



## Reporting an Explosive Truth: the *Boston Globe* and Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church

In early November 2001, sitting at his desk at the *Boston Globe*, Michael Rezendes looked through a packet of photocopied documents. The documents were evidence in a group of civil cases pending against former Catholic priest John Geoghan, accused of sexual abuse by more than 100 people. A few of the documents, Rezendes discovered, were important. One was explosive.

Rezendes was a member of the Spotlight Team, the paper's four-person investigative team. In July, the *Globe's* new editor, Martin Baron, had instructed the team to examine the problem of sexual abuse in Boston's fabled Catholic Archdiocese. The team had twin goals: to learn whether Geoghan's case was part of a pattern of sexual abuse by priests and, if so, to discover whether the archdiocese had shielded offenders and concealed their crimes.

By early November, the Spotlight Team had uncovered a story larger than any of the journalists had anticipated. By scouring documents and speaking to victims and lawyers, they had discovered evidence suggesting that many priests, perhaps dozens, had abused children, and that the church had not only attempted to conceal their crimes but—by assigning them to new parishes—had also enabled them to commit more. No piece of evidence was more significant than the document discovered by Rezendes. It proved that Boston's powerful archbishop, Cardinal Bernard Law, had known about Geoghan's history of pedophilia *before* relocating him to parishes where many of the alleged crimes had taken place.

The Spotlight reporters had planned to publish a comprehensive piece on Geoghan in January, to coincide with the beginning of his trial. They'd wanted to make the story as airtight as possible. This was the way Spotlight operated, and it seemed to make particular sense in this charged case. Boston was a majority-Catholic city, the only one in the country, and the archdiocese was the city's most powerful institution. The story had the potential to unsettle the city at its core. To make matters even more complicated, many Boston Catholics already saw the *Globe* as liberal, elitist, and anti-Catholic.

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*This case was written by David Mizner for the Knight Case Studies Initiative, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University. The faculty sponsor was Professor Ari Goldman. Funding was provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. (0109)*

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But the document Rezendes had was public: it resided in a docket file, where any court reporter might find it. Although the *Globe* journalists were sure they were well ahead of their competitors on the story, this document alone was a major story that they were loath to lose to a rival news organization. The team had a choice. It could proceed as planned, holding the Cardinal Law-Geohan story until January. Or it could run this story as soon as possible. Basic competitive instincts argued for publishing the story immediately. The need to be thorough, and to have maximum impact, argued for waiting.

### ***Boston Globe*—brief history**

The newspaper about to challenge the Catholic Church had a storied history. Founded in 1872 by a group of businessmen led by Eben Jordan, co-founder of the Jordan Marsh Department store, it struggled to find a readership in a city already served by 10 newspapers. But it began to grow under publisher Charles Taylor and, by 1886, it had the largest circulation of any paper in the country outside New York.<sup>1</sup> Taylor descendants managed the paper for generations.

The *Globe* remained a private company until 1973, when it went public as part of the newly formed Affiliated Publications. From the beginning, the *Globe's* editorial page had been staunchly Democratic. Legendary editor Tom Winship (1965-84) took the *Globe's* editorial stance even further to the left in the 1960s and 70s, when the paper developed a reputation for liberalism—bold liberalism to supporters, knee-jerk liberalism to detractors.

When Matthew Storin came to the editor's position in 1993, he sought to make the *Globe* less liberal, or at least less predictably so. His tenure was marked by both success and scandal. Under Storin, the *Globe* ended a 10-year Pulitzer drought, winning four prizes. According to a 1999 poll of editors by the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the *Globe* was (tied for) the sixth best paper in the country. But in 1998, Storin accepted the resignations of two star columnists who had fabricated quotes and characters.<sup>2</sup> The dual scandals prompted speculation about Storin's future; he hung on for two more years.

*Business side.* Meanwhile, the ownership of the paper was changing. In 1993, the Taylor family—owners for 126 years—sold the *Globe* to the New York Times Company for \$1.1 billion, the highest price ever paid for a newspaper. The sale was a blow to a paper that prided itself on independence, and to a city that viewed New York as a rival. As part of the deal, the Times Company agreed not to intervene in the *Globe's* operations for five years.

Six years later, it abruptly replaced publisher Benjamin Taylor with one of its own top executives, Richard Gilman. The Taylor family's day-to-day management of the *Globe* had come to

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<sup>1</sup> Louis M. Lyons, *Newspaper Story: One Hundred Years of the Boston Globe*. (Harvard University Press, 1971), p.60.

<sup>2</sup> The columnists were Mike Barnicle and Patricia Smith.

an end. At a meeting, *Globe* staffers greeted Gilman with silence; it had “the feeling of a hostile takeover,” according to columnist Ellen Goodman.<sup>3</sup> Gilman was a specialist in circulation and operations, and some analysts saw his appointment as an effort to improve the *Globe*’s financial performance. The paper, although profitable, had fallen short of goals set by the Times Company. Other analysts said the Times Company simply wanted to broaden control.

By the time Baron took over in the summer of 2001, the *Globe*, like most newspapers across the country, was losing readers. In 1993, when the Times had bought it, the *Globe* had a daily circulation of 504,869 and a Sunday circulation of 811, 409. In the first half of 2001, amid a slowing economy, those numbers had declined to 467,217 and 710,256.<sup>4</sup> Still, the *Globe* was by far the largest paper in New England and one of the 15 largest in the country (one of the 10 largest on Sunday). Its readership, moreover, was educated and affluent; as such, it appealed to advertisers. Baron’s new job was one of the top in journalism.

### **Baron—a new face**

Baron represented a significant change for the *Globe*. The previous two editors had been Irish-Catholic; Baron was Jewish, the son of Israeli immigrants. Every previous editor in the *Globe*’s history had come from the inside; Baron had been executive editor of the *Miami Herald* and, before that, associate managing editor of the *New York Times*. He was new not just to the *Globe*, but to Boston. The city’s reputation for insularity and provincialism was perhaps overblown, but it didn’t come from nowhere. Commenting on the hire, a veteran at the *Globe* complained about Baron’s ignorance of Boston, suggesting that he “wouldn’t know how to find Boylston Street.”<sup>5</sup>

While *Globe* staffers could object to the hiring of an outsider—a “*Times* man,” no less—they couldn’t claim that Baron wasn’t qualified. *Editor and Publisher* magazine had just named him Editor of the Year for his work at the *Miami Herald*, which had received national attention for its coverage of the 2000 presidential election and a 2001 Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the case of six-year-old Elian Gonzalez, the subject of a custody battle that drew the involvement of the Cuban and American governments.

