



Tainted Saint: Mother Teresa Defended Pedophile Priest

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The death of journalist and polemicist Christopher Hitchens last month gave those familiar with his work a chance to revisit one of his more controversial subjects: the Albanian nun Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, better known to the world as Mother Teresa. In his 1997 book, *The Missionary Position: Mother*

Teresa in Theory and Practice, Hitchens argued that the "Saint of Calcutta," who founded and headed the international Missionaries of Charity order, enjoyed undeserved esteem.

Despite her humanitarian reputation and 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa had set up a worldwide system of "homes for the dying" that routinely failed to provide adequate care to patients, Hitchens argued — an appraisal shared by *The Lancet*, a respected medical journal. Mother Teresa also associated with, and took large sums of money from, disreputable figures such as American savings-and-loan swindler Charles Keating and the dictatorial Duvalier family of Haiti.

Notwithstanding these black marks on an otherwise sterling reputation, Mother Teresa — who died in 1997 and is now on the fast track to a formal proclamation of sainthood by the Vatican — was never known to have been touched by the scandal that would rock the Roman Catholic Church in the decade after her death: the systematic protection of child-molesting priests by church officials.

Yet documents obtained by SF Weekly suggest that Mother Teresa knew one of her favorite priests was removed from ministry for sexually abusing a Bay Area boy in 1993, and that she nevertheless urged his bosses to return him to work as soon as possible. The priest resumed active ministry, as well as his predatory habits. Eight additional complaints were lodged against him in the coming years by various families, leading to his eventual arrest on sex-abuse charges in 2005.

The priest was Donald McGuire, a former Jesuit who has been convicted of molesting boys in federal and state courts and is serving a 25-year federal prison sentence. McGuire, now 81 years old, taught at the University of San Francisco in the late 1970s, and held frequent spiritual retreats for families in San Francisco and Walnut Creek throughout the 1980s and 1990s. He also ministered extensively to the Missionaries of Charity during that time.

In a 1994 letter to McGuire's Jesuit superior in Chicago, it appears that Mother Teresa acknowledged she had learned of the "sad events which took [McGuire] from his priestly ministry these past seven months," and that McGuire "admitted imprudence in his behavior," but she wished to see him put back on the job. The letter was written after McGuire had been sent to a psychiatric hospital following an abuse complaint to the Jesuits by a family in Walnut Creek.

"I understand how grave is the scandal touching the priesthood in the U.S.A. and how careful we must be to guard the purity and reputation of that priesthood," the letter states. "I must say, however, that I have confidence and trust in Fr. McGuire and wish to see his vital ministry resume as soon as possible."

The one-page letter comes from thousands of pages of church records that have been shared with plaintiffs' attorneys in ongoing litigation against the Jesuits involving McGuire. (The documents were also shared with prosecutors who worked on his criminal cases.) It is printed on Missionaries of Charity letterhead but is unsigned, and thus cannot be verified absolutely as having been written by Mother Teresa. Officials in the Missionaries of Charity and the Jesuits did not respond to requests for comment on its provenance.

Yet statements throughout the letter point to Mother Teresa as the author. The writer speaks of "my communities throughout the world" and refers by name to Mother Teresa's four top deputies, calling them "my four assistants." Rev. Joseph Fessio, a

Jesuit and former University of San Francisco professor who knew Mother Teresa, said the reference to her assistants is an "authentic" aspect of the letter.

The letter could have an impact on the near-complete process of canonizing Mother Teresa. In 2003 she was beatified by Pope John Paul II, the penultimate step to full sainthood.

"What we see here is the same thing we see over and over in regard to the [priest pedophilia] scandal — the complete lack of empathy for, or interest in, possible victims of these accused priests," said Anne Rice, the bestselling author of novels including *Interview with the Vampire* and a former Catholic who has been outspoken in her criticism of the church's handling of the sex-abuse scandal. "In this letter the concern is for the reputation of the priesthood. This is as disappointing as it is shocking."

Other documents that have emerged in the criminal and civil cases involving McGuire could affect the sainthood prospects of another deceased religious leader eyed by the Vatican for sainthood. Among the newly uncovered church records are letters by Rev. John Hardon, a Jesuit who also worked extensively with Mother Teresa and died in 2000. He collaborated with then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a landmark summation of contemporary church doctrine. In 2005, the Vatican opened a formal inquiry into whether Hardon should be made a saint.

But statements by Hardon in his letters could complicate that process. The documents reveal McGuire admitted to Hardon that he was taking showers with the teenage boy from Walnut Creek whose complaint led to McGuire's psychiatric treatment. He also acknowledged soliciting body massages from the boy and letting him read pornography in the room they shared on trips together.

