, even meeting the Pope in the midst of mounting allegations.

00.22.34

Sarah Macdonald

The Bishop sent Fortune to psychiatrists, but they couldn't decide if he was a sexual deviant or not. So Fortune was left in the parish, often supported publicly by his Bishop.

00.22.50

Sarah Macdonald

One of Father Fortune's many schemes was the night watch team. Young boys would ride around on their bicycles after dark to protect the homes of the elderly.

00.23.02

Sarah Macdonald

Two of these boys are now dead. They committed suicide within a couple of years of each other.

00.23.23

Sarah Macdonald

In this community of just two hundred families, four young men have killed themselves. Like the abuse, no one talks openly about the suicides.

00.23.37

Sarah Macdonald

And there is no direct evidence linking these tragic men to Father Fortune. But many believe that he is to blame.

00.23.43

Waves crashing

00.23.59

Sarah Macdonald

Peter Fitzpatrick shot himself in the chest. His mother has now finally voiced the fear she's harboured since discovering her son's body.

00.24.09

Aston

MONICA FITZPATRICK

I thought what was going down on in Poulfur, I asked Peter and he said well, the lads were saying like that Father Fortune had the young lads in with him and things that way. But he never mentioned about being in with him. He never mentioned to me now about being in with him.

00.24.29

Monica Fitzpatrick

He had a caravan just at the bottom of the garden there because he, he wanted his own bit of space.

00.24.37

Monica Fitzpatrick

And when I went down, I called at the caravan door, there was no answer. And I just stepped up into the caravan and Peter was lying back on the bed.

00.24.56

Monica Fitzpatrick

I just screamed and come tearing up the garden. And I got Patrick and my husband and they came down with me to the caravan. And I said, what happened to him, what's wrong? And Patrick said; mummy, he said, you didn't see, it's on the floor and I didn't see the gun on the floor.

00.25.28

Monica Fitzpatrick

I didn't want Father Fortune near the house. I didn't want him near the place and he came, he came that day, that Saturday night. He was laughing and joking his usual, usual way and I said to him, Father Fortune I didn't want you here. And he said, oh we can't talk about

things like that now, he said. He said, this is not the time, he said to be talking. I said I specifically said I didn't want you and I don't want you there at the funeral either.

00.26.01

Monica Fitzpatrick

It just keeps hitting me all the time — did he abuse Peter? Was Peter involved with Father Fortune? I do keep thinking about that and would that have sort of brought on, would it brought on this, I don't know. I don't know. I talk to myself going round.

00.26.31

Sarah Macdonald

Have you contacted the Bishop or anything?

00.26.33

Monica Fitzpatrick

No. No, when the Bishop didn't do anything when he was told about it by the, the youngsters and their family and that and he done nothing about it, there is no point to go near the Bishop. But I think the Bishop knows most of the answers and I think he should be answering the questions for the people.

00.26.58

Music

00.27.09

Sarah Macdonald

Six years after the first complaint, Father Fortune was finally removed from Poulfur, burning all financial records relating to the parish on his departure.

00.27.19

Music

00.27.24

Sarah Macdonald

All Bishop Comiskey did was to send him to London to study media and communications and to see yet more psychiatrists.

00.27.31

Music

00.27.35

Sarah Macdonald

One year later Fortune was brought home and awarded with not only another parish but also the directorship of a Catholic media organisation, the National Association of Community Broadcasting.

00.27.48

Sarah Macdonald

Father Fortune quickly turned his new role to his financial advantage.

00.27.53

Sarah Macdonald

Using the Irish state broadcaster, RTE's good name, he ran night classes through a bogus journalism and media institute, making over a hundred thousand pounds a year.

00.28.05

Music

00.28.09

Sarah Macdonald

Fortune remained completely uninhibited by mounting accusations and never missed an opportunity for self-promotion.

00.28.17

Presenter

Maria, just there.

00.28.19

Woman

I'd just like to ask that clergyman that if among a family that you were talking with, that you met, say two members of that family who were homosexuals. How would you deal with that?

00.28.28

Father Fortune

I'd like to reply in the words of the Irish Bishops, may I? Homosexual persons can no less than others, acquire real holiness in life, they should be supported by the Christian community and especially by compassionate and enlightened guidance from priests, in their efforts to do so.