*A question.* At 10:30 a.m. on July 30, 2001, Baron walked into his first meeting as the top editor at the *Globe*. He had started the job that morning. On his mind, among other things, was a column that had appeared in the *Globe* the day before. The column, by Eileen McNamara, discussed John Geoghan, a retired Roman Catholic priest alleged to have sexually abused more than 100 boys. One of many civil suits against Geoghan had been brought by 25 people who

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<sup>3</sup> Howard Kurtz, “The Shot Heard Round the Globe: N.Y Times Co. Fires Publishers in Consolidation Move.” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> From the New York Times Company Website ([http://www.nytc.com/investors/financials/boston\\_globe-circulation.html](http://www.nytc.com/investors/financials/boston_globe-circulation.html))

<sup>5</sup> Bill Beuttler, “Global Warming.” *Boston Magazine*, January 2002.

claimed to have been raped between 1985 and 1993. Cardinal Law—who had assigned Geoghan to the parishes where the alleged crimes had taken place—was a defendant in the suit.

The suit had yet to come to trial, but attorneys had begun to file pre-trial motions. In her column, McNamara mentioned that the documents were under seal. Baron had come from Florida, which had an expansive public records law; as editor of the *Herald*, he had been quick to sue for access to documents. In the July 30 staff meeting, Baron asked if anyone had considered challenging the confidentiality order in court. In response, there was silence. It was not a revolutionary idea, just one that hadn't occurred to anyone else. "People here had assumed that because there was a confidentiality order, that there was no way that they would be able to gain access to these files," Baron says.<sup>6</sup> He had other ideas.

### **An investigation is born**

After the meeting, Baron asked the *Globe* lawyer for an analysis. Two weeks later, the lawyer told him that the *Globe* had a 50 percent chance of winning a suit to see the trial documents. To Baron, that seemed like pretty good odds. Before he could bring a lawsuit, however, he needed agreement from Publisher Gilman. After listening quietly as Baron made his case for going to court, Gilman agreed that it was the right thing to do. Baron hustled out of Gilman's office before he could change his mind. On August 15, the *Globe* filed suit in Massachusetts Superior Court.

But a lawsuit was only one option—and there was no assurance the *Globe* would win. Baron had just run into Columnist McNamara in the hallway. According to Baron, McNamara (a Pulitzer prizewinner) went "on a bit of a rant," urging him to launch an investigation. The *Globe* had a Spotlight Team, a celebrated unit created in 1970 to do investigative journalism. Would this make sense as a Spotlight project? Baron conferred with Special Projects Editor Ben Bradlee, Jr., who oversaw the team, and Walter Robinson, the team's editor and lead reporter.

Bradlee, a former metro editor, had led the *Globe's* aggressive coverage of another Catholic priest convicted of pedophilia in the early 1990s. Father James Porter had been convicted in 1993 and sent to prison on 41 counts of sexual assault against children in several parishes. Church officials had shuffled him from one parish to another, and the Fall River diocese had agreed to pay more than \$7 million to Porter's victims. But *Globe* journalists, Bradlee says, had "hit a wall" in probing the potential complicity of the church. Now with the new investigation, he saw a chance to pick up where they had left off.

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<sup>6</sup> Author's interview with Martin Baron in Boston, MA, on April 4, 2008. All further quotes from Baron, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

Spotlight Editor Robinson, too, liked the idea of delving into this story. He was impressed by Baron's quick call for an investigation and believed it was a move only an outsider could have made. "It's a great example of what a fresh pair of eyes can do at a newspaper," he says.

This is not meant to disrespect some of the great editors we had over time, but this was a very inbred newspaper... All of our editors had come up through the system. In a city like Boston, you become acculturated to the city and its mores and its institutions, and you don't necessarily think as much outside the box as you should.<sup>7</sup>

The team had recently wrapped up an investigation into the shoddy work done by a national builder of luxury homes. No other major stories were pending. But before committing to a full-scale investigation, they would do some preliminary reporting.

### The Spotlight Team

The Spotlight Team enjoyed unusual autonomy and freedom within the news operation. It typically spent weeks and months reporting stories, which tended to focus on governmental corruption and organized crime. "It's one of the best jobs in journalism," Robinson says. Such units were prohibitively expensive; many newspapers could not afford them. Spotlight investigations occupied four of the *Globe's* best journalists, who otherwise would have produced hundreds of other stories a year.

The 2001 incarnation of the Spotlight Team was new. The only member with more than a year on the unit was Matt Carroll, who specialized in computer-assisted reporting. Robinson had started with Spotlight in late 2000, bringing with him more than 25 years of *Globe* experience as a city political reporter, White House correspondent, and Middle East bureau chief. Bradlee and Robinson recruited Michael Rezendes, a political reporter who in his 11 years at the *Globe* had served as City Hall bureau chief, weekly essayist, and roving national reporter. Rezendes' respect for Robinson and Bradlee was such that he immediately agreed to sign on. Something big would happen, he felt. "I mean, I just knew it in my bones," he says.<sup>8</sup> To round out the team, Bradlee and Robinson brought on Sacha Pfeiffer, an experienced court reporter who had already written about the Geoghan case.

*Rummaging.* The team wanted first to find out whether the scandal went beyond a single priest. What, if anything, did church leaders know about Geoghan and other abusive priests? Says Baron:

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<sup>7</sup> Author's interview with Walter Robinson in Boston, MA, on April 4, 2008. All further quotes from Robinson, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with Michael Rezendes in Boston, MA, on May 8, 2008. All further quotes from Rezendes, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

Can we document in this instance that the cardinal and the hierarchy of the Archdiocese knew that Geoghan had abused children and, despite that, reassigned him from one parish to the next where he then abused other children? And, if it happened in the Geoghan case, did it happen in other cases, and if so, how many and how often? Those were the two questions that needed to be answered.

The reporters knew that senior archdiocese officials were unlikely to speak to them. But others might. If there had been sexual abuse, then there were victims, and if there were victims, then there were possibly lawyers. The Spotlight Team worked the phones. “The four of us just started to call everybody,” Robinson says. “Everybody we knew who might know anything about this subject. You know, we were rummaging around in the dark.”

Within only a week or so, they discovered that the church had secretly paid off a number of people to deter them from filing sexual abuse lawsuits against priests. Such “hush money” settlements served the interests of all the parties: the lawyers received money without having to go to trial, the archdiocese kept the crimes hidden, and the victims remained anonymous. Everyone on the Spotlight Team agreed that the situation was worthy of further investigation, and the challenge of it, says Pfeiffer, heightened its appeal. She notes:

[T]he church wasn’t a public entity, didn’t have to give us anything, didn’t want to give us anything. Sex abuse victims were often embarrassed and ashamed, and didn’t want to talk. The lawyers who represented them had developed this great cottage industry where they were making a lot of money, so they had no interest in talking. So it was the ultimate challenge: how do you get information?<sup>9</sup>

At this point the journalists felt that they were onto a big story. They guessed that as many as a dozen priests might be involved. They told Baron what they had learned, and he authorized a full-fledged project. By late August, the Spotlight Team had a daunting new assignment: to find out what Boston’s Catholic Archdiocese knew about pedophile priests in its midst.

