VATICAN ACCOUNTABILITY

By NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press
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In this Nov. 11, 2015, file photo, Fernando Karadima is escorted from a court, after testifying in a case that three of his victims brought against the country’s Catholic Church in Santiago, Chile.

Jan. 11, 2018

AP Exclusive: Pope letter details concern over Chile bishop

By EVA VERGARA and NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — The Vatican was so concerned about the fallout from Chile’s most notorious pedophile priest that it planned to ask three Chilean bishops accused of knowing about his decades-long crimes to resign and take a year’s sabbatical — a revelation that comes just days before Pope Francis makes his first visit to Chile as pope.

A confidential 2015 letter from Francis, obtained by The Associated Press, details the behind-the-scenes maneuvering by the Vatican and Chile’s bishops
The scandal grew as Chilean prosecutors and Vatican investigators took testimony from the victims.

Chile’s Catholic Church was thrown into crisis in 2010 when former parishioners publicly accused Karadima of sexually abusing them when they were minors, starting in the 1980s — accusations they had made years earlier to Chilean church leaders but that were ignored. The scandal grew as Chilean prosecutors and Vatican investigators took testimony from the victims, who accused Barros and other Karadima proteges of having witnessed the abuse and doing nothing about it.

In his Jan. 31, 2015, letter, written in response to Chilean church leaders’ complaints about the Barros appointment, Francis revealed for the first time that he knew that the issue was controversial and that his ambassador in Chile had tried to find a way to contain the damage well before the case made headlines.

“Thank you for having openly demonstrated the concern that you have about the appointment of Monsignor Juan Barros,” Francis wrote in the letter, addressed to the executive committee of the Chilean bishops’ conference. “I understand what you’re telling me and I’m aware that the situation of the church in Chile is difficult due to the trials you’ve had to undergo.”

Francis told the committee that his ambassador, Monsignor Ivo Scapolo, had asked Barros to resign in 2014 as bishop to Chile’s armed forces, a high-profile post, and had “encouraged him to take a sabbatical year before assuming any other pastoral responsibility as a bishop.”

Barros was told a similar exit strategy had been planned for two other Karadima-trained bishops, but was asked not to share the information, the pope wrote. He said the plan went awry when Barros named the two others in his letter stepping down as military bishop — a development that posed “a serious problem,” and “blocked any eventual path, in the sense of offering a year of sabbatical,” to remove the three from the eye of the storm roiling the
Anne Barrett Doyle, co-director of BishopAccountability.org, a U.S.-based group that has compiled a clergy abuse database, shows images of Catholic clerics implicated in abuse cases against children and teens, during a press conference, in Santiago Chile, Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2018.

Chilean church.

In the end, Francis went through with the appointment of Barros as bishop of Osorno, 600 miles (900 kilometers) south of Santiago.

Barros had been a protege of Karadima, a charismatic preacher who ministered to Chile’s elite in a posh suburb of Santiago, where his El Bosque parish community produced dozens of priestly vocations and five bishops, Barros among them. Chile’s church leadership for years had ignored complaints about Karadima’s sexual abuse of minors and only took action after victims went public with their claims in 2010.

Karadima was sanctioned in 2011 by the Vatican, which removed him from all pastoral duties and sentenced him to a lifetime of penance and prayer for his crimes. Chilean prosecutors investigated Karadima as well but dropped the charges because the statute of limitations had expired. The judge handling the case stressed that it didn’t collapse for lack of proof.

Some of Karadima’s victims say Barros and other Karadima-trained bishops witnessed and tolerated Karadima’s abuse and then kept quiet about it. Francis’ appointment of Barros has thus been a stain on his oft-repeated “zero tolerance” for abuse, with even members of his own sexual abuse advisory commission criticizing it.

Francis has since defended Barros, saying the Osorno opposition to him
was “stupid,” unfounded and coming from the left. After the uproar over the appointment, the Vatican took the unusual step of defending it publicly by saying the Vatican’s bishops office had “carefully” examined Barros’ record and found no “objective reason” to block the nomination.

The Vatican spokesman, Greg Burke, declined to comment on the pope’s 2015 letter, and calls and emails placed to members of the Chilean bishops’ conference about the letter were not returned.

Asked about the planned protests by Osorno parishioners during Francis’ trip to Chile, Burke said the Vatican had “maximum respect” for their right to do so. But he said no papal meetings were planned with the Osorno group, which had formally requested to meet with the pope in July but were told by Vatican organizers that his schedule was already final, some six months before the trip.

Barros said he knew nothing of the pope’s letter and repeated his position that he knew nothing of Karadima’s crimes. “I never knew anything about, nor ever imagined the serious abuses which that priest committed against the victims,” he told the AP.

“I have never approved of nor participated in such serious dishonest acts
and I have never been convicted by any tribunal of such things,” Barros added.

Juan Carlos Cruz, who says Karadima sexually abused him when he was a teenager in the 1980s, told the AP that Barros and the other bishops Karadima trained were well aware of the abuse and even witnessed it. He said two of the bishops kissed Karadima “and put their heads on his shoulder and touched him, for 37 years, but now they have forgotten.”

The Karadima scandal has contributed to a severe crisis in the Chilean church, including a dramatic drop in new seminarians, a 20 percent decline in the number of people identifying themselves as Catholics and a growth in evangelical churches. Francis is expected to offer encouragement to the church and Chilean Catholics during his visit.

On Wednesday, the online database on the abuse crisis, BishopAccountability.org, released research showing at least 78 priests or members of religious orders had been credibly abused or convicted of sexually abusing minors in Chile, but that the number was likely far higher. Chile has about 2,300 priests.

Winfield reported from Vatican City.
Pope Francis walks to his studio at the Vatican, Monday, Feb. 5, 2018. Pope Francis received a victim’s letter in 2015 that graphically detailed how a priest sexually abused him and how other Chilean clergy ignored it, contradicting the pope’s recent insistence that no victims had come forward.

