

UNHOLY ALLIANCES

Big and sprawling and a bright-yellow brick, St. Rita's is an imposing presence in a quiet New Orleans neighborhood of neat little houses and well-tended lawns. It is scarcely past dawn when the first parishioners begin to file into church for early-morning Mass, but already the air is as hot as a furnace. Outside St. Rita's, the force of nature is inescapable: in this tropical climate, lush green vegetation thrusts into every crevice, floods come with the first hard rain, and thunder rumbles across the skies in a low, continuous murmur. Inside the pristine, air-conditioned church, however, an old-fashioned decorum prevails. Although most of the women wear casual clothes on this weekday morning, their heads are modestly covered, as if all the years of liberalization since Vatican II had never happened. As a white-robed priest leads the faithful in prayer, his voice is mellifluous and soothing: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," he intones solemnly. The faces of his flock are as serene as their sanctuary; inside this place, man has triumphed over nature to impose a rigorous order on its darker and more luxuriant excesses.

Or so it seemed until last spring, when the parishioners at St. Rita's finally learned from the news media about the activities of one of their favorite priests. Father Dino Cinel, a charming Italian-born priest who lived at St. Rita's for nearly a decade, was discovered to have stockpiled an enormous

cache of commercially produced pornographic films, photographs, and magazines featuring young children as sexual objects. "Little Brother Wants a Kiss!" reads one magazine. "Yes! A minor is loads of fun!" Another shows pictures of children in black leather performing oral sex on each other; one headline advertises "Big Prick Dream Boy." A how-to article entitled "Young Boys Are Fun in Bed" instructs "fellow boy-fuckers" on how to seduce children, from hanging around near schoolyards to striking up conversations—"Be nice"—to initiating sex ("A few drinks or a pipe of hashish . . . will help you a lot").

The mere possession of such material carries a mandatory jail sentence in Louisiana, which has one of the strictest child-pornography laws in the nation, but there was more. Also found in Father Cinel's room were 160 hours of home-made pornographic videotapes in which the handsome priest performed anal sex, oral sex, group sex, and a dizzying array of other diversions (often including his fluffy white lapdog) with at least seven different teenage boys. His voice as soft as a caress, he was relentlessly persuasive as he urged one boy to have sex with his brother on-camera, another to have intercourse with his mother and to bring in his sister and her boyfriend to make a group-sex video they might sell in Denmark. At one point one of Cinel's partners reported back on his mother's reaction when he tried to seduce her: "She got real upset," he said plaintively. "She never reacted the same to me after that. It blew her mind."

Hers wasn't the only mind that was blown. To the horror of the parishioners at St. Rita's, many of the videotapes were made in the rectory, in Father Cinel's modest little suite of rooms right under the noses of the other priests in residence there. But the uproar last spring was only the public eruption of a scandal that the church had kept secret for more than two years and that was finally revealed not by diocesan officials but by Richard Angelico, an outstanding investigative reporter on WDSU-TV, the local NBC affiliate. Father Cinel's cache of contraband had been discovered at the end of December 1988, and although he himself was discreetly ousted as a parish priest shortly thereafter, the archdiocese held on to his collection of pornography for three months before

The Catholic Church is in crisis over the pedophilia in the priesthood—its lawsuit payouts could total \$1 billion within the next few years. But how is the church confronting the problem?

LESLIE BENNETTS reports on the case of a New Orleans priest who allegedly exploited young men for sex and collected child pornography, but was allowed to re-emerge as a tenured college professor in New York

turning it over to the district attorney's office, prompting a barrage of later questions about whether the tapes had during that time been purged of sequences involving minors or parishioners. In addition to the resulting charges of a church cover-up, when the news became public the district attorney immediately came under fire for his failure to prosecute Cinel.

Harry Connick Sr., the father of the singer, is a devout Catholic and a parishioner at St. Rita's as well as the longtime D.A. of Orleans Parish, New Orleans being a town so Catholic its counties are called parishes. Although Connick had lobbied hard for Louisiana's tough new child-pornography statute, he had also entertained Father Cinel in his home, and the sociable priest had even performed the rites at the wedding of Connick's brother-in-law. In a television interview with Angeli-co, the D.A. admitted that one reason he hadn't prosecuted the case, despite a recommendation by his own investigators that he do so, was his unwillingness to embarrass "Holy Mother the Church." The ensuing outcry drove him from public view, although the D.A.'s office did finally file a single, unspecific charge of possession of pornography against Cinel—a move so halfhearted that it elicited still more criticism, since hundreds of charges could technically have been filed based on the commercial pornography collection alone.