### **The national picture**

As they began to delve into the priest abuse story, the *Globe* reporters knew that it was part of a national trend. They remembered the 1992 Porter case and were vaguely aware of similar cases around the country. The first case to become national news had occurred in 1985 in Lafayette, Louisiana, where 11 boys said they had been abused by their priest, Reverend Gilbert Gauthé. At trial, it emerged that his superiors had known about Gauthé’s problem, secured

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<sup>9</sup> Author’s interview with Sacha Pfeiffer in Boston, MA, on May 8, 2008. All further quotes from Pfeiffer, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

inadequate treatment for him, kept reassigning him despite reasons to believe he was still a danger, and made confidential payments to the victims.

In response to the Gauthé case, three men wrote a 93-page report calling for a policy to deal with abusive priests. In the report, which was confidential at the time, the authors—Rev. Thomas P. Doyle, a canon lawyer for the Vatican Embassy in Washington, F. Ray Mouton, a lawyer defending Gauthé, and Michael R. Peterson, a psychiatrist—predicted that the scandal would cost the church a billion dollars and said pedophilia was “a lifelong disease with NO HOPE AT THIS POINT IN TIME for cure.”

The authors of the report sought to introduce it at the 1985 meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Support was hard to come by, but they had the backing of one influential prelate: the new archbishop of Boston. “Law was definitely a supporter,” Doyle said. But Law withdrew his support at the last minute without an explanation, and the bishops declined to take up the report, which was shelved.

Meanwhile the scandal spread, with allegations of sexual abuse arising across the country. In 1987, an article that went out on the Knight-Ridder wire said that “[t]he church’s reluctance to address the problem is a time bomb waiting to detonate within American Catholicism.” In 1993, dozens of people charged seven priests in Worcester, MA, with sexual abuse. In 1998, a Palm Beach, FL, bishop resigned after admitting to molesting five former altar boys. In 1999, DNA and taped evidence showed that a bishop in Santa Rosa, CA, had been having sex with one of his priests—a scandal that rocked an archdiocese already paying out \$5.4 million in child sex-abuse settlements. Also in 1999, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then the Vatican’s Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, suspended without explanation a canonical proceeding against a Mexican priest accused of sexual assault. In 2000, a youth minister in Middleton, Massachusetts was indicted for allegedly sexually abusing 29 boys.

These several cases, however, were treated by the Catholic Church as isolated instances. The church, and to some degree the press, seemed content to portray the growing list of cases as stories of individual priests who had sinned, been exposed, and brought to justice.

### **The “most Catholic city”**

If there was one place in the United States where a major investigation into the Catholic Church might cause an uproar, it was Boston. As *Globe* reporter Rezendes says, it was “the most Catholic major city in the country.” The three most populous US cities—New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago—had more Catholics, but Boston had the highest percentage. Of the 3.8 million people living in Boston’s metropolitan area in 2001, about 2 million were Catholic.

Boston's archbishop presided over an extensive network of parishes, schools, seminaries, convents, and hospitals. The job title alone conferred significant power, and for most of the 20th century, Boston's larger-than-life archbishops had expanded the scope of the office to wield power well beyond the church, and well beyond Boston. "The Boston Archdiocese is a uniquely American Catholic institution," wrote a Minneapolis newspaper when the head of the archdiocese there was under consideration for the Boston job. "It is to the church what the New York Yankees are to baseball, Carnegie Hall to music, Broadway to theater."<sup>10</sup>

It was not only the number of Boston's Catholics that explained their special place in the imagination of Catholics nationwide; it was their history. Establishing themselves in the birthplace of American Puritanism, they had overcome persecution to rise to the highest levels of political, economic, and social power. In this sense, the story of Boston's Catholics was also the story of Boston's Irish. People of Irish descent represented more than a quarter of the city's Catholics and an even higher percentage of its ruling class.

As successive waves of immigrants washed into Boston in the 1820s, the 1840s and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Protestants reacted with hostility. An anti-Catholic press flourished. In a city where jobs were scarce, signs saying NINA—No Irish Need Apply—hung everywhere. Faced with discrimination and spurned by the city's Protestant-dominated institutions, Boston's Catholics developed an intense bond with their priests, who helped the new immigrants pay rent, fill out citizenship papers and form unions.

In the decades leading up to World War II, however, the fortunes of Boston's Catholics turned. They demonstrated a knack for politics, built a strong parish system, and produced skilled leaders, such as William O'Connell, Boston's first archbishop to be named cardinal. O'Connell (served 1907-1944) centralized power and built numerous churches, schools, seminaries, convents, and hospitals. A militant champion of Catholicism, he made no effort to cooperate with Protestants whose time, he said, had passed. His political power came to rival the governor's. Nicknamed "Number One" by politicians, he could single-handedly determine the fate of legislation.

His successor was Cardinal Richard Cushing (served 1944-1970). A beloved populist who promoted interfaith cooperation, he offered a striking contrast to his feared, autocratic, non-ecumenical predecessor, but Cushing attained a stature that matched O'Connell's. Ray Flynn, a former ambassador to the Vatican and former mayor of Boston, said "Cardinal Cushing or O'Connell, he could just put his arm around someone who was running for mayor, and that picture would be on the front pages of the papers, and it might register 40,000 votes."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Warren Wolfe, "Could Flynn be a savior in Boston?; The Twin Cities archbishop might get the 'toughest job in the Catholic Church,'" *Star Tribune*, April 28, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Pamela Ferdinand and Paul Duggan, "In Boston, Driven by Disillusionment; As Priests' Abuse Scandal Unfolds, Irish American Catholics Angrily Confront Church," *Washington Post*, October 30, 2002.



Yet if the history of the church in Boston was a success story, it ran into a plot twist in the 1960s. It was then that the Boston Archdiocese—along with the Catholic Church virtually everywhere else in the US—went into decline. Rocked by social change, it struggled to maintain priests, parishioners, and authority among both Catholics and the population at large. In 1968, when Pope Paul VI issued his famous encyclical reaffirming the Church's unconditional opposition to artificial birth control, it sparked widespread opposition from priests and laity alike. Catholics stopped attending mass or left the church altogether. Fewer priests entered the seminaries. Rejecting church teaching on birth control, couples had fewer children. While the church was invigorated in some locales by Latin American immigrants, it struggled to remain relevant to many of its members.

### Cardinal Law

In 1984, Bishop Bernard Law became Boston's archbishop. He succeeded Cardinal Humberto Medeiros, who had alienated the Catholic rank-and-file by supporting busing to forcibly integrate public schools. Unlike O'Connell and Cushing, both Irish Catholics from Massachusetts, the Portuguese-born Medeiros wasn't a hero in blue-collar communities.