Despite these admissions, Hardon concluded that his fellow Jesuit's actions were "objectively defensible," albeit "highly imprudent," and told McGuire's bosses that he "should be prudently allowed to engage in priestly ministry."

The postulators, or Vatican-appointed researchers and advocates for sainthood, assigned to investigate Mother Teresa and Hardon did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

While it is unclear exactly what impact the new documents will have on the evaluation of both figures for sainthood, the evidence of involvement by two prominent and internationally respected Catholics in the McGuire sex-abuse scandal is likely to cause consternation among critics of the church's handling of predator priests. The situation is aggravated since McGuire went on to abuse more children after suggestions to return him to ministry were heeded.

"We're talking about extremely powerful people who could have gotten Father McGuire off the streets in 1994," said Patrick Wall, a lawyer and former Benedictine monk who performs investigations on behalf of abuse victims suing the Catholic Church. "I'm thinking of all those post-'94 kids who could have been saved."

It is unknown exactly when Hardon, McGuire, and Mother Teresa first crossed paths. But chances are good that the first time they all found themselves together in the same place was in San Francisco in 1981. It was the 800th anniversary of the birth of Saint Francis of Assisi, the city's namesake. Hardon invited Mother Teresa, who attended celebratory services at which she was introduced to McGuire, according to Fessio, who was present.

Fessio, who today heads the Ignatius Press, a Catholic publishing house in the Sunset District, said Mother Teresa was impressed by McGuire's reputation as an erudite, engaging preacher. She arranged to have him perform retreats — based on the *Spiritual Exercises* by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order — for her missionaries around the world. "She was always looking for priests to say mass for the different places in the world where she had missions," Fessio recalled.

In McGuire, she found a priest whose strict adherence to traditional Catholic practices matched her own views. Mother Teresa was an extreme conservative on questions of religious doctrine. She declared during her speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize that abortion was "the greatest destroyer of peace" in the modern world. McGuire was likewise stoutly orthodox in his public persona, requesting that women wear long skirts in his presence and often assailing other Jesuits for their relatively tolerant approaches to political and social issues.

Some insight into the reverence the Missionaries of Charity held for McGuire and his retreats and sermons can be gleaned from letters sent to Wisconsin Circuit Court Judge James Carlson, who oversaw the trial that resulted in McGuire's first conviction in 2006.

Sister Nirmala, Mother Teresa's successor as the superior general of the Missionaries of Charity, wrote, "He was one of the very few priests to whom ... Teresa of Calcutta entrusted the spiritual care of the Missionaries of Charity through retreats,

seminars and spiritual guidance wherever possible."

Sister Mary Christa, another nun with the Missionaries of Charity, wrote, "Father's immense love for Jesus Christ radiated brilliantly through his every word and gesture, and his whole concern was to inspire the Sisters with a more intense desire for holiness. His wisdom, immense knowledge of Holy Scripture, and saintly manner of life made a profound impression on all of us."

But McGuire's holy veneer concealed signs of a dark side that were already evident to select church officials long before he met Mother Teresa.

Documents that have emerged in the criminal prosecution of McGuire and civil litigation against the Jesuits over his actions show that suspicions about the priest were brought to his higher-ups beginning soon after his ordination in 1961. During his first teaching assignment, at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Ill., he molested at least two boys, whose cases led to his first criminal conviction decades later.

The Jesuits, who have formally apologized to McGuire's victims for failing to adequately control the priest, have nevertheless asserted in legal filings that they should not be held liable for the harm he did to children during his career. In a June 2011 motion in a lawsuit filed against the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus, the order's lawyers asserted that McGuire is "an evil and perverted man who used his substantial intellectual gifts and his dominating personality to disobey every tenet of his faith and his vows as a cleric."

(SF Weekly reported on the Jesuits' failure to protect children from McGuire in a previous cover story, "Let Him Prey" [5/25/11].)

One of the best-documented instances of abuse in McGuire's record is one in which neither the victim nor his family chose to pursue litigation against the church. Jesuit records show that in April 1993, a devout Catholic man in Walnut Creek came forward with the complaint that his 16-year-old son, who traveled with McGuire as his personal assistant, had looked at pornographic magazines, showered, and masturbated with the priest.

Following this complaint, McGuire was removed from active ministry and sent to Saint John Vianney Center, a psychiatric-treatment facility for clerics in Pennsylvania. It was there that Hardon — whom the victim's family had requested investigate their allegations — interviewed McGuire and chose to exonerate him. After six hours of face-to-face talks at the hospital, Hardon wrote to McGuire in a January 1994 letter, "I firmly expressed my belief in your innocence of any sexual misbehavior."