00.28.49

Sarah Macdonald

Within months of setting up his bogus media institute, Father Fortune raped one of his fifteen year old students in a recording booth he used for producing religious programmes.

00.28.59

MAN

It was in a small booth in front of the main sort of studio and he, you know, started kind of feeling me up and kind of put his hand under my jumper and I was like, no. But, in a sense and very, very rapidly he sort of basically pinned me down against the, the mixing desk and sort of, he anally raped me.

00.29.27

MAN

And it was very frightening, very painful experience and it was all quite brief. It was very brutal and at no point, I think all subtlety, I mean he was a manipulative and very subtle man but I think subtlety went out the window at that stage. And afterwards, it was all over quite quickly and afterwards I got out of there as quickly as possible.

00.30.02

MAN

But not before he had a chance to kind of, to say, you know you'll be in big, big trouble, you know. If, you know, really it would be better for you, you know. And I was like, you know, I'm not going to say anything, just let me get the hell out of here. You know, I was just like, fuck, you know. And I think if I remember rightly I actually left my bag and that was one thing I remember later on, I was coming on the bus home and I thought oh no, I left my bag with all my stuff in there or whatever. But I didn't, I didn't go back for it.

00.30.41

Sarah Macdonald

Yet it's now clear that a year before he was raped, two more complaints about Father Fortune sexually abusing young boys were made to Bishop Comiskey.

00.30.51

Sarah Macdonald

This time the Church investigated. Father Fortune denied the allegations, the Church came to no conclusions and did nothing. It offered no explanation, then or now.

00.31.05

Sarah Macdonald

Inside this room the torment continued.

00.31.10

Sarah Macdonald

Correspondent has obtained these pictures of yet another of Sean Fortune's victims. The young man beneath the priest had been abused from the age of fifteen. He used the video to blackmail Father Fortune into finally leaving him alone.

00.31.30

Sarah Macdonald

Bishop Brendan Comiskey says he has never, ever, put a child's safety at risk to protect any priest.

00.31.38

Sarah Macdonald

He declined to respond to Correspondent's questions about why he failed to prevent Father Fortune abusing young boys.

00.31.46

Sarah Macdonald

Until 1995 Brendan Comiskey was battling a serious alcohol addiction and no one was more aware of the Bishop's demons than Father Fortune.

00.31.56

Aston

GER WALSH

Managing Director,
'Wexford People'

He certainly acted as a, a, a, as a barman, a, a bar host at least, at least one occasion that I can say for certain because I had attended a reception that evening in the house. And of course Sean Fortune, to my knowledge at least, didn't consume alcohol and I think that he, he would skilfully manoeuvre himself so that he could ensure that people who were in his company would maybe consume a lot of alcohol.

00.32.35

Sarah Macdonald

It was thanks to Colm O'Gorman that something was finally done. Fifteen years after Fortune raped him for the last time; Colm went to the police.

00.32.45

Aston

COLM O'GORMAN

My father actually broke down and spoke to my sister and just said that he couldn't live with it anymore. And that really cracked everything open for me. For the first time ever he'd spoken about what had happened and its impact on him. So in some ways I guess I did it for, initially I did it for him, for my father because of the impact everything had had on him but also because I feared that Fortune was still abusing.

00.33.10

Sarah Macdonald

The ensuing police investigation resulted in Father Fortune being charged with sixty-six counts of sexual indecent assault and buggery relating to eight boys.

00.33.23

Sarah Macdonald

Eighteen years after the first complaint, the Catholic Church was finally forced to remove him from duties.

00.33.32

Aston

Fr TOM DOYLE

What makes me angry about this whole thing, is when, is the lack of justice. It's the, it's the almost arrogant, you know, self-satisfied attitude that the ecclesiastical, that the church leaders portray in the face of this incredibly horrendous criminal behaviour by priests. When they, they almost act like we're above this and how dare they make accusations against us. And they, in many cases they've known, that's why these law suits have happened, that's why they've won the lot, that's why it's cost the Catholic Church in the United States alone over a billion dollars over a ten year period. That's a lot of dollars.

