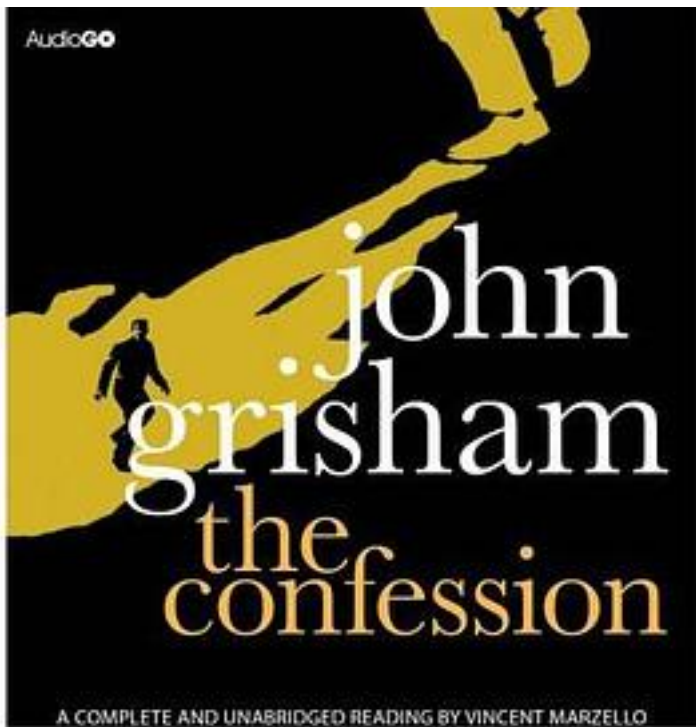


The Confession



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Mike Daley doesn't go to confession much since he left the priesthood twenty years ago and became a lawyer, but that doesn't stop his old friend Father Ramon Aguirre from trying to get him there. "It wouldn't kill you to go to church once in a while," he says. But it does kill someone.

For several months, a ruinous sexual harassment suit has been building against the San Francisco Catholic archdiocese, and when the plaintiff's lawyer is found dead, an

apparent suicide, an almost audible sigh of relief is heard in certain quarters. But that is before the police find evidence of murder. Even worse - the evidence points to Aguirre.

Mike and his ex-wife law partner, Rosie, jump in to take his case, but what started out as difficult quickly becomes impossible, as forensics, witnesses, secrets in Aguirre's past all incriminate their client. Soon Mike's and Rosie's wits are the only things keeping him from a life sentence or worse, and that simply may not be enough, unless they can conjure up a miracle of their own.

Lawyer and ex-priest Mike Daley is back again in Siegel's fifth legal thriller (Final Verdict, etc.), this time going to bat for Father Ramon Aguirre, his longtime friend and beloved local priest in San Francisco's Mission District. Aguirre is accused of murdering his parishioner Maria Concepcion, a fiercely competitive lawyer who became something of a celebrity after instigating and successfully settling several abuse cases against the Roman Catholic Church. Her latest suit alleging sexual impropriety by a prominent priest has come to an abrupt halt with her death, and the prosecutor is claiming that Ramon, whose fingerprints are found on the murder weapon and her naked body, is guilty. Daley believes in Ramon's innocence and agrees to help him pro bono despite the archdiocese's suspicious insistence that they be his sole representation in the case. Incriminating evidence against Ramon continues to appear, including the possibility that the priest has fathered Maria's unborn child. As Daley moves from the drug and prostitution-ridden underbelly of San Francisco, where auto parts and offers of legal aid are exchanged for cooperation, to the tension-filled courtroom and the hushed offices of the church, it gradually becomes apparent that Ramon isn't the only character with a lot at stake in this intelligent, timely thriller.

Another year, another entry in the always-engaging procedural series starring the legal team of Michael Daley and Rosie Fernandez, whose partnership as lawyers, friends, and even lovers is stronger than the marriage they once had together. The ex-priest and his ex-wife face their most challenging case yet: defending longtime friend Father Ramon Aguirre in the murder of parishioner Maria Concepcion. Maria had been a lawyer, too, and was about to begin jury selection in a civil case against the San Francisco archdiocese regarding a now-dead priest's illicit sexual relationships with female parishioners. Maria was known as a competent lawyer, and although one would think she was conflicted about suing the archdiocese--she was, after all, a faithful churchgoer--Maria faulted the people at the helm rather than the faith. Father Aguirre, for his part, is considered a rogue, antiestablishment priest who never supported the archdiocese's arcane, patriarchal ways. Why, then, would they think he killed Maria? Mike and Rosie employ their stellar discovery and courtroom talents to get to the bottom of the twisted situation involving the movers and shakers of the San Francisco Catholic community. Once again, Mike and Rosie prove to be a duo that's fun to root for.

Mary Frances Wilkens

Sheldon Siegel has been in private practice in San Francisco for twenty years.

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