Law, by contrast, "charmed Church leaders and thrilled the laity during an inaugural week of hope and celebration," the *Globe* wrote.<sup>12</sup> Some found the charismatic Irish Catholic with ties to Boston—he had graduated from Harvard—even more impressive than the legendary Cardinal Cushing. Paul White, longtime editor of the Archdiocese newspaper, wrote that "[b]oth are forceful, but I see in Archbishop Law the charm and personality and clarity and openness I didn't see in Cardinal Cushing."<sup>13</sup> In 1985, Law traveled to Rome to be elevated to the rank of cardinal. This was a relatively good time for the church, with a young and powerful pope at the helm. The optimism pervading the church was evident in Law's statement during his swearing-in ceremony: "This is the strongest moment for the church since the Reformation."<sup>14</sup>

Law was known for rigid adherence to church teachings and for traditionalism on social issues like abortion, which he called the "primordial darkness of our time." He made national headlines when he forbade a girl with a wheat allergy from using a rice cracker during communion. He and fellow traditionalist Cardinal John Joseph O'Connor of New York (also appointed in 1984) were nicknamed "Law and Order."

Ambitious, at ease in South Boston as well as Rome, conservative in a conservative time, Law became a national leader. He befriended President George H.W. Bush, with whom he spoke monthly, and his chief of staff, John Sununu, with whom Law met weekly. His power was such

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<sup>12</sup> The Investigative Staff of the Boston Globe, *Betrayal*. (Little Brown, 2002), p.33.

<sup>13</sup> The Investigative Staff of the Boston Globe, *Betrayal*, p.34.

<sup>14</sup> Jack Thomas, "Crisis in the Church; Scandal Darkens a Bright Career." *Boston Globe*, April 14, 2002.

that he was sometimes mentioned as a possible successor to Pope John Paul II, but the papacy, said the *Globe*, was unlikely to be bestowed on an American, especially one so close to a president: “If we choose Pope Bernard, his critics might say, nobody would know whether he was speaking for the church or the Republican Party.”<sup>15</sup>

While his relations with such national figures were strong, Cardinal Law did not have as cordial a relationship with the *Globe*.

### The Paper and the Cardinal

Even in the early years of his tenure, the *Globe* was critical of Law’s political gamesmanship:

He wants it all, secular and religious power. He acts both roles—the pragmatist educated at public schools and at Harvard, and the Vatican sergeant who learned to obey orders as the son of an Air Force colonel. He mingles with the pooh-bahs of American culture, then proclaims that the church must be countercultural. A pragmatist after President Bush’s heart in secular affairs, and a hard-liner in the mold of John Paul II in Catholic doctrine, Law has the ear of both leaders—at least until they compare notes.<sup>16</sup>

In 1989, Law condemned as “slanderous” a charge by the *Globe* that he had struck a deal with President Bush.<sup>17</sup> According to the *Globe*, Law had agreed to stay silent on Bush’s inaction on the murder of six Jesuits and two women in El Salvador. In exchange, Bush would move on issues of importance to conservative Catholics, like abortion, school prayer, and government support for church day care programs. The 1992 Father Porter case only exacerbated the hostility between the newspaper and the cardinal.

*Porter and Law.* Cardinal Law had taken over in Boston long after Porter retired, but the scandal erupted on his watch. After the case became public, Law said Porter’s crime was “an aberrant act.”<sup>18</sup> Critics claimed that Law had too much sympathy for Porter, citing this statement by the cardinal: “We would be less than the community of faith and love which we are called to

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Golden, “The Cardinal’s Ambitions; Does Cardinal Bernard Law Serve the Pope or the President? Is He Prelate or Politician—or Both?” *Boston Globe*, April 22, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Golden, “The Cardinal’s Ambitions,” *Boston Globe*.

<sup>17</sup> Gill Donovan, “Ambition, Defense of Institutional Church Drove Cardinal’s Career; Church In Crisis.” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 27, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> The Investigative Staff of the Boston Globe, *Betrayal*, p.7

be... were we not to attempt to respond both to victim and betrayer in truth, in love, and reconciliation."<sup>19</sup>

Cardinal Law refused to answer the *Globe's* questions about Porter and in response to its aggressive coverage, said, "By all means we call down God's power on the media, particularly the *Globe*."<sup>20</sup> Law knew his audience: many blue-collar Catholics already viewed the *Globe* as an elitist, Brahmin, anti-Catholic institution. Law was pushing two hot buttons: religion and class. "Boston is only the most class-conscious city in America," notes then-Metro Editor Bradlee.<sup>21</sup> It was a source of wry amusement inside the *Globe* that, a week after Law had called down "God's power" on the paper, Jack Driscoll, the *Globe's* editor who happened to be Irish-Catholic, fell and broke his leg.

But not everyone at the *Globe* was amused by the charges of anti-Catholic bias. It seemed that the Archdiocese's frequent complaints about the *Globe's* coverage had found a receptive audience among top executives at the paper. Carroll, a reporter on the Spotlight Team, says there wasn't at the time "the appetite" to look further into sexual abuse in the church. "I think there was a feeling in the upper offices after Porter that we'd kind of been too harsh on the church," says Carroll.<sup>22</sup>

Law eventually unveiled a new policy for dealing with abusive priests. Under the new guidelines, the archdiocese would pay for counseling for victims and establish a review board of both clergy and lay members to look into allegations of abuse. But Law reserved the right to reassign abusive priests who had received treatment, and he preserved for the archdiocese the primary responsibility of handling charges of abuse. Neither the law nor church policy required priests to report charges of sexual abuse to civil authorities.

The *Globe* was not impressed. An editorial said, "With its publication of a pastoral policy on sexual misconduct with minors, the Archdiocese of Boston has lost an important opportunity to communicate to parishioners and the public that it understands the depth of the problem."<sup>23</sup>

### **The *Globe* and Boston's Catholics**

Historically, the *Globe* had been a friend to the Catholic Church. Although the men who owned and managed the *Globe* were Protestant, the paper had many Irish Catholics on staff, and their influence led the *Globe* to reject the anti-Catholicism of "proper Bostonians." The paper

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<sup>19</sup> Kay Longcope, "Sexual Abuse by Priests is a 'Betrayal,' 'Rare,' Law Says." *Boston Globe*, May 14, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Steve Marantz, "Law Raps Ex-Priest Coverage." *Boston Globe*, May 24, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Author's telephone interview with Ben Bradlee Jr. on July 10, 2008. All further quotes from Bradlee Jr., unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

<sup>22</sup> Author's interview with Matt Carroll in Boston, MA, on April 4, 2008. All further quotes from Carroll, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

<sup>23</sup> The Editors, "Pastoral Miscue on Child Abuse." *Boston Globe*, January, 16, 1993.

fought successfully for the right of priests to administer last rites in city hospitals. In the 1880s, the *Globe* was the only paper in the city to support Irish independence, and its circulation grew accordingly.