00.34.12

Sarah Macdonald

Father Fortune bragged openly that if he went down his Bishop was going with him.

00.34.18

Sarah Macdonald

But instead of reaching out to Fortune's many victims, Doctor Brendan Comiskey fled his Bishop's palace and disappeared.

00.34.26

Ger Walsh

People simply didn't know, they didn't know what state the diocese had been left in, they didn't know where the Bishop was or anything. I mean there was no proper statement to, to, you know, which in retrospect would have been very helpful. So it began, people began to investigate various aspects of the Bishop's stewardship of the diocese and his holiday destinations for example became a, a focus of interest.

00.35.02

Sarah Macdonald

But the Bishop wasn't on holiday. He was in a clinic in America being treated for alcoholism. When he returned six months later, it was to a media inquisition about his financial affairs, foreign holidays and his handling of child sexual abuse allegations.

00.35.20

Aston

November 1998

00.35.20

Aston

Bishop BRENDAN COMISKEY

There's a lot of things that haven't come out and the last thing I would want to give that I was making excuses for the Bishops, sorry, for myself. I have no problems saying like, we did not do well.

00.35.33

Music

00.35.36

Sarah Macdonald

In a letter to this programme, Bishop Comiskey says that he maintains an open door policy for survivors of child sexual abuse in his diocese and this he feels is where he can make his best contribution.

00.35.48

Sarah Macdonald

But Bishop Comiskey has never personally reached out in any way to the men in this film.

00.35.53

Music

00.36.00

Pat Jackman

He has admitted himself that he may not have reacted as quickly as he should have done but if we were talking in terms of six months or a year I think that's fine. When you're talking of over a term of, whatever it was, fifteen years, that's a different matter entirely, you know. And I think he preferred to fudge it, I think he preferred to keep it quiet.

00.36.19

Music

00.36.24

Pat Jackman

I would never, ever leave my kids alone with a priest, like ever.

00.36.29

Music

00.36.37

Sarah Macdonald

Four priests in Bishop Comiskey's diocese have been accused of molesting children over the last twenty years. In the same period, fifty Irish priests have been convicted.

00.36.49

Sarah Macdonald

But attention is increasingly turning to Church superiors. Last year a French court convicted a Bishop for failing to report a paedophile priest to the authorities.

00.36.59

Fr Tom Doyle

My guess would be that if the Bishop knew about it, generally speaking they, because it's a notorious issue, especially in a small country like Ireland, that the Papal Nuncio would have known and he in turn would have reported that to the Vatican. Whether the Pope would have been personally briefed on it, that I don't know, I can't tell you that. But I do know in many of the American cases the Pope did personally know.

00.37.23

Music

00.37.35

Sarah Macdonald

This year the Vatican issued new guidelines on how its senior clergy should respond to allegations of child abuse.

00.37.43

Sarah Macdonald

Suspected cases should now be reported immediately to Rome, so the Vatican can determine the course of action. They do not say if civil authorities should be told. Instead, the Vatican will act as police, judge and jury. And it will all be conducted in secret.

00.38.00

Fr Tom Doyle

If you know that a crime has been committed and you, you, you either look the other way or you condone it or you support the perpetrator, you share in the guilt. That, I think, should be pursued. And I don't think just because a man is a Bishop does not entitle him to allow criminal acts to take place or to commit them himself. It certainly doesn't entitle him to allow children to be violated and their lives ruined.

00.38.25

Sarah Macdonald

What do you think should happen to them?

00.38.26

Fr Tom Doyle

I think the same thing should happen to them that should happen to any leader or anyone who harbours a criminal, they should be prosecuted.

00.38.37

Sarah Macdonald

Supported by the Church, Fortune managed to drag the legal process out for four years, at one point disappearing to Belgium with thirty thousand pounds. He was finally brought before the Irish courts in 1999.

00.38.51

Sarah Macdonald

Whilst out on bail he killed himself with a cocktail of alcohol and drugs, denying the boys their first chance to be heard.