Indeed, the Cinel case is being described as the largest documented case of priest pedophilia in the history of the crime. Federal authorities are expected to file additional charges this fall based on violations of customs and postal regulations, since Cinel admitted he had smuggled some of his stash into the country from Europe. Then there are the civil lawsuits: two so far, one by each of Cinel's most long-standing boyfriends, citing not only the priest but

Former priest Dino Cinel during his deposition in 1990 and some of the child pornography discovered in his room at the rectory.





Cinel with his wife, Linda, and teaching at the College of Staten Island last May.

also the church for its failure to protect them from Father Cinel's predations.

A major New York educational system has also become embroiled in the controversy. After being quietly dismissed from St. Rita's in early 1989, Cinel, a respected historian, continued to teach at Tulane University a few blocks away, and before the next year was out he had landed a job as "distinguished professor" of history at the College of Staten Island, which is part of the City University of New York. The distinguished-professor rank carries a \$20,000 bonus, so by last winter Cinel was ensconced at Staten Island in the cushiest of academic posts, with an annual salary of \$90,000 and a decidedly underwhelming work load of half a course per semester. The new distinguished professor was given tenure, of course, so when the scandal broke shortly thereafter, the College of Staten Island found, to its extreme dismay, that it couldn't even suspend Cinel without running a lengthy procedural gauntlet of byzantine complexity, a process that would obviously take months to complete and in which Cinel was entitled to an automatic defense by the union representing faculty members. In September, the college finally reassigned Cinel to a theretofore nonexistent position at CUNY Press, a largely nonexistent entity that has yet to publish a book. "The highest priority is to avoid contact between him and students," said Dr. Barry Bressler, the vice president for academic affairs at the College of Staten Island. The college had originally settled upon Cinel after a long search process ratified by some of the most prominent historians in the country, but after the scandal broke the school was besieged with criticism for its handling of the situation; it turned out that most of the professors on the search committee never even knew Cinel was a former priest—a fact he had somehow omitted from his vita—let alone a disgraced one facing a multitude of potential criminal charges. The lone priest on the search committee—Lydio Tomasi, executive director of the Center for Migration Studies on Staten Island, who had known Cinel for more than twenty years and even belonged to the same order, the Scalabrinian Fathers—never told any of his colleagues that Cinel had been a priest. "It was quite irrelevant," insists Tomasi, who claims to have known nothing about the sex scandal.

With assorted religious, educational, and criminal-justice systems reeling in his wake, the fifty-year-old Cinel has been

living in Brooklyn since last summer with Linda Pollock, the fellow Tulane history professor he married two years ago after getting her pregnant, and with their toddler, a girl. The Scottish-born Pollock is "kind of a wallflower," according to Dr. Bressler. "She's the opposite of Dino." Indeed, even his enemies acknowledge that Cinel is extremely charming. He is now presenting himself as a respectable family man while maintaining a posture of aggrieved innocence, telling everyone who will listen that his sexual peccadilloes are behind him and that he can't understand why everyone is making such a big deal out of something that happened in the past. "Before this I was a prince—now I'm a pariah," he said bitterly to another professor over the summer.

He may be a pariah, but he's also free to walk the streets, and the mere thought makes many observers shudder. "Somebody's got to put this guy in jail," says Gary Raymond, a private investigator and former New Orleans policeman who has worked on the case. "The experts always say there's no cure for pedophilia, and based on the lack of proof of rehabilitation other than Cinel's saying 'I've given it up,' I can only assume that what he's doing at the present time is molesting kids, because that's what Dino Cinel has always done, and everything else—the priesthood, Tulane, CUNY—everything has been secondary. If he's photographed seven boys, he's seduced seventy, and if he's seduced seventy, he's taken a shot at seven hundred."