As Catholics rose to prominence in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Boston press seldom, if ever, criticized the Catholic Church. On the contrary, it deferred to it. The *Globe*, for example, withdrew its support for a bill regulating child labor as soon as Cardinal O'Connell came out in opposition to it. The *Globe's* coverage of O'Connell and his successor, Cardinal Cushing, was favorable and often fawning.

*The Globe in the 60s.* But in the 1960s, the cultural battles of the day pitted the *Globe* against the church. In 1965, the paper supported reform of the state's birth control law and when reform passed in 1970, it said, "We Join the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."<sup>24</sup> In 1970, defying pleas from Catholic associates, *Globe* Editor Winship editorialized against the ban on abortion. These positions led critics to charge that the *Globe* was hostile to religion. Said Edward King, a conservative Democratic governor of Massachusetts, "If God is with you, who can be against you, right? Except the *Boston Globe*."<sup>25</sup>

In the 1970s, the *Globe* supported busing to integrate schools. Even though Cardinal Medeiros and prominent Irish Catholics like Senator Edward Kennedy took the same stance, many blue-collar Catholics were furious. The paper, says longtime *Globe* reporter Robinson, "began to be seen as more of a liberal, elitist, suburban, affluent, educated institution... And that it was out of touch with the lives of many of its readers, many of whom were conservative and happened to be Catholic."

Even two decades later, critics claimed that the *Globe* perpetuated negative stereotypes about Irish-Catholics. For example, a long piece in 1997 about Ray Flynn, then-ambassador to the Vatican, detailed his heavy drinking. The article drew charges of anti-Catholicism from Flynn and from some 200 people who phoned the ombudsman.<sup>26</sup> So when the case of Father Geoghan broke in the late 1990s, the *Globe* was inclined to tread carefully.

### **Father Geoghan case**

Reverend John J. Goeghan—who had retired in 1993 after 28 years as a priest—entered the news quietly in 1996 when a woman in Waltham, Massachusetts filed suit alleging that he had sexually abused her three sons. Eight months later, a 22-year-old man filed a suit claiming that Geoghan had abused him beginning in 1981, when he was seven. Between 1996 and 2000, 70

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<sup>24</sup> Lyons, *Newspaper Story: One Hundred Years of the Boston Globe*, p.60.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Feeney and Brian MacQuarrie, "Edward King, Hard-Charging Governor, Dies." *Boston Globe*, September 19, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Carey Goldberg, "Article on His Drinking Stirs Ex-Mayor's Wrath." *New York Times*, October 28, 1997.

people accused Geoghan of sexual abuse. By the summer of 2001, the claims had led to criminal charges and 84 civil suits, 70 by alleged victims and the rest by their family members. The church all but acknowledged his guilt when it defrocked Geoghan in 1998—the most severe penalty in canon law. Still, at his arraignment in 1999, he pleaded not guilty.

The *Globe* did not give the story prominent coverage, generally running stories of a few hundred words inside the Metro section. (One article about Geoghan made the front page.) But *Globe* columnist Eileen McNamara seized on it. After the second suit was filed against Geoghan, she wrote on January 15, 1997:

News the other day that Rev. John J. Geoghan, a retired Roman Catholic priest, stands accused for the second time in a year of molesting boys in Boston area parishes caused nary a ripple. The Archdiocese felt no pressure to discuss what, if any, disciplinary or therapeutic course it has followed in this case.

If we take child abuse so seriously, where is the outcry? Why is Father Geoghan facing only civil trial for acts of alleged rape against boys as young as seven years old? If we are really so relentless in our pursuit of pedophiles why aren't we also prosecuting him criminally, instead of allowing him to retire in the sheltering arms of his Church?

As Geoghan's case dragged on for years, the *Globe* covered it conscientiously but without fanfare. Stories appeared on the inside pages of the paper. Meanwhile Law addressed the scandal only in general terms, refusing to comment on specific cases. For example, in March 2000, in a speech billed as an attempt to atone for the church's racism and anti-Semitism, he also apologized for sexual abuse. "Intolerable situations have caused great pain and have sometimes resulted in alienation from the church," he said. "There are obvious cases of sexual abuse which have so seared us all and the less celebrated cases of harsh words, as well as rough and unjust treatment."<sup>27</sup>

*Law warned.* Columnist McNamara returned to the fray in mid-July 2001. The *Globe* had already reported that Geoghan repeatedly went on "sick leave" before reemerging at another parish, and in June 2001, during the discovery portion of Geoghan's trial, Law had filed a document that included an admission: in September 1984—before the alleged crimes had occurred—he had been warned about Geoghan. Without naming the source, he acknowledged receiving a letter alleging that Geoghan had molested seven boys. On July 22, McNamara wrote:

Will Cardinal Bernard F. Law be allowed to continue to play duck and cover indefinitely? Will no one require the head of the Archdiocese of Boston to explain how it was that the pastors, bishops, archbishops, and

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Paulson, "Laws Asks Atonement for Sins of Catholics." *Boston Globe*, March 12, 2000

cardinal-archbishops who supervised Geoghan never confronted, or even suspected, his alleged exploitation of children in five different parishes across 28 years?

A week later, in a development that made the *Globe's* front page, Law finally spoke out on the Geoghan case. In a column in the *Pilot*, the archdiocesan newspaper, he wrote, "Never was there an effort on my part to shift a problem from one place to the next." The same edition of the *Pilot* ran a letter from Law's lawyer blasting the plaintiffs' lawyers for failing to mention that Law had reassigned Geoghan only after "independent medical evaluation advising that such assignment was appropriate and safe."

McNamara responded with another column on July 29—the piece that caught Baron's attention. She wondered in print how Cardinal Law could have assigned Geoghan to new parishes even after charges of sexual abuse had been leveled against him:

Either the church was ignorant of the kind of sexual abuse with which Geoghan is charged, or it knew enough to send its priests to treatment centers to try to curb their pedophilia. If the latter is true, why didn't Law err on the side of caution and assign Geoghan to duties other than the parish work that put him in daily contact with children? And why won't he tell his flock the extent of his supervision of Geoghan after he sent him back to work? How could there have been at least 25 more victims after 1984 if the cardinal and his agents were being vigilant in efforts to protect children from a suspected sexual predator?

It was the job of the Spotlight Team to try to answer the questions.