00.39.02

Gemma Hearne

I never spoke to Bishop Comiskey about Father Fortune or his suicide. But I would say that it was probably the happiest day of his life. Because, although he may have lost a clergyman, he left, Father Fortune brought a lot of secrets to the grave that would have come out had he gone to jail or had he gone to court. And Bishop Comiskey would have, I mean after all he was the Bishop of Ferns, or he is the Bishop of Ferns. So he has responsibility for his clergy and the blame would have to be laid clearly at his feet because he didn't deal with the situation as he should have done.

00.39.58

Colm O'Gorman

Twenty years ago that bastard raped me.

00.40.05

Colm O'Gorman

And, I'm still now forced to be in a position where I have to fight to get somebody to acknowledge what they did or didn't do and the responsibility that they had for that. And I meet up with other men who are in exactly the same position and I find out that, that, that young boys and men have died, have committed suicide, I believe because of what he did to them.

00.40.30

Colm O'Gorman

And you have, frankly, bastards like Brendan Comiskey, hiding in his nice palace in Summerhill, behind his alcoholism and his regret and his, you know, his inability to understand or to do anything about it. It's not good enough; it's not good enough. It's not good enough anymore. People have died. People are dying. People are hurting.

00.41.00

Sarah Macdonald

Bishop Comiskey!

00.41.01

Bishop Comiskey

We will survive, how are you?

00.41.03

Sarah Macdonald

I'm fine thanks. Sarah Macdonald, BBC television.

00.41.04

Bishop Comiskey
Sarah, how are you?

00.41.05

Sarah Macdonald
Very well, thank you. I've just come to ask you just a question about Sean Fortune...

00.41.09

Bishop Comiskey
I'm going to have mass at half past six...

00.41.09

Sarah Macdonald
We just wanted to know why didn't you stop Sean Fortune abusing young boys? Bishop Comiskey?

00.41.12

Aston
Bishop BRENDAN COMISKEY
I, I, I moved, when it was brought to my attention I moved him out of the parish and sent him on treatment for two years...

00.41.20

Sarah Macdonald
Not for six years. Not for six years, you didn't move him out of the parish. Why didn't you stop him?

00.41.26

Bishop Comiskey
Thank you very much.

00.41.27

Sarah Macdonald
Why didn't you stop him, Bishop Comiskey?

00.41.37

Monica Fitzpatrick
It's the first time I've talked, haven't been able to talk to neighbours or family, I can't. I haven't been able to talk to them. But, I think Father Fortune is dead and gone now, I know he's dead and gone but there was really nothing done about him before he died. He was let away and I think the Bishop as well was there involved. The Bishop knew all about it and he was the one that should have sorted Father Fortune out from the early times. I think all the young lads that have been involved like, that

he has abused, I think there's no answers for them. Peter has gone and there's nothing we can do.

00.42.33

Sarah Macdonald

In the last year another young man has committed suicide in Fethard-on-Sea.

00.42.38

Waves crashing

00.42.41

Sarah Macdonald

Doctor Brendan Comiskey remains the Bishop of Ferns.

00.42.45

Sarah Macdonald

Since Father Sean Fortune's suicide, six of his victims have begun legal action.

00.42.51

Sarah Macdonald

So far, the Church's only response has been to deny liability and plead diplomatic immunity.

00.42.59

Sarah Macdonald

Colm O'Gorman is suing the Bishop, the Papal Nuncio and the Pope.

00.43.03

End Music

00.43.14

Voice over

For more information on tonight's programme please visit our web site at:

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00.43.23

Voice over

A helpline number will be given out at the end of this programme.

00.43.11

Reported & Directed by

SARAH MACDONALD

Original Music

CHARLIE MOLE

Camera

JONATHAN CALLERY

Dubbing Mixer

PHITZ HEARNE

VT Editor

ROD HUTSON

Graphic Design

NICOLA OWEN

Production Team

ALEXANDRA CAMERON

EMMA CASHMORE

SARAH EVA

ANJANA SHARMA

Production Manager

JANE WILLEY

Unit Manager

IRENE OZGA

Film Research
NICK DODD

Picture Editor
DAVID HOWELL

Series Producer
SIMON FINCH

Deputy Editor
FARAH DURRANI

00.43.31
Editor
FIONA MURCH

BBC
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00.43.42

End

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