McGuire returned to his order at the beginning of 1994, but his future, including the extent to which he would be allowed to interact with families and children as a priest, was still unclear. Hardon's letter to McGuire reveals that the errant Jesuit still worried that the sex-abuse allegations lodged against him would mar his prospects for continued work with Mother Teresa, work that considerably enhanced McGuire's prestige among other Catholics to whom he ministered.

"You expressed your deep fear that despite your proven innocence of all charges, somehow you would nevertheless not be allowed to continue your retreat ministry to Mother Teresa's sisters," Hardon wrote. At the conclusion of his letter, Hardon indicated that the matter would soon be resolved in direct consultation with the "Saint of Calcutta" herself.

"And so, Don, this is the state of the question on this eve of my departure for Calcutta, India, where, with your permission, I will be communicating with Mother Teresa about your situation and your future," he wrote.

A letter written less than a month later, on Feb. 2, 1994, appears to contain an answer to the questions about his future with the Missionaries of Charity that dogged McGuire after his release from treatment at Saint John Vianney. It is addressed to Brad Schaeffer, Provincial, or head, of the Chicago section of the Jesuits. (While McGuire's ministry took him across the U.S. and into foreign countries, he was officially under the supervision of the Jesuits' Chicago Province.)

The letter is not signed, though it begins with a handwritten salutation in Mother Teresa's characteristic looping script. It is unclear whether additional pages are missing from the document, or whether the writer simply failed to attach a signature. Clues throughout the letter, however, indicate that Mother Teresa is the author. The writer refers to "my communities throughout the world" and praises McGuire's preaching to "my novices in our new novitiate in San Francisco" in 1982. (Novices are aspiring nuns who have not yet taken vows.)

More significantly, the writer refers to "my four assistants, Sisters Mary Frederick, Priscilla, Monica and Joseph Michael." In 1994, the councilors general of the Missionaries of Charity — a group of four senior nuns who directly advised Mother Teresa, and were subordinate to no one else in the order — were Sisters Frederick, Priscilla, Monica, and Joseph Michael (Upon taking vows, nuns sometimes assume the names of male religious figures).

"That's authentic, mentioning those people," Fessio said. "Those were her four councilors."

(View the original letter, and other documents mentioned in this story in the "details" box.)

Nuns at the primary U.S. office of the Missionaries of Charity, in New York City, referred all questions related to McGuire to the Mother Teresa Center in San Ysidro, Calif. Rev. Brian Kolodiejchuk, postulator for the sainthood cause of Mother Teresa and director of the center, did not respond to calls and e-mails seeking comment.

Schaeffer, the letter's recipient, is now the rector of a Jesuit community in Brighton, Mass., and serves on the board of trustees of Boston College. He did not respond to phone messages. The Chicago Province of the Jesuits also did not respond to requests for comment.

If Mother Teresa did write the letter to Schaeffer, it is unclear how much she learned about the circumstances under which McGuire was disciplined. The letter states, "During his recent visit to Calcutta in the past month, Fr. John Hardon, S.J., brought a letter to me from Fr. McGuire, describing the sad events which took him from his priestly ministry these past seven months. Fr. Hardon explained ... how he had established Father's innocence of the allegations against him. Father Hardon said that Fr. McGuire admitted imprudence in his behavior."

SF Weekly could not obtain the letter written by McGuire that is mentioned, or find anyone who had seen it. Following the exhortation that McGuire be returned to active ministry, the Missionaries of Charity letter concludes, "We, in the Missionaries of Charity, will do all in our power, to protect him and the Priesthood of Jesus Christ which he bears, when he once more takes up his mission with us."

Tariq Ali, the British intellectual who produced and co-wrote with Hitchens the sharply critical 1994 documentary film on Mother Teresa, *Hell's Angel*, said the letter fit with what he described as the nun's pattern of consorting with dubious personalities.

Among the problems chronicled in *Hell's Angel* were substandard care for the poor who filled her hospitals, and her willingness to accept money from notorious figures such as Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier of Haiti, who presided over a brutally repressive regime under which most Haitians lived in abject poverty. Duvalier's own lifestyle was luxurious, thanks to revenue from his participation in the drug trade and practice of selling dead Haitian citizens' cadavers overseas. Mother Teresa once posed for a photograph holding hands with Duvalier's wife, Michèle.