Unfortunately, such numbers would not be unprecedented; in the last few years, the Catholic Church has been overwhelmed with similar cases. In fact, it is surprising that Cinel's own archdiocese handled his case so ineptly, since it had already endured a horrific embarrassment a few years earlier with a slew of lawsuits against Gilbert Gauthe, a Louisiana priest who has thus far cost the church more than \$20 million. "According to some of the estimates, as many as two hundred kids, mostly altar boys, were abused over a five- to seven-year period," says Raul Bencomo, an attorney for some of the plaintiffs. The damage was exacerbated by the fact that church authorities had known Gauthe was a pedophile. "They shuffled him from one parish to another

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and swept it under the rug to avoid the embarrassment," says Bencomo. "They have their own code of silence, just like cops, but there's no question there were other priests involved. These guys were trading these kids like baseball cards." A total of seven priests were eventually implicated in the scandal, and Gauthier is currently serving twenty years at hard labor.

According to the experts, such situations are all too common. "The pattern you find in many if not most of these cases is that a priest is removed and recycled, sometimes with therapy, sometimes not," says Jason Berry, a Catholic journalist and the author of *And Lead Us Not into Temptation*, a book about homosexuality and pedophilia in the priesthood that will be published next year by Doubleday. "They're placed in another parish, in another priestly assignment, and when parents and parishioners find out they have received damaged goods, they get very angry."

Increasingly, they also get a very expensive form of revenge. "Roughly \$300 million has been paid by church officials and insurers since 1985 in cases of priests abusing children and adolescents," reports Berry, adding that there have been at least two hundred priests or brothers reported to the Vatican Embassy for such offenses in the last six years alone. Since many court records are sealed and settlements are often predicated on the enforced silence of the plaintiffs, such estimates are generally conceded to be extremely conservative; internal church documents describe priest pedophilia as a major crisis and warn that lawsuits may cost the church as much as \$1 billion by 1995. No one really knows how many child molesters there are in the general population, let alone the priesthood, but around 6 percent of priests are believed to be pedophiles, according to A. W. Richard Sipe, a former Benedictine monk and the author of *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*.

Catholic officials who deal with pedophilia object to its characterization as a particular problem for the priesthood. "I don't think it's a church problem, I think it's a universal problem," says Monsignor Robert Bacher, president and C.E.O. of St. Luke Institute, a psychiatric hospital in Maryland whose patients include priests with sexual disorders. "Most of the people we treat who are pedophiles were abused by their own families, and it grows in geo-

metric progression—a father abuses three or four children, and they go out and become child abusers."

Nevertheless, other analysts find the church particularly culpable in how it handles the problem. "What is so staggering to me is not that there are a lot of pedophile priests, because child molestation affects all layers of society," says Jason Berry. "What staggers me is the stupidity of the bishops who simply are afraid to do the morally correct thing. The Cinel case is a Watergate kind of story, because ultimately every one of these cases is a tragedy. You have the hubris of power—the raw arrogance, the blindness, the myopia. Every one of these stories is about the abuse of ecclesiastical power, and about the ecclesiastical power structure trying to conceal the internal corruptions that have long been tolerated."

How long Dino Cinel's corruptions had been tolerated remains a matter of conjecture. Philip Hannan, the New Orleans archbishop during Cinel's tenure at St. Rita's, maintains that Cinel arrived there with glowing recommendations from his former bishop in California. However, Chris Fontaine, one of the two young men now suing Cinel, told WDSU's Richard Angelico that the priest once admitted to him that he was fleeing from earlier indiscretions. "He got into some serious trouble in New York, and he went to California, and then he got into some trouble in California and he got kicked out of the church... because he was having homosexual problems and they told him to get out," says Fontaine. In New Orleans, Cinel "started all over again," Fontaine adds. Through his lawyer, Arthur "Buddy" Lemann, Cinel categorically denies Fontaine's account. When I ask Hannan, who has since retired as archbishop, if he knew anything about such a history, he says, "That is absolutely not the story of the church."

Even if the church knew nothing about Cinel's proclivities, experts report that such discreet recycling is common. "I've followed priests who have had this problem who have been in dozens of parishes all over the country," says A. W. Richard Sipe. "The policy is 'Avoid scandal at any cost.'"