### **Starting to dig**

Because pedophiles tended to be repeat offenders, the Spotlight Team assumed that there would be numerous victims—victims who might be willing to name their abusers. For help tracking down victims, reporters turned to a national organization, SNAP (Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests). Within days, they had found victims, who sometimes led to attorneys, who sometimes led to more victims.

It wasn't long before the archdiocese knew the *Globe* was snooping around. One reporter spoke to a plaintiff's attorney who, Robinson would later discover, called Cardinal Law's attorney. In August, the cardinal sent an emissary, a prominent Boston figure, to ask Robinson what they were doing. Robinson told him that they were only in the reporting stage, and that if they were going to run a story, they would be in touch.

*Missing documents.* To meet Geoghan's victims, Rezendes had turned to Attorney Mitchell Garabedian, who represented many of them. Neither well-known nor well-off, operating out of a cluttered office without a receptionist, Garabedian reminded Rezendes of the ambulance-chaser played by Paul Newman in the movie "The Verdict." But Rezendes came to consider Garabedian principled and concerned for his clients. He understood that Garabedian was wary of him out of fear that the *Globe* would publish a "sensational story that would essentially exploit his clients without doing them any good." Only after Garabedian saw Rezendes interview his clients for hours and days did his caution start to abate.

The two men developed a mutual respect. In taking on these cases against the church, Garabedian "did something," says Rezendes, "that nobody else ultimately really had the courage to do." Rezendes also admired the lawyer's ingenuity. For example, faced with a state "charitable immunity" statute, which would have capped church liability at \$20,000, Garabedian had the idea of suing church officials as individuals.

In late August, Garabedian told Rezendes something tantalizing: certain documents in the civil cases against Geoghan were already public. Garabedian could have leaked the documents to a reporter much earlier but, fearing the church's retribution, he had insisted on doing everything by the book. Even in a case with a confidentiality order, a lawyer could buttress motions with documents that then became public. Garabedian had filed motions, with their accompanying records, and hoped that an enterprising reporter would stumble upon them. But to his frustration, by late August that had not happened, so he tipped off Rezendes. Without providing details, Garabedian told Rezendes that the documents were potentially explosive.

But the documents, Rezendes discovered, weren't in the docket file at the courthouse. Garabedian had filed 14 different sets of documents, and all of them were missing. Rezendes consulted with a *Globe* attorney. There was a notation on the docket indicating that the documents had been filed. Based on this evidence, *Globe* attorney Anthony Fuller asked the presiding judge, Superior Court Justice Constance Sweeney, to order that the missing documents be re-filed.

These documents were a subset of the documents the *Globe* sought to unseal with its earlier lawsuit. That case was proceeding: in early September, Judge Sweeney had heard arguments in a session so under-the-radar that only one journalist, Rezendes, attended. In both the lawsuit and the more limited motion, no one could predict if and when documents would become available.

## **Organizing the files**

As they amassed ever larger amounts of information, the Spotlight Team knew that organizing their findings would be essential. Matt Carroll was, as he describes himself, "the keeper of the data." He had started at the *Globe* as a copy editor and moved up through the ranks on the

strength of his computer-assisted reporting skills, which he had learned primarily from colleagues. By the standards of computer-assisted reporting, this was simple stuff, and Carroll put in place a rudimentary spreadsheet to keep track of the information.

*Sick leave.* The database swelled after Robinson had a “light bulb moment.” It occurred to him to look through the public directories published by the church, which gave the status and location of all the priests in the archdiocese. The Spotlight Team knew that in between assignments, Geoghan had been placed on “sick leave,” so they examined 17 years’ worth of directories, taking particular notice of “on-the-shelf” designations. Carroll recalls:

You’d be looking through it from say ‘97, ‘98, ‘99 and the first two years it would say John Smith, St. Mary’s Church, Dedham, then all of a sudden it would say John Smith, unassigned. So what does unassigned mean? Or sick leave or something like that... Or transferred to foreign missions. That was another place they would send them off to. So we just started looking for that, sort of these details. That was sort of their way of camouflaging what they were doing.

There were legitimate reasons to take sick leave, of course, but an on-the-shelf designation was enough to raise suspicion among the Spotlight Team members, especially if the name of that priest had come up elsewhere in the investigation. Although the directories by themselves proved nothing, they provided invaluable leads and a point of reference. Here, hiding in plain sight, was evidence.

The directories were like thick phonebooks, with minuscule text. Pfeiffer, Rezendes, and Carroll shared the tedious work of going through them. Two of them, squinting over directories, called out information; the third entered it on the spreadsheet. This was only one of the painstaking tasks in the investigation. The Spotlight Team had once been known as a cushy gig, with deadlines few and far between. No longer. They worked long days cloistered in “the cave,” two small rooms downstairs in the *Globe* building. When they got a rare day off, they didn’t have much energy for their families. “I was a puddle,” says Carroll, who had four young children.

As the senior member of the team, Walter Robinson might have left some of the grunt work to the others, but he was the first one in every morning, arriving at dawn. Affectionately known as Robbie, he was erudite yet crusty, someone you could picture speaking to both longshoremen and heads of state. His tirelessness and meticulousness impressed his junior colleagues, who had little choice but to keep pace. Robinson was also an old-fashioned reporter. On September 7, he met downtown with two sources who gave him a list of priests whose alleged abuses had triggered “hush-money” settlements. There were more than 30 names on the list.

*September 11.* The investigation came to a halt, however, with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. All US news organizations turned their full attention to the national tragedy.



The *Globe* had a special interest, as the two flights which hit New York's World Trade Center had originated in Boston. The Spotlight Team was pulled off the priest sex abuse story. "It was a no-brainer," Robinson says.

### **The database grows**

By mid-October, however, the most intense of the September 11 coverage was over, and the Spotlight reporters returned to their investigation. They continued to go through the directories and eventually identified more than 100 priests with suspicious "on-the-shelf" designations.

They also came up with other ways to identify suspect priests. For example, they assembled a list of all lawyers, including church lawyers, who had worked on cases involving sexual abuse by priests. Carroll had a contact in the court system who, using the lawyers' Board of Overseers number, identified all their cases over a 15-year period, more than 1,000 in all, including many in which priests had been defendants. These cases led to more lawyers, which led to more cases.

In some instances, the computer contained no information on specific cases, so the reporters went to the courthouse to get the files and discovered that they had been impounded: after settlements had been reached, judges had granted the church's request to seal the records—a sign of the deference afforded the church. It was as if these lawsuits had never existed. In response, the *Globe* asked judges to re-open these files.

Not all of the Spotlight Team's methods were so complex or time-consuming. It was a poorly kept secret that the church used a mansion in Milton to house "on-the-shelf" priests. The mansion happened to be a mere quarter of a mile from where Robinson lived. Checking residency records at Milton Town Hall, Robinson discovered that around a dozen priests had "very obligingly" listed the mansion as their home. Over time, the team found that much of the information they gathered reinforced—and was reinforced by—information they already had. Perhaps a priest cited by a lawyer was already in the Spotlight's database because he had listed the Milton mansion as his home. Or the directories showed that a priest had gone on "sick leave" two weeks after the church had received a complaint about his behavior.