Feb. 5, 2018

AP Exclusive: 2015 letter belies pope’s claim of ignorance

By NICOLE WINFIELD and EVA VERGARA
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis received a victim’s letter in 2015 that graphically detailed how a priest sexually abused him and how other Chilean clergy ignored it, contradicting the pope’s recent insistence that no victims had come forward to denounce the cover-up, the letter’s author and members of Francis’ own sex-abuse commission have told The Associated Press.

The fact that Francis received the eight-page letter, obtained by the AP, challenges his insistence that he has “zero tolerance” for sex abuse and
cover-ups. It also calls into question his stated empathy with abuse survivors, compounding the most serious crisis of his five-year papacy.

The scandal exploded last month when Francis’ trip to South America was marred by protests over his vigorous defense of Bishop Juan Barros, who is accused by victims of witnessing and ignoring the abuse by the Rev. Fernando Karadima. During the trip, Francis callously dismissed accusations against Barros as “slander,” seemingly unaware that victims had placed Barros at the scene of Karadima’s crimes.

On the plane home, confronted by an AP reporter, the pope said: “You, in all good will, tell me that there are victims, but I haven’t seen any, because they haven’t come forward.”

But members of the pope’s Commission for the Protection of Minors say that in April 2015, they sent a delegation to Rome specifically to hand-deliver a letter to the pope about Barros. The letter from Juan Carlos Cruz detailed the abuse, kissing and fondling he says he suffered at Karadima’s hands, which he said Barros and others saw but did nothing to stop.

Four members of the commission met with Francis’ top abuse adviser, Cardinal Sean O’Malley, explained their concerns about Francis’ recent appointment of Barros as a bishop in southern Chile, and gave him the letter to deliver to Francis.

“When we gave him (O’Malley) the letter for the pope, he assured us he would give it to the pope and speak of the concerns,” then-commission member Marie Collins told the AP. “And at a later date, he assured us that that had been done.”

Cruz, who now lives and works in Philadelphia, heard the same later that year.

“Cardinal O’Malley called me after the pope’s visit here in Philadelphia and he told me, among other things, that he had given the letter to the pope — in his hands,” he said in an interview at his home Sunday.

Neither the Vatican nor O’Malley responded to multiple requests for comment.

While the 2015 summit of Francis’ commission was known and publicized at the time, the contents of Cruz’s letter — and a photograph of Collins handing
it to O’Malley — were not disclosed by members. Cruz provided the letter, and Collins provided the photo, after reading an AP story that reported Francis had claimed to have never heard from any Karadima victims about Barros’ behavior.

The revelation could be costly for Francis, whose track record on the abuse crisis was already shaky after a botched Italian abuse case he intervened in became public. More recently, he let the abuse commission lapse at the end of last year. Vatican analysts now openly question whether he “gets it,” and some of his own advisers privately acknowledge that maybe he doesn’t.

The Barros affair first caused shockwaves in January 2015 when Francis appointed him bishop of Osorno, Chile, over the objections of the leadership of Chile’s bishops’ conference and many local priests and laity. They accepted as credible the testimony against Karadima, a prominent Chilean cleric who was sanctioned by the Vatican in 2011 for abusing minors. Barros was a Karadima protege, and according to Cruz and other victims, he witnessed the abuse and did nothing.

Juan Carlos Cruz says Pope Francis received a letter he wrote in 2015 detailing the sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of a priest and efforts by the Chilean church to cover it up.
“Holy Father, I write you this letter because I’m tired of fighting, of crying and suffering,” Cruz wrote in Francis’ native Spanish. “Our story is well known and there’s no need to repeat it, except to tell you of the horror of having lived this abuse and how I wanted to kill myself.”

Cruz and other survivors had for years denounced the cover-up of Karadima’s crimes, but were dismissed by some in the Chilean church hierarchy and the Vatican’s own ambassador in Santiago, who refused their repeated requests to meet before and after Barros was appointed.

After Francis’ comments backing Barros caused such an outcry in Chile, he was forced last week to do an about-face: The Vatican announced it was sending in its most respected sex-crimes investigator to take testimony from Cruz and others about Barros.

In the letter to the pope, Cruz begs for Francis to listen to him and make good on his pledge of “zero tolerance.”

“Holy Father, it’s bad enough that we suffered such tremendous pain and anguish from the sexual and psychological abuse, but the terrible mistreatment we received from our pastors is almost worse,” he wrote.

Cruz goes on to detail in explicit terms the homoeroticized nature of the circle of priests and young boys around Karadima, the charismatic preacher whose El Bosque community in the well-to-do Santiago neighborhood of Providencia produced dozens of priestly vocations and five bishops, including Barros.

He described how Karadima would kiss Barros and fondle his genitals, and do the same with younger priests and teens, and how young priests and seminarians would fight to sit next to Karadima at the table to receive his affections.

“More difficult and tough was when we were in Karadima’s room and Juan Barros — if he wasn’t kissing Karadima — would watch when Karadima would touch us — the minors — and make us kiss him, saying: ‘Put your mouth near mine and stick out your tongue.’ He would stick his out and kiss us with his tongue,” Cruz told the pope. “Juan Barros was a witness to all this innumerable times, not just with me but with others as well.”

“Juan Barros covered up everything that I have told you,” he added.

Barros has repeatedly denied witnessing any abuse or covering it up. “I never knew anything about, nor ever imagined, the serious abuses which that
priest committed against the victims,” he told the AP recently. “I have never approved of nor participated in such serious, dishonest acts, and I have never been convicted by any tribunal of such things.”

For the Osorno faithful who have opposed Barros as their bishop, the issue isn’t so much a legal matter requiring proof or evidence, as Barros was a young priest at the time and not in a position of authority over Karadima. It’s more that if Barros didn’t “see” what was happening around him and recognize it was problematic for a priest to kiss and fondle young boys, he shouldn’t be in charge of a diocese where he is responsible for detecting inappropriate sexual behavior, reporting it to police and protecting children from pedophiles like his mentor.