For Fontaine and Ronnie Tichenor, the other young man who has filed suit against Cinel, the knowledge that theirs are not isolated cases provides little consolation. Both are now in their mid-twenties, both are the products of troubled family backgrounds, both lacked a stable father figure at

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home, and both remain deeply disturbed by their experiences with Father Cinel. Tichenor says he was only thirteen when he began having sex with the priest (Cinel claims he doesn't remember how old Tichenor was when they got involved), but the passage of years has done little to assuage his turmoil. "Many's the night I sat in the kitchen of my mother's house with the barrel of a gun in my mouth," Tichenor told Richard Angelico.

Fontaine acknowledges that he was seventeen when his affair with Cinel started, but he has always looked far younger than his years, and his mental capabilities are limited; indeed, he is described by his lawyers as borderline retarded. Cinel's videotapes provide eloquent testimony to Fontaine's childishness; in one sequence, he is watching a Smurf cartoon on television while Cinel performs oral sex on him. Fontaine remains particularly fragile; he has been diagnosed in the past as both suicidal and, after threatening to kill Cinel, homicidal, and he is haunted by his feelings of betrayal by the priest, to whom he had been deeply attached. Fontaine finally decided to sue only after seeing an issue of a European porno magazine entitled *Dreamboy U.S.A.*, which consisted entirely of pictures of himself—posing in provocative positions, pulling down his underpants, displaying his erections, masturbating—secretly supplied to the magazine by Cinel. Cinel claims he never got any money for the pictures—but for Fontaine, who believes that Cinel sold the material without telling him, the discovery was the ultimate blow in a series of disillusionments made possible by his own terrible vulnerability.

A slight, freckled young man with reddish-brown hair, Fontaine speaks slowly and haltingly, stumbling over syntax and groping for words; he may not be articulate, but after years of therapy he has come to a clear understanding of why Father Cinel was able to manipulate him so egregiously. "I was just begging for somebody to love me," Fontaine told Richard Angelico, his voice suffused with bitterness. "He made me believe he loved me and he would always be there for me. My parents didn't care about me, and I didn't have nothing. If he had told me to jump off a bridge, I would have jumped. . . . He made me believe that I was a kid in need of a father and he was a father in need of a son, and God put us together to help each other and to serve each other's needs. I was seventeen years old, but I must have been fourteen years

old in my brain. . . . I didn't think about the cost. All I knew was here was a person telling me he loved me, and I was going to do everything in my power to keep him. . . . When I was with him, I really didn't doubt his word. All I knew was that for the first time in my life I had somebody home waiting for me that was supposedly going to be there forever for me. . . . I sat outside that church many a night in the pouring rain, waiting for him to come home, where I could go inside. That's how much I loved him."

A cluster of television cameras and reporters are massed in front of Darryl Tschirn's law office overlooking Lake Pontchartrain as Dino Cinel and his attorney step off the elevator. Cinel's lawyer is scowling as they dart through the assembled press, but the former priest simply looks shell-shocked, his eyes wide and startled like those of a deer caught in headlights. Pale and wan, clad in a pin-striped navy suit jacket over rumpled khaki pants, he keeps his head down as he disappears into the inner office, where he is about to give a deposition in one of the two civil suits that have been filed by Tschirn and David Paddison, the attorneys for both Fontaine and Tichenor. On this particular occasion, Cinel spends a lot of time pleading the Fifth Amendment, but it doesn't matter; he has already aired a remarkable amount of dirty laundry in a videotaped deposition taken in August of 1990. If Cinel looks somewhat chastened now, back then he seemed a different man entirely—arrogant to the point of insolence, cavalier, even nonchalant as he discussed his richly varied sex life with both men and women during his twenty-three years as a priest, his illicit activities in the rectory at St. Rita's, and his contraband pornography collection, among other topics.