Meanwhile, they awaited a ruling on the lawsuit initiated by Baron, and continued to interview victims.

### **When the story gets personal**

Some of the victims were eager to tell their stories. Others didn't want to talk on the record, or at all. In one instance, Robinson says, "the victim wasn't willing to speak to us, but the

father told us about this one priest who had not only molested kids, but had managed to kill a kid when he was driving drunk in an auto accident.” That priest was Father Ronald Paquin.

Paquin “belonged” to Pfeiffer: the Spotlight reporters had divided up the priests. Pfeiffer, it turned out, was responsible for talking to victims of the three priests (other than Geoghan) most frequently accused of abuse—Fathers Paul Shanley and Joseph Birmingham, plus Paquin. A former court reporter with years of experience talking to victims of crime, Pfeiffer had a reputation as a skilled and patient listener. Both on the phone and in person, she made victims—virtually all men—feel comfortable enough to tell their stories. The crimes had happened years before, but some victims were just beginning to deal with their shame and confusion. “It was heartbreaking to think that adult men were still wrestling with what happened,” Pfeiffer says. Some had never told their stories before talking to Pfeiffer. “That kind of story is embarrassing to tell anyone,” Pfeiffer says, “but might have been slightly less embarrassing to tell a woman.”

Early in the investigation, Pfeiffer met with one of Shanley’s victims, 53-year-old Arthur Austin, in a restaurant. Shanley was a longhaired, charismatic “street priest,” who in the 1960s and 70s ministered to alienated young people: runaways, addicts, those struggling with their sexual identity. He molested many of them. Austin first went to see him in 1968. For the next six years, Austin was Shanley’s “sex slave.” Speaking to Pfeiffer about the years of abuse and his resulting depression, Austin broke down. “The waitress was trying to figure out how to approach the table because he was in tears the whole time,” Pfeiffer says.<sup>28</sup>

Many victims had suffered severe emotional and psychological damage. Carroll says he had to learn not to dismiss people who were often off-putting and incoherent:

I think a lot of the times the wackiness came from the fact that they'd been telling people their story for years and no one believed them... Or to be honest, that the abuse had kind of driven them around the bend a little bit.

Rezendes, who was interviewing Geoghan’s victims, had had experiences that helped him relate to the victims. Having driven a cab and run a community newspaper in Boston, Rezendes knew the neighborhoods that had produced many of the victims. He explains:

Most of these kids were from hardscrabble blue-collar neighborhoods. And so a kid would tell me he was living in such and such a neighborhood and I would try to break the ice by saying yeah, you used to live over by the High Top liquor, or you used to live by Sacred Heart parish, or something like that, and try to just make them understand that I knew where they were coming from.

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<sup>28</sup> Roy J. Harris Jr., *Pulitzer’s Gold: Behind the Prize for Public Service Journalism*. (University of Missouri Press, 2007), p.52.

One day Rezendes spent three hours talking to a couple and their three children; two of the children, a girl and a boy, had been abused by Rev. Peter S. Kanchong, a Thai priest who had come to work in the Boston Archdiocese. The son had tried to kill himself. The parents were ravaged by guilt. It was one thing to suspect, as Rezendes did, that sexual abuse in the church was “an epidemic,” quite another to hear the stories. Says Rezendes:

We were all, I think, really devastated by what we were discovering, which were people who were poor and vulnerable and trusting of the church as an institution that was supposed to care for them and help them and shepherd them, and we were devastated by the stories that showed their lives had been just destroyed. So emotionally devastated, and I think also fair to say, you know, shocked and kind of outraged by what we were discovering. It's a human reaction. I don't know how you could not be.

### **Reporting your culture**

The Spotlight reporters' consternation was the more acute because, as they learned only well into the investigation, all four had been raised Catholic. None was still practicing, but their experience growing up in the church gave them an intuitive grasp of the story and also added a level of emotional connection. Pfeiffer, an Ohio native, had grown up both Catholic and Protestant, attending church twice on Sundays. She says that going into the investigation she didn't have any strong feelings one way or the other about the Catholic Church; to her, it was an interesting story that she could approach relatively objectively. But with time, the story hit home. Her mother, in fact, had grown up in Boston. Says Pfeiffer:

She was one of those devout Catholics who, the greatest honor would be the priest coming to dinner, and it was very interesting for me to see how people like my mother who thought that the priests were angels and saints and didn't ask questions, and wouldn't question the church, basically ended up enabling this to happen for as long as it did.

Their upbringings helped the reporters comprehend the power of the priesthood. In most Catholic communities, parents were honored to have a priest take an active interest in their children, and in large families, especially fatherless ones, caretaking help was invaluable. If suspicions arose, people gave priests the benefit of the doubt. The *Globe* discovered cases in which children told their parents that they had been molested, and the parents didn't believe them.

Hardened journalists—as well as lapsed Catholics—the Spotlight Team members were expecting to uncover secrets. But what they found exceeded their expectations. It was the prevalence of abuse that shocked them and, more than that, the church's effort to conceal it. “Even though I was aware that [sexual abuse in the church] was a problem,” Rezendes says, “I never, ever for one second thought that we would discover what we ultimately did discover.” Carroll

remembers feeling “shocked and excited and sort of bewildered” as the church’s role became clear. A Massachusetts native whose aunt had been a nun, Carroll had vivid memories of Cardinal Cushing in the 1960s. He says:

He was building hospitals and orphanages throughout greater Boston and that's all you'd see on TV, this real old guy but obviously just a real well meaning sweet guy just doing so much good for the community, helping people left and right. My father was always active in the parish council, so we always had priests in, and I knew my aunt and she was just a really great woman, and I had the utmost respect for the church. Then all of a sudden you start seeing this stuff, I was like they're covering stuff up, what's going on? It was baffling and mind-boggling.

Not surprisingly, their human reaction tempered their excitement about the story. As Robinson recalls: “There are some stories you do where you’re excited and you’re pumped. I think in this case this was not a story where there were high fives, because the subject matter was so grim and so gruesome and so disconcerting, so depressing.” But those same characteristics also made the story impossible to drop. Says Pfeiffer:

Once we finally tapped into that network of lawyers and victims who would talk to us, we realized there were huge numbers of stories that were just like each other. A priest abused a kid, parents tell the church, the priest disappears and shows up somewhere else. There was a lot of that happening, so it was pretty clear that the numbers were really big.