Cruz had arrived at Karadima’s community in 1980 as a vulnerable teenager, distraught after the recent death of his father. He has said Karadima told him he would be like a spiritual father to him, but instead sexually abused him.

Based on testimony from Cruz and other former members of the parish, the Vatican in 2011 removed Karadima from ministry and sentenced him to a lifetime of “penance and prayer” for his crimes. Now 87, he lives in a home for elderly priests in Santiago; he hasn’t commented on the scandal and the home has declined to accept calls or visits from the news media.
The victims also testified to Chilean prosecutors, who opened an investigation into Karadima after they went public with their accusations in 2010. Chilean prosecutors had to drop charges because too much time had passed, but the judge running the case stressed that it wasn’t for lack of proof.

While the victims’ testimony was deemed credible by both Vatican and Chilean prosecutors, some in the local church hierarchy clearly didn’t believe them, which might have influenced Francis’ view. Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz has acknowledged he didn’t believe the victims initially and shelved an investigation. He was forced to reopen it when the victims went public, and has since apologized.

He is now one of the Argentine pope’s key cardinal advisers.

By the time he finally got his letter into the pope’s hands in 2015, Cruz had already sent versions to many other people, and had tried for months to get an appointment with the Vatican ambassador to relay concerns about Barros’ suitability for diocesan work. The embassy’s Dec. 15, 2014, email to Cruz — a month before Barros was appointed — was short and to the point:

“The apostolic nunciature has received the message you emailed Dec. 7 to the apostolic nuncio,” it read, “and at the same time communicates that your request has been met with an unfavorable response.”

One could argue that Francis didn’t pay attention to Cruz’s letter, since he receives thousands of letters every day from faithful around the world. He can’t possibly read them all, much less remember the contents years later. He might have been tired and confused after a weeklong trip to South America when he told an airborne press conference that victims never came forward to accuse Barros of cover-up.

But this was not an ordinary letter, nor were the circumstances under which it arrived in the Vatican.

Francis had named O’Malley, the archbishop of Boston, to head his Commission for the Protection of Minors based on his credibility in having helped clean up the mess in Boston after the U.S. sex abuse scandal exploded there in 2002. The commission gathered outside experts to advise the church on protecting children from pedophiles and educating church personnel about preventing abuse and cover-ups.
The four commission members who were on a special subcommittee dedicated to survivors had flown to Rome specifically to speak with O’Malley about the Barros appointment and to deliver Cruz’s letter. A press release issued after the April 12, 2015, meeting read: “Cardinal O’Malley agreed to present the concerns of the subcommittee to the Holy Father.”

Commission member Catherine Bonnet, a French child psychiatrist who took the photo of Collins handing the letter to O’Malley, said the commission members had decided to descend on Rome specifically when O’Malley and other members of the pope’s group of nine cardinal advisers were meeting, so that O’Malley could put it directly into the pope’s hands.

“Cardinal O’Malley promised us when Marie gave to him the letter of Juan Carlos that he will give to Pope Francis,” she said.

O’Malley’s spokesman in Boston referred requests for comment to the Vatican. Neither the Vatican press office, nor officials at the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, responded to calls and emails seeking comment.

But O’Malley’s remarkable response to Francis’ defense of Barros and to his dismissal of the victims while he was in Chile, is perhaps now better understood.

In a rare rebuke of a pope by a cardinal, O’Malley issued a statement Jan. 20
in which he said the pope’s words were “a source of great pain for survivors of sexual abuse,” and that such expressions had the effect of abandoning victims and relegating them to “discredited exile.”

A day later, Francis apologized for having demanded “proof” of wrongdoing by Barros, saying he meant merely that he wanted to see “evidence.” But he continued to describe the accusations against Barros as “calumny” and insisted he had never heard from any victims.

Even when told in his airborne press conference Jan. 21 that Karadima’s victims had indeed placed Barros at the scene of Karadima’s abuse, Francis said: “No one has come forward. They haven’t provided any evidence for a judgment. This is all a bit vague. It’s something that can’t be accepted.”

He stood by Barros, saying: “I’m certain he’s innocent,” even while saying that he considered the testimony of victims to be “evidence” in a cover-up investigation.

“If anyone can give me evidence, I’ll be the first to listen,” he said.

Cruz said he felt like he had been slapped when he heard those words.

“I was upset,” he said, “and at the same time I couldn’t believe that someone so high up like the pope himself could lie about this.”

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_A previous version of this story corrected that the commission members’ trip to Rome was paid for by the commission, not themselves._

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_Eva Vergara reported from Santiago, Chile. Yvonne Lee in Philadelphia and Jeffrey Schaeffer in Paris contributed to this report._
VATICAN CITY (AP) — When a Vatican court convicted a Chilean predator priest of sex crimes, it went out of its way to affirm the credibility of his victims. Their testimony had been consistent and corroborated, while their motives in coming forward had been only to “free themselves of a weight that had tormented their consciences,” the tribunal said.

One key witness in the Rev. Fernando Karadima’s 2010 trial is preparing to testify again, this time in a spinoff case with potentially more significant consequences. Juan Carlos Cruz’s allegations of a cover-up raise questions

By NICOLE WINFIELD and EVA VERGARA
Associated Press

Juan Carlos Cruz, victim of Chilean pedophile priest Fernando Karadima, poses for a portrait in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
about Pope Francis’ already shaky track record on preventing clergy sex abuse and concealment.

Cruz has accused Chilean Bishop Juan Barros of having been present when Karadima kissed and fondled him as a 17-year-old, and of then ignoring the abuse. One of Francis’ top advisers has privately called Cruz a liar who is out to destroy the Chilean church. Francis, who has called allegations against Barros slander, may have accepted the adviser’s take.