According to his deposition, Cinel, the youngest of nine children, was first introduced to sex back home in Italy by the headmaster of his boarding school, whom he described as "an eminent priest who was a friend of the pope." Cinel was thirteen or fourteen at the time, and the encounters with his superior continued over the next couple of years. After Cinel became a priest, his sex partners included both women and young men; after acquiring a master's degree at New York University, he earned his doctorate at Stanford, maintaining



New Orleans D.A.
Harry Connick Sr. (near left)
and former New Orleans
archbishop Philip Hannan,
one of the first to be informed
of Cinel's activities.

a four-year affair with a woman in California in addition to his more fleeting homosexual contacts. Cinel's taste for adolescent boys was already well established; when he moved to New Orleans, he made a point of calling the D.A.'s office to ascertain the age of consent in Louisiana. He had been down to the French Quarter, where many male hustlers hang out, "and I had seen that some of them looked young and I wanted to know what the situation was here," Cinel explained. "I tried to stay clear of the law." At no point during his entire four-hour deposition did he mention the conflict between his behavior and his vows as a priest. Sparring verbally with the lawyer who was questioning him, Cinel taunted his opponent as if he thought he were invulnerable, and a mocking smile rarely left his face. Cinel's lawyer, Arthur Lemann, has a ready explanation for his client's attitude back then. "He had been assured he wasn't going to be criminally prosecuted and that the deposition he was giving would be confidential and sealed," says Lemann, a sleek, portly man who favors three-piece white linen suits, saddle shoes, Panama hats, and fat cigars. "The D.A. had agreed not to prosecute him; there was a binding oral agreement."

The beleaguered district attorney refuses to comment on this or any other aspect of the Cinel case, which has been a major headache ever since Connick admitted he went easy on Cinel because he didn't want to embarrass the church. "It's a pending case, and I'm not going to discuss anything about it," Connick tells me. Even things he's said in the past? He groans. "Especially things I've said in the past," he says.

However, Cinel isn't the only one who got the distinct impression that Connick didn't want to prosecute him. Gary Raymond, who worked as an investigator in the D.A.'s office for seven years before retiring to establish a private practice, wrote Connick a three-page letter in the summer of 1990 outlining the case against Cinel. "I literally begged Harry Connick to charge this man," says Raymond, a wiry, intense man who is determined to see the former priest brought to justice. "I was then told by an investigator in the D.A.'s office that Connick was upset because I had created a paper trail." Connick still took no action; months later, Raymond ran into him on St. Patrick's Day. "When are you going to prosecute this priest?" he demanded. "Never, as long as I'm D.A.," Connick replied, according to Raymond. (It was only after the media broke the story last spring that

Connick even filed the one charge against Cinel. After months of continuing criticism, this fall the D.A. finally charged him with sixty separate counts of possession of child pornography.)

The alleged agreement with the D.A. isn't the only deal Cinel claims to have made: when another priest finally blew the whistle on him, Cinel says, the archbishop agreed that if he departed quietly the material discovered in his room would not be used against him. The circumstances of Cinel's downfall were ironic. He had just been driven to the airport by Linda Pollock, his future wife, who was to use his car while he made a lecture trip to Italy. She promptly locked the keys in the car and called the rectory to ask another priest to check Cinel's room for an extra set. Father James Tarantino began poking around in Cinel's desk, where he found piles of child pornography. Archbishop Hannan was notified and called Cinel in Italy the next day. Both Cinel and Hannan agree that the archbishop's first request was that the errant father simply stay in Italy; Hannan doesn't seem to see anything wrong with having encouraged a priest who had just been discovered to have committed criminal acts to become a fugitive from justice. But Cinel refused to disappear. "He replied, to my great surprise, that he resented the invasion of privacy of his room, and didn't show any kind of remorse," Hannan reports. The rest of their conversation is a matter of bitter dispute. "Of course I did not make any deal at all," protests Hannan. "Those charges are ridiculous." Indeed, Hannan has repeatedly expressed outrage that anyone would even question his word against that of someone like Cinel. "Father Dino was a real number-one con man," he says indignantly.

However, Hannan's version of events is contradicted by others as well. One key issue is whether the archdiocese notified Tulane University when the tapes were discovered. The first time I ask Hannan whether he told Tulane, he stammers and hedges. "I'm trying to think... I don't remember what we did about Tulane," he says. Half an hour later, his memory suddenly improves, and he calls me back with a new answer, saying that he had indeed informed the school. "It was all done within twenty-four hours," he says briskly. "I took care of notifying some of the people, and Bishop Muench notified some of the others—right away."

Tulane has a different story. (Continued on page 268)