### **Potential backlash**

The Spotlight Team spent October and early November 2001 gathering its evidence, interview by interview and document by document. Gradually, it began to discern the dimensions of the story. In fact, the grim facts presented a challenge: it seemed too bad to be true. Precisely what made it a good story in a journalistic sense made it more difficult to report and write. If seasoned journalists were shocked, how would the public react? Says Robinson:

I could go to my best friends who trust me implicitly and I could tell them the story of what Geoghan did and what the church did to cover him up, and they wouldn't believe me. Because you can't believe that an institution like the Catholic Church would allow children to be so harmed for so many decades, nobody would believe it. We couldn't believe it.

Although Baron wasn't on intimate terms with Boston's Catholic communities, he was well aware of the explosiveness of this story. He knew, for one thing, that his own religion could

become an issue: critics might point out that the “Jewish editor” had arrived and immediately launched an investigation into the church. He adds:

I expected that there would be sort of an outburst of antipathy toward the *Globe*, of feeling that, once again, the *Globe* was going after the Catholic Church, and that we wouldn’t win any friends among devout Catholics.

The paper was also aware of the potential economic impact of printing a shocking story in a time of declining circulation and revenues. That didn’t mean they would hold the story, but Baron and his colleagues had to be realistic. “When [newspapers] are losing circulation, there is a heightened sensitivity to upsetting a good chunk of your community and having them cancel subscriptions on you,” says Baron.

Bradlee says there was an “unspoken understanding” among the journalists that the stakes were unusually high: they were, after all, producing a story damning the city’s most powerful institution, a source of pride and comfort for millions. While the Spotlight journalists could not prevent an angry reaction, they could try to minimize it. They could report the story exhaustively, using documentation and on-the-record sources where possible. They resolved to make a special effort to write dispassionately, to avoid loaded language and hyperbole, so that critics wouldn’t have even a small hook on which to hang charges of bias. “You just have to make the story bulletproof,” Pfeiffer says.

### **Rezendes gets a scoop**

In early November, Judge Sweeney took action on the *Globe’s* request to see the documents that had disappeared from the docket file. She ordered Garabedian to re-file them. Finally, Rezendes could see the documents that Garebedian had described as “potentially explosive.” Fuller, the *Globe’s* attorney, secured copies of the documents, which he copied and sent to Rezendes by courier. At his desk Rezendes excitedly opened the envelope.

The contents amounted to a smoking gun. Most significant was a letter from Bishop John D’Arcy to Cardinal Law, written in 1984 after Law had reassigned Geoghan. D’Arcy had objected to Law’s decision, citing Geoghan’s “history of homosexual involvement with young boys.” This December 1984 warning from his top lieutenant was different from the warning Law had admitted receiving from an unnamed source in September 1984. The D’Arcy letter meant that a person high up in the archdiocese had accepted as fact Geoghan’s pedophilia. The import of the letter, says Rezendes, was clear: Law knew. He knew Geoghan was a serial pedophile when he assigned him to St. Julia’s Parish in Weston, where he was placed in charge of altar boys. Rezendes adds:

Here was a letter from basically one of his top lieutenants saying Geoghan’s a real big problem. So it showed me that Geoghan is not someone who had slipped through the cracks. Geoghan’s fate and his

deeds in fact were discussed and debated at the highest levels of the archdiocese.

The documents re-filed by Garabedian also included part of a deposition by Joanne Mueller, a single mother of four boys in Melrose, a town north of Boston. Although stationed at that time in Hingham on the South Shore, Geoghan had befriended Mueller. He counseled her on spiritual matters and babysat her boys, who were between five and 12. He regularly took them to get ice cream and put them to bed. One night her third son came to her and insisted she protect him from Geoghan. "I don't want him doing that to my wee-wee," he said, according to her testimony. She called all the boys together and learned that Geoghan had been raping them orally and anally.

She immediately went to a local priest and told him what had happened. Rev. Paul E. Miceli, who knew both Geoghan and her family, told her that Geoghan would "never be a priest again." He also advised her not to tell anyone else what had happened "[D]on't think about it," he told her. "It will never happen again."

There was a third important document: a letter sent by the aunt of victims to Law's predecessor, Cardinal Medeiros. When he was stationed in Jamaica Plain from 1974 to 1980, Geoghan had abused the seven boys in the care of Maryetta Dussourd. Three of the boys were hers and four were her niece's. Dussourd discovered what had happened after the boys confided in her sister, Margaret Gallant. Dussourd complained to the pastor of a local parish, Rev. John E. Thomas, and Geoghan was placed on "sick leave." But a year later, in 1981, Geoghan reemerged at St. Brendan's in Dorchester. Gallant wrote to Medeiros to object. "It embarrasses me that the church is so negligent," she wrote. "Regardless of what he says, or the doctor who treated him, I do not believe he is cured; his actions strongly suggest that he is not, and there is no guarantee that persons with these obsessions are ever cured."

The existence of any of these three documents, especially the letter from Bishop D'Arcy, was a huge story. Together they were a bombshell. But what should the *Globe* do with them?

### **Publish or pause?**

The Spotlight Team was not in the habit of reporting news as it came in. Rather, it waited until it had thoroughly reported a topic before publishing an in-depth piece or series. Particularly in this case, with such a controversial subject, it seemed to make sense to follow its usual practice and wait until it was ready to publish a comprehensive story. The plan in this case was to run a long, airtight story on Geoghan as a setup to his trial, which was set to start in January. The *Globe* could be confident that its competitors were well behind on this story—if they had even entered the race. In fact, were the *Globe* to publish an article immediately based on these three documents, it would likely pull competitors onto the story. Rezendes, moreover, doubted that Garabedian had

told any other reporter about the documents; he alone had put in the time to win Garabedian's trust.

The problem, however, was that another reporter could find the documents. Whenever new documents were filed, there was a notation on the docket. Because these documents were technically not new, Rezendes had asked his lawyer to argue that there need not be a notation. But as it turned out, the courthouse clerk had followed standard procedure. A diligent court reporter, one who routinely checked docket files for new entries, might find the documents.

This scenario seemed plausible to Rezendes. The idea of holding the story made him nervous. The *Globe* could run this story and still do the more comprehensive piece when it was ready. If they ran a story immediately, it would be a solid one; it would be based on documents that would go a long way toward offsetting the church's predictable pushback.

On the other hand, the team was not ready to run, as Rezendes says, "the most authoritative piece." They still had leads to follow, facts to check. Plus they might win the lawsuit that would, with the infusion of documents, greatly expand the scope of the story. But what if a rival journalist stumbled across their largest single discovery? Rezendes describes the choice:

There was some thought that we should just go [with the story] right away. And there was another thought that no, we should hold it and do the best possible, do what we do, which is get our arms completely around a subject, and come out with the most authoritative piece that we could as soon as we could, but to not rush it for competitive reasons.

The team would have to make a decision.