After his defense of Barros sparked an outcry during his recent trip to Chile, Francis did an about-face and asked Maltese Archbishop Charles Scicluna, a former Vatican sex crimes investigator, to gather testimony about Barros and then report back. Cruz, who now works in communications in the U.S., is his first witness Saturday.

“We’ve been giving this testimony for years and years, but finally it’s being heard,” Cruz told The Associated Press. “So when the pope says he needs evidence, he’s had it for a long time.”

Francis named Barros to head the diocese of Osorno, Chile in January 2015 over the opposition of some Chilean bishops. They were worried about fallout from the Karadima scandal, and had recommended that Barros and two other Karadima-trained bishops resign and take year-long sabbaticals.
Francis has said he rejected the recommendation because he couldn’t in good faith accept Barros’ resignation without any evidence of wrongdoing.

Barros has repeatedly denied witnessing any abuse or covering it up.

“I never knew anything about, nor ever imagined, the serious abuses which that priest committed against the victims,” he told the AP last month.

Dozens of former parishioners and seminarians have told Chilean and Vatican prosecutors about how public Karadima’s groping was, including of minors, within the tight-knit community where Barros was a top lieutenant of the now-disgraced priest. A handful of victims have also told the courts how, behind closed doors, Karadima would masturbate his young charges, and have them confess on their knees in front of his crotch.

Francis recently sparked an outcry when he called the accusations against Barros “calumny” and said none of Karadima’s victims had brought forth evidence to implicate the bishop.

The AP reported last week that Cruz did come forward with cover-up accusations against Barros. The pope’s top abuse adviser, Cardinal Sean O’Malley, hand-delivered to Francis an eight-page letter from Cruz in April 2015.

Cruz says Barros not only witnessed him being abused, but then tormented him with private information that Karadima had obtained from Cruz during confession.

“If Karadima felt that you were not being too dedicated to him in any way, he would ice you. He would not talk to you, but he would send these hatchet men, Juan Barros was one of them,” said Cruz, who after joining Karadima’s community went onto the seminary, only to leave after a few years.

The Vatican hasn’t commented on whether Francis read the 2015 letter.

Barros himself hasn’t been accused of sexually abusing anyone, and merely witnessing a superior kiss and grope minors isn’t a canonical crime. Perhaps Francis doesn’t consider it a fireable offense.

But Francis’ own sex abuse advisers, as well as many Osorno faithful, have argued that Barros’ failure to “see” Karadima’s abuse and his continued denial that it was around him raises questions about whether he can protect children in Osorno today.

Since Barros has not been charged with any wrongdoing, Cruz’s allegations against him have not been subject to legal scrutiny. However, Vatican and
Chilean prosecutors both considered him to be a credible witness in cases against Karadima, during which he also testified about Barros’ presence while he was being groped. Other Karadima victims have said the same.

“The tribunal has acquired sufficient conviction to accept Cruz’s testimony as proof of the facts,” Chilean investigating Judge Jessica Gonzalez wrote in 2011. While Gonzalez dropped criminal charges against Karadima, she stressed it wasn’t for lack of proof but because too much time had passed.

In the decree sentencing Karadima to a lifetime of penance and prayer, the Vatican tribunal said it had acquired the “moral certainty of the truth” about Karadima’s guilt based on testimony from Cruz and other whistleblowers, even though many bishops, priests and laity insisted Karadima was innocent.

Some high-ranking church officials, though, have continued to question
Cruz’s veracity and motives. Among them is Chilean Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz, a top adviser to Francis as a member of the pope’s “kitchen cabinet” of cardinals.

While Francis and Errazuriz have ideological differences, it would be natural for the pope to ask the head of the Chilean church about a Chilean bishop who had once worked for him. And Errazuriz and the Argentinian pope have known each other for decades, when both men served as archbishops in their neighboring countries.

Errazuriz publicly apologized in 2010 for not believing Karadima’s victims initially. Privately, he has called Cruz a liar and a “serpent” bent on destroying the Catholic Church in Chile, according to emails first published by Chilean online newspaper El Mostrador.

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The emails Errazuriz exchanged in 2013 and 2014 with his successor as Santiago’s archbishop show him maneuvering to keep Cruz off the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors — Francis’ advisory panel on sex abuse — and from the list of speakers for an annual bishops’ gathering.

“We know the intention of Mr. Cruz toward you and the church in Santiago,” Cardinal Riccardo Ezzati, the archbishop of Santiago, wrote Errazuriz in April 2013. “I hope we can avoid the lies from finding a place with those in the same church.”

Errazuriz responded the next day: “May the serpent not prevail!”

“There’s no reason to invite Carlos Cruz, who will falsify the truth,” Errazuriz wrote. “He’s going to use the invitation to continue damaging the church.”

Errazuriz and Ezzati had a reason to try to discredit Cruz. After evidence emerged showing the Santiago archdiocese had received reports about Karadima for years but shelved an initial investigation, Cruz and two other victims sued the archdiocese in 2013 for an alleged cover-up.

The litigation, since dismissed for insufficient proof, was active in April 2015 when Cruz’s letter made its way to Cardinal O’Malley. A member of the Pontifical Commission, Marie Collins, gave it to O’Malley when she flew to Rome with three other commissioners to raise alarm at Barros’ appointment as bishop of Osorno.

O’Malley was in Rome anyway for a meeting with the pope, Errazuriz and Francis’ other cardinal advisers. A Vatican statement issued after their meeting...
suggests that O’Malley may have raised the Barros case, just as he reported to Collins and Cruz.

During the meeting, O’Malley proposed creating procedures “to evaluate and judge cases of ‘abuse of office’ concerning the safeguarding of minors” by bishops and other church leaders, it said.

The pope and his advisers subsequently agreed to establish a tribunal inside the Vatican to hear evidence against bishops who covered up sex abuse. Francis authorized a budget to fund it for five years.

But the proposal lagged. Within a year, Francis had scrapped it entirely and instead issued a document essentially saying the church’s existing procedures were sufficient to handle alleged cover-ups.

Vergara reported from Santiago, Chile.
VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis admitted Wednesday he made “grave errors” in judgment in Chile’s sex abuse scandal and invited the victims he had discredited to Rome to beg their forgiveness.

In an extraordinary public letter, Francis also summoned all of Chile’s bishops to the Vatican for an emergency meeting in the coming weeks to discuss repairing the damage from the scandal, which has badly tarnished his reputation and that of the Chilean church.
Monsignor Santiago Silva, left, President of Episcopal Conference of Chile attends a press conference next to his press secretary Jaime Coiro, in Punta de Tralca, Chile.

Archbishop Charles Scicluna reads a statement to the press during a press conference prior to a meeting with people who claim to have been victims of sexual abuse by members of the Church, in Santiago, Chile.

The Vatican orders up such emergency visits only on rare occasions, such as when American bishops were summoned in 2002 after the clerical sex abuse scandal exploded in the U.S. and in 2010 when Irish bishops received a comprehensive Vatican dressing down for their botched handling of abuse cases.

Francis blamed a lack of “truthful and balanced information” for his missteps in judging the case of Bishop Juan Barros, a protege of Chile’s most notorious predator priest, the Rev. Fernando Karadima. Francis strongly defended the bishop during his January visit to Chile despite accusations by victims that Barros had witnessed and ignored their abuse.

In Chile and during an airborne press conference returning to Rome,
Francis accused the victims of “calumny” for pressing their case against Barros, demanded they present “proof” of their claims and revealed he had twice rejected Barros’ resignation.

“I am convinced he is innocent,” the pope insisted.

After causing an outcry, Francis sent the Vatican’s most respected sex abuse investigator, Archbishop Charles Scicluna, to look into the scandal.

While his letter didn’t reveal his ultimate conclusions about Barros, Francis made clear that he and the bishops have a lot of work to do to turn the Chilean church around.

In words that laid bare his simmering anger, Francis said they must “re-establish confidence in the church, confidence that was broken by our errors and sins, and heal the wounds that continue to bleed in Chilean society.”

But the Chilean bishops insisted they had been truthful to Francis about the need to get rid of Barros — they had proposed he resign and take a year sabbatical — and victims’ advocates said Francis had only himself to blame, since the accusations against Barros were well known and well-founded.

Anne Barrett Doyle, of BishopAccountability.org, noted an Associated Press report that Francis received a personal letter about Barros’ misdeeds from a victim in 2015, but seemingly chose to ignore it.

“If Francis was misinformed or inadequately informed, it was because he chose to be so,” she said.

Karadima was a charismatic preacher who was removed from ministry by the Vatican for sexually abusing minors and sentenced in 2011 to a lifetime of penance and prayer. Karadima had long been a darling of the Chilean hierarchy, and his victims have accused church leaders of covering up his crimes to protect the church’s reputation.

Scicluna and his colleague, the Rev. Jordi Bertomeu, spent nearly two weeks in Chile and New York earlier this year interviewing Karadima’s victims, who for years have denounced Barros’ silence and were stunned by Francis’ strong defense of him.

In his letter, Francis thanked the 64 people who testified and had the courage to bare the “wounds of their souls” for the sake of truth. After reading the 2,300-page dossier his envoys prepared, Francis affirmed the victims “spoke in a stark
way, without additives or sweeteners, of many crucified lives.”

“I confess this caused me pain and shame,” he wrote.

“For my part, I recognize - and so I want it to be faithfully transmitted - that I have fallen in grave errors of judgment and perception of the situation, especially due to the lack of truthful and balanced information,” Francis wrote. “From now on I ask forgiveness of all those I offended and I hope to be able to do it personally in the coming weeks.”

In a statement, Barros’ three main accusers said they appreciated Francis request for forgiveness and were weighing his invitation to meet. They said they would continue fighting for reparation and forgiveness “until zero tolerance about abuse and cover-up in the church becomes a reality.”

Many of Chile’s bishops, and members of Francis’ own sex abuse advisory board, had questioned Barros’ suitability to lead a diocese given claims by Karadima’s victims that Barros stood by and did nothing while Karadima groped them.

Francis overrode their concerns and appointed Barros bishop of the southern Chilean diocese of Osorno in 2015, saying the church had investigated the claims against him and found them to be baseless.

Osorno’s lay Catholics and many Osorno priests rejected him, and they
greeted Francis’ letter Wednesday with graciousness, accepting his request for forgiveness but renewing their demand for Barros’ removal.

The head of the Chilean bishops’ conference, Monsignor Santiago Silva, insisted the Chilean church had provided only truthful information to Francis about Barros. But, he added, “obviously we didn’t do everything we should have done.”

Other clerics more favorable to Barros had Francis’ ear: the Vatican ambassador, who has long been hostile to Barros’ accusers; the retired archbishop of Santiago, who has accused Cruz of being a liar and “serpent”; and an old Spanish Jesuit friend who evaluated Barros years ago.

Associated Press writer Nicole Winfield reported this story at the Vatican and AP writer Eva Vergara reported from Punta de Tralca, Chile.
VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis has taken measures to address a spiraling sex abuse scandal in Chile, but he hasn’t moved on a problem closer to home: Vatican City itself does not have policies to protect children from pedophile priests or require suspected abuse to be reported to police.

Seven years after the Vatican ordered all bishops conferences around the world to develop written guidelines to prevent abuse, tend to victims, punish offenders and keep pedophiles out of the priesthood, the headquarters of the Catholic Church has no such policy.

By NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

The gap in Francis’ oft-pledged “zero tolerance” for abuse is surprising, given that the Holy See told the United Nations five years ago that it was developing a “safe environment program” for children inside the 44-acre Vatican City.

Asked about the promised child protection guidelines, the secretary general of the Vatican City State administration, Monsignor Fernando Vergez, told The Associated Press he couldn’t respond “since the study and verification of the project are still underway.”

Yes, Francis in 2013 updated Vatican City’s legal code to criminalize sexual violence against children and just last month the Vatican tribunal convicted a former diplomat of possession and distribution of child pornography.

And one could argue that, beyond the new law, a written policy and safe environment program is unnecessary in a city state where only a handful of children live full time.

But thousands of children pass through the Vatican walls every day, touring the Vatican Museums, attending papal audiences and Masses and visiting St. Peter’s Square and basilica.

And Vatican City authorities wouldn’t have to look far for help in crafting such a policy. The pope’s own Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors — his hand-picked sex abuse advisory board — has a template for such guidelines on its Vatican website.

The absence of clear-cut policy became evident late last year following revelations that a teenage seminarian in the Vatican’s youth seminary had, in 2012, accused one of the older boys of sexually molesting his roommate.

Nothing came of it. Vatican police, who have jurisdiction over the territory, weren’t called in to investigate. A series of bishops — including Cardinal Angelo Comastri, Francis’ vicar for Rome and the archpriest of St. Peter’s Basilica — said they investigated, but no one ever interviewed the alleged victim.

The student who lodged the complaint, Kamil Jarzembowski, was promptly kicked out of the seminary while the accused seminarian was ordained a priest last year.

The Associated Press has learned that the victim has since filed a formal complaint with the Vatican’s criminal tribunal and Italian church authorities launched a canonical investigation into the newly ordained priest.

Those developments occurred after Italian journalists Gaetano Pecoraro
and Gianluigi Nuzzi exposed the scandal last year, prompting the Vatican to reopen the investigation. In their reports, Jarzembowski’s story — including all the letters he sent to church authorities, Vatican officials and the pope over the years — came to light.

“In those years when I was sending letters, there was never any response,” Jarzembowski told the AP. “I was really hurting, because silence can be a real weapon that hurts you when you suffer. You make a denunciation and no one will deal with it.”

Church officials had discounted Jarzembowski’s complaint, claiming that he only went public with it because he was bitter at having been kicked out of the seminary. Jarzembowski is indeed bitter — the Polish student had to scramble to find a place to live and a new school for his senior year of high school.

The seminary in question, located inside a palazzo just a few steps from the Vatican hotel where Francis lives, serves as a residence for about a dozen boys, aged 12 to 18, who serve as altar boys at papal Masses.

Jarzembowski says his roommate was first molested by the older seminarian when both were minors, but that the molestation continued after the older seminarian turned 18.

The status of the investigation is unclear. Calls and emails to the Diocese of Como, which is in charge of the seminary and is conducting the canonical investigation, were not returned. The Vatican spokesman declined several requests for comment.
But the lack of a full-fledged investigation into Jarzembowski’s original claims exposed how the absence of a policy on handling abuse complaints can have repercussions.

“If the Holy See can’t be bothered to safeguard the handful of kids in its own backyard, how can it possibly protect the millions of children in its care worldwide?” asked Anne Barrett Doyle of the online research database BishopAccountability.org. “It’s a small but telling measure of the Catholic Church’s disconnect when it comes to its abuse problem. It makes promises that it abandons or forgets once the world’s attention fades.”

The promises were made five years ago, when the Vatican went before the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child to defend its efforts to combat the global sex abuse scandal.

The promises were made five years ago, when the Vatican went before the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child to defend its efforts to combat the global sex abuse scandal.

The Holy See argued that the U.N. child rights convention was “territorial” in nature, and that the Holy See can’t possibly be responsible for implementing it outside the confines of Vatican City. Within the city state, however, it told the U.N. it was taking extensive measures to protect children.

Not surprisingly, the U.N. committee dismissed the Vatican’s argument and urged the Vatican to not only make good on protecting children inside Vatican territory but globally.

“We did not agree with the narrow understanding of implementation ... as confined to the Vatican City state,” Kirsten Sandberg, who was president of the U.N. committee at the time, said.

The Vatican was supposed to report back to the committee last September about progress it has made since its 2013 submission. Sandberg said countries are often late on those deadlines — the Holy See was 14 years late when it finally submitted its responses in 2013.

She said she hoped the Holy See in its next report would follow up on a core recommendation to require cooperation with police rather than keeping investigations exclusively in-house.

“They should leave the cases to the judicial authorities,” she said.

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Jamey Keaten contributed from Geneva.
Nuns are silhouetted in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican. Some nuns are now finding their voices, buoyed by the #MeToo movement and the growing recognition that adults can be victims of sexual abuse when there is an imbalance of power in a relationship.

July 27, 2018

After decades of silence, nuns talk about abuse by priests

By NICOLE WINFIELD and RODNEY MUHUMUZA
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The nun no longer goes to confession regularly, after an Italian priest forced himself on her while she was at her most vulnerable: recounting her sins to him in a university classroom nearly 20 years ago.

At the time, the sister only told her provincial superior and her spiritual director, silenced by the Catholic Church’s culture of secrecy, her vows of obedience and her own fear, repulsion and shame.

“It opened a great wound inside of me,” she told the Associated Press. “I pretended it didn’t happen.”

After decades of silence, the nun is one of a handful worldwide to come
forward recently on an issue that the Catholic Church has yet to come to terms with: The sexual abuse of religious sisters by priests and bishops. An AP examination has found that cases have emerged in Europe, Africa, South America and Asia, demonstrating that the problem is global and pervasive, thanks to the universal tradition of sisters’ second-class status in the Catholic Church and their ingrained subservience to the men who run it.

Some nuns are now finding their voices, buoyed by the #MeToo movement and the growing recognition that adults can be victims of sexual abuse when there is an imbalance of power in a relationship. The sisters are going public in part because of years of inaction by church leaders, even after major studies on the problem in Africa were reported to the Vatican in the 1990s.

The issue has flared in the wake of scandals over the sexual abuse of children, and recently of adults, including revelations that one of the most prominent American cardinals, Theodore McCarrick, sexually abused and harassed his seminarians.

The extent of the abuse of nuns is unclear, at least outside the Vatican. Victims are reluctant to report the abuse because of well-founded fears they won’t be believed, experts told the AP. Church leaders are reluctant to acknowledge that some priests and bishops simply ignore their vows of celibacy, knowing that their secrets will be kept.

However, this week, about half a dozen sisters in a small religious congregation in Chile went public on national television with their stories of abuse by priests and other nuns — and how their superiors did nothing to stop it. A nun in India recently filed a formal police complaint accusing a bishop of rape, something that would have been unthinkable even a year ago.

Cases in Africa have come up periodically; in 2013, for example, a well-known priest in Uganda wrote a letter to his superiors that mentioned “priests romantically involved with religious sisters” — for which he was promptly suspended from the church until he apologized in May. And the sister in Europe spoke to the AP to help bring the issue to light.

“I am so sad that it took so long for this to come into the open, because there were reports long ago,” Karlijn Demasure, one of the church’s leading experts on clergy sexual abuse and abuse of power, told the AP in an interview. “I hope
that now actions will be taken to take care of the victims and put an end to this kind of abuse.”

**TAKING VICTIMS SERIOUSLY**

The Vatican declined to comment on what measures, if any, it has taken to assess the scope of the problem globally, what it has done to punish offenders and care for the victims. A Vatican official said it is up to local church leaders to sanction priests who sexually abuse sisters, but that often such crimes go unpunished both in civil and canonical courts.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn’t authorized to speak to the issue, said only some cases arrive at the Holy See for investigation. It was a reference to the fact that the Catholic Church has no clear measures in place to investigate and punish bishops who themselves abuse or allow abusers to remain in their ranks — a legal loophole that has recently been highlighted by the McCarrick case.

The official said the church has focused much of its attention recently on protecting children, but that vulnerable adults “deserve the same protection.”

“Consecrated women have to be encouraged to speak up when they are molested,” the official told the AP. “Bishops have to be encouraged to take them seriously, and make sure the priests are punished if guilty.”

But being taken seriously is often the toughest obstacle for sisters who are sexually abused, said Demasure, until recently executive director of the church’s Center for Child Protection at the Pontifical Gregorian University, the church’s leading think tank on the issue.

“They (the priests) can always say ‘she wanted it,’” Demasure said. “It is also difficult to get rid of the opinion that it is always the woman who seduces the man, and not vice versa.”

Demasure said many priests in Africa, for example, struggle with celibacy because of traditional and cultural beliefs in the importance of having children. Novices, who are just entering religious life, are particularly vulnerable because they often need a letter from their parish priest to be accepted into certain religious congregations. “And sometimes they have to pay for that,” she said.

And when these women become pregnant?

“Mainly she has an abortion. Even more than once. And he pays for that. A
religious sister has no money. A priest, yes,” she said.

There can also be a price for blowing the whistle on the problem.

In 2013, the Rev. Anthony Musaala in Kampala, Uganda wrote what he called an open letter to members of the local Catholic establishment about “numerous cases” of alleged sex liaisons of priests, including with nuns. He charged that it was “an open secret that many Catholic priests and some bishops, in Uganda and elsewhere, no longer live celibate chastity.”

He was sanctioned, even though Ugandan newspapers regularly report cases of priests caught in sex escapades. The topic is even the subject of a popular novel taught in high schools.

In 2012, a priest sued a bishop in western Uganda who had suspended him
Sometimes, when a nun becomes pregnant, the priest insists on an abortion, the report said.

and ordered him to stop interacting with at least four nuns. The priest, who denied the allegations, lost the suit, and the sisters later withdrew their own suit against the bishop.

Archbishop John Baptist Odama, leader of the local Ugandan conference of bishops, told the AP that unverified or verified allegations against individual priests should not be used to smear the whole church.

“Individual cases may happen, if they are there,” he said Thursday. “Individual cases must be treated as individual cases.”

PRIESTLY ABUSE OF NUNS IS NOT A NEW PROBLEM

Long before the most recent incidents, confidential reports into the problem focused on Africa and AIDS were prepared in the 1990s by members of religious orders for top church officials. In 1994, the late Sr. Maura O’Donohue wrote the most comprehensive study about a six-year, 23-nation survey, in which she learned of 29 nuns who had been impregnated in a single congregation.

Nuns, she reported, were considered “safe” sexual partners for priests who feared they might be infected with HIV if they went to prostitutes or women in the general population.

Four years later, in a report to top religious superiors and Vatican officials, Sr. Marie McDonald said harassment and rape of African sisters by priests is “allegedly common.”

Sometimes, when a nun becomes pregnant, the priest insists on an abortion, the report said.

The problem travelled when the sisters were sent to Rome for studies. They “frequently turn to seminarians and priests for help in writing essays. Sexual favors are sometimes the payment they have to make for such help,” the report said.

The reports were never meant to be made public. The U.S. National Catholic Reporter put them online in 2001, exposing the depths of a scandal the church had long sought to keep under wraps. To date, the Vatican hasn’t said what, if anything, it ever did with the information.

Sister Paola Moggi, a member of the Missionary Combonian Sisters — a religious congregation with a significant presence in 16 African countries — said in her experience the African church “had made great strides” since the 1990s, when she did missionary work in Kenya, but the problem has not been eliminated.
“I have found in Africa sisters who are absolutely emancipated and who say what they think to a priest they meet who might ask to have sex with them,” she told the AP.

“I have also found sisters who said ‘Well, you have to understand their needs, and that while we only have a monthly cycle a man has a continuous cycle of sperm’ — verbatim words from the ’90s,” she said.

But the fact that in just a few weeks scandals of priests allegedly molesting sisters have erupted publicly on two other continents — Asia and Latin America — suggests that the problem is not confined to Africa, and that some women are now willing to break the taboo to denounce it publicly.

In India, a sister of the Missionaries of Jesus filed a police report last month alleging a bishop raped her in May 2014 during a visit to the heavily Christian state of Kerala, and that he subsequently sexually abused her around a dozen more times over the following two years, Indian media have reported. The bishop denied the accusation and said the woman was retaliating against him for having taken disciplinary action against her for her own sexual misdeeds.

In Chile, the scandal of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, an order dedicated to health care in the diocese of Talca, erupted at the same time the country’s entire Catholic hierarchy has been under fire for decades of sex abuse and cover-ups. The scandal got so bad that in May, Francis summoned all Chilean bishops to Rome, where they all offered to resign en masse.

The case, exposed by the Chilean state broadcaster, involves accusations of priests fondling and kissing nuns, including while naked, and some religious sisters sexually abusing younger ones. The victims said they told their mother superior, but that she did nothing. Talca’s new temporary bishop has vowed to find justice.

The Vatican is well aware that religious sisters have long been particularly vulnerable to abuse. Perhaps the most sensational account was detailed in the 2013 book “The Nuns of Sant’Ambrogio,” based on the archives of the Vatican’s 1860s Inquisition trial of abuse, embezzlement, murder and “false holiness” inside a Roman convent. Once word got out, the Vatican poured the full force of its Inquisition to investigate and punish.
It remains to be seen what the Vatican will do now that more sisters are speaking out.

**ONE SISTER’S STORY — AND YEARS OF HURT**

The sister who spoke to the AP about her assault in 2000 during confession at a Bologna university clasped her rosary as she recounted the details.

She recalled exactly how she and the priest were seated in two armchairs face-to-face in the university classroom, her eyes cast to the floor. At a certain point, she said, the priest got up from his chair and forced himself on her. Petite but not frail, she was so shocked, she said, that she grabbed him by the shoulders and with all her strength, stood up and pushed him back into his chair.

The nun continued with her confession that day. But the assault — and a subsequent advance by a different priest a year later — eventually led her to stop going to confession with any priest other than her spiritual father, who lives in a different country.

“The place of confession should be a place of salvation, freedom and mercy,” she said. “Because of this experience, confession became a place of sin and abuse of power.”

She recalled at one point a priest in whom she had confided had apologized “on behalf of the church.” But nobody ever took any action against the offender, who was a prominent university professor.

The woman recounted her story to the AP without knowing that at that very moment, a funeral service was being held for the priest who had assaulted her 18 years earlier.

She later said the combination of his death and her decision to speak out lifted a great weight.

“I see it as two freedoms: freedom of the weight for a victim, and freedom of a lie and a violation by the priest,” she said. “I hope this helps other sisters free themselves of this weight.”

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*Muhumuza reported from Kampala, Uganda.*
Sept. 18, 2018

Pope role in study of Argentine sex abuse case in spotlight

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Pope Francis’ role in Argentina’s most famous case of priestly sex abuse is coming under renewed scrutiny as he faces the greatest crisis of his papacy over the Catholic Church’s troubled legacy of cover-up and allegations he himself sided with the accused.

Francis, who at the time was still Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, in 2010 commissioned a four-volume, 2,000-plus page forensic study of the legal case against a convicted priest that concluded he was innocent, that his victims were
lying and that the case never should have gone to trial.

The Argentine church says that the study obtained by The Associated Press — bound volumes complete with reproductions of Johannes Vermeer paintings on the covers — was for internal church use only. But the volumes purportedly ended up on the desks of some Argentine court justices who were ruling on the appeals of the Rev. Julio Grassi.

Despite the study, Argentina’s Supreme Court in March 2017 upheld the conviction and 15-year prison sentence against Grassi, a celebrity priest who ran homes for street children across Argentina.

The study, and Francis’ role in the Grassi case, have taken on new relevance following allegations by a former Vatican ambassador that Francis, and a long line of Vatican officials before him, covered up the sexual misconduct of a prominent U.S. cardinal.

Neither Francis nor the Vatican has responded to the allegations that Francis rehabilitated ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick from sanctions in 2013. The Vatican didn’t respond to a request for comment about Francis’ role in the Grassi case.

In an exclusive interview with AP, Grassi’s victim, Gabriel, said he is still
waiting for Francis to acknowledge his pain, given the Supreme Court has now ruled that he indeed was assaulted by Grassi when he was 13.

“I’d like for the church to say something, even though I don’t expect it will,” Gabriel told AP, sitting next to his psychiatrist. “No one ever reached out to me,” he said. “No one bothered.”

Francis, the former archbishop of Buenos Aires, wasn’t Grassi’s bishop and bore no direct responsibility for him. But in 2006, he was quoted by the now-defunct Argentine magazine Veintitres as saying the accusations against Grassi were “informative viciousness against him, a condemnation by the media.”

He said he would withhold judgment pending the outcome of the court case, but Grassi himself testified that Bergoglio had “never let go of my hand” throughout the legal process.

Under Bergoglio’s presidency, Argentina’s bishops conference in 2010 enlisted a leading Argentine criminal defense attorney, Marcelo Sancinetti, to research a counter-inquiry into the prosecutors’ case against Gabriel and two other former residents of Grassi’s Happy Children homes whose cases were thrown out in the initial trial.

In the study, Sancinetti concluded that not only weren’t the accusations against Grassi sufficiently proven, “the falsity of each one of the accusations is objectively verifiable.”

In the four tomes, which were produced at an annual clip from 2010-2013, Sancinetti accused Gabriel of changing his story and trying to extort Grassi. But a court years earlier had already thrown out a criminal complaint filed by Grassi accusing Gabriel of extortion.

Sancinetti compared the “current trials and condemnations with severe sentences based exclusively on the word of a person who calls itself victim of sexual abuse to the trials for witchcraft of the Middle Ages.” And in the final volume and on his law firm’s website, Sancinetti said Francis in particular had commissioned the work. He didn’t respond to multiple requests for comment.

Argentina’s Supreme Court disagreed with Sancinetti’s analysis, and on March 21, 2017, upheld Grassi’s 