News



Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, archbishop of Krakow, Poland, foreground, arrives to take part in Oct. 22, 1971 working session of the World Synod of Bishops at the Vatican. Pope St. John Paul II knew about sexual abuse of children by priests under his authority and sought to conceal it when he was an archbishop in his native Poland, according to a television news report. In a story that aired late Monday, March 6, 2023, Polish channel TVN24 named three priests whom the future pope then known as Archbishop Karol Wojtyla had moved among parishes during the 1970s, including one who was sent to Austria, after they were accused of abusing minors. (AP Photo/Gianni Foggia)

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Pope St. John Paul II knew about sexual abuse of children by priests under his authority and sought to conceal it when he was an archbishop in his native Poland, according to a television news report.

In a story that aired late March 6, Polish channel TVN24 named three priests whom the future pope then known as Archbishop Karol Wojtyla had moved among parishes or sent to a cloister during the 1970s, including one who was sent to Austria, after they were accused of abusing minors.

Two of the priests, Eugeniusz Surgent and Jozef Loranc, eventually served short prison terms for the abuse, TVN24 said its investigation found. Wojtyla served as archbishop of Krakow from 1964 to 1978, when he became Pope John Paul II. He

died in 2005 and was declared a saint in 2014 following a fast-tracked process.

TVN24 quoted from documents of Poland's communist-era secret security services, which sought to discredit the Catholic Church and had informers there. Journalist Marcin Gutowski also spoke with a number of victims and to a man who said he informed Wojtyla during the 1970s about the abuse by Surgent. None of the priests was defrocked.

The TV channel also quoted from a letter that Wojtyla wrote to the archbishop of Vienna at the time, Franz Koenig, recommending a priest to his care. Wojtyla did not say in the letter that Boleslaw Sadus had abused young boys, and he was made a parish priest in Austria.

TVN24's investigation concluded that there was no doubt Wojtyla knew about abuse by priests in his archdiocese and sought to conceal it.

The broadcast featured a journalist who has written about cases of priestly abuse in Krakow and who argued that Wojtyla reacted in line with Catholic Church procedures of the time. But a philosopher who knew Wojtyla and visited him at the Vatican after he became pope said it would be hard for Poles in general to accept these new facts about him.

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The channel's investigation has unleashed heated reactions in Poland, with some observers deriding it as an attempt by left-wing forces to destroy the memory of John Paul II and others demanding for the Catholic Church to reveal the truth.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, a Catholic, tweeted a photo of John Paul II greeting a crowd in Poland and added the late pope's motto "Do not be afraid," without any comment.

A Polish Jesuit priest, Krzysztof Madel, wrote on Twitter that the focus should be on the victims, who need the truth to be told.

An official at the Ministry of Education, Radoslaw Brzozka, said on Twitter that John Paul II's reputation was under attack from people who want to eliminate Catholicism from Poland's national identity.

The choice of Wojtyla for pope in 1978 energized Poland's predominantly Catholic population to openly oppose the nation’s communist system and eventually topple it.

Until recently, the Catholic Church in Poland has played a significant role in the country's public life. Revelations about pedophile priests and the church's close ties with the current right-wing government have depreciated its standing.

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