"When Christopher Hitchens and I made the film on her, the research was impeccable," Ali said. "She was close to dictators. She took money wherever she could. The care in her hospitals was poor. It was just one nightmare after another. From that time on, I saw her as a total fake," Ali said. The letter, he added, "would only be surprising if one saw her as a moral person, and I don't."

Anne Sebba, a biographer of Mother Teresa, said the founder of the Missionaries of Charity had never before been tainted by knowing involvement with a pedophile priest. However, she said the nun's response to criticism of her coziness with figures such as the Duvaliers and savings-and-loan scamster Charles Keating — for whom she pleaded for leniency during his trial and eventual conviction on fraud charges — was that she was practicing forgiveness in line with Christian ideals.

"Her answer was always that any miserable sinner deserved to be given a chance to do good," Sebba said. "She argued that Jesus always offered redemption, and no sinner was beyond redemption."

In McGuire, Mother Teresa encountered a challenge to that belief. After his return to ministry in 1994, McGuire would see eight new abuse allegations lodged against him by boys' families. In 2006, he was found guilty of molesting two boys decades earlier at the Loyola Academy. In 2008, he was convicted in federal court of taking a boy across state lines for the purpose of sexually abusing him. According to federal prosecutors, McGuire probed the boy's anus with his fingers during "massages," examined his penis with a magnifying glass, and looked at pornography with him.

McGuire has maintained his innocence of the charges against him, asserting that his victims fabricated stories to secure financial settlements from the Jesuits. His Chicago-based lawyer, Stephen Komie, said that McGuire's appeals of his state and federal convictions were unsuccessful, however. "He's going to die in prison, absent a pardon, and I don't think that's in the cards," Komie said.

The father of the Walnut Creek boy whose abuse allegation prompted McGuire's psychiatric treatment in 1993 said the information in the new documents is unfortunate, but not shocking. "That McGuire fooled Father Hardon and Mother Teresa like he did so many others is disappointing, but not a surprise," he said. "It shows that a person doesn't have to be a mind-reader in order to be a saint."

A second Walnut Creek man who says McGuire abused him as a child, and who is participating in a lawsuit against the Jesuits, reacted to the letter that might be from Mother Teresa more strongly.

"I was totally blown away by it," said the man, who is identified in court records only as John Doe 129 and whom SF Weekly is not identifying by name because he is an alleged victim of childhood sexual abuse. "I just don't know how somebody supposedly so saintly, supposedly such a protector of the weak and the poor, could be so indifferent to it," he said.

Hardon's letter to McGuire, as well as the letter that appears to have been written by Mother Teresa, indicate it was Hardon who personally carried news of McGuire's situation to Calcutta. It is thus important to understand how much Hardon knew when he visited Mother Teresa in January 1994. On this front, newly uncovered documents show the Jesuit in an unflattering light, and may have a serious impact on his prospects for sainthood.

[Fr Hardon's shocking letter is outlined which tried to rationalise the abuse but without denying activity took place] could be a stumbling block for the sainthood cause of Hardon, who is still in the early stages of being investigated by Vatican deputies. The most rigorous review of a candidate's life typically comes prior to the first milestone in the process, called veneration. Following that are beatification and canonization.

Lawler said the letter apparently written by Mother Teresa, by contrast, is unlikely to stop her from clearing the final hurdle of canonization.

"I think her reputation is safe," Lawler said. "It doesn't fluster me that she would try to help a friend, and didn't know what was going on. Her reputation is so safe that, even if this is a negative, it doesn't much weigh on it."

The extent to which the new documents will influence the canonization of either Hardon or Mother Teresa should, ideally, only be assessed after a thorough investigation of what both figures knew about McGuire, and how much influence their advocacy on his behalf had in the disastrous decision to return him to ministry in 1994. But in light of the church's past lack of diligence in dealing with priestly abuse, that might be a lot to hope for.

Mother Teresa is perhaps the most famous and popular Catholic religious leader of the second half of the 20th century, rivaled only by the late Pope John Paul II. Hardon's cause is likewise dear to senior officials in the Vatican. The investigation into his potential sainthood was initiated by Raymond Burke, the cardinal and former archbishop of St. Louis who is now prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura — a position that could be described as the chief justice of the Catholic Church's supreme court.

Lawler pointed out that dozens of American bishops who protected known child molesters in the clergy remain on the job today. Will similar efforts to shield a predator by figures of possibly saintly stature have any fallout?

"You asked me whether this matter could affect the progress of Father Hardon's cause [for canonization], and I said that it definitely would. It might have been more accurate if I had said it definitely should," Lawler said. "I hope that people would recognize this as a serious issue that demands attention. But this is an issue on which the record of the American Catholic hierarchy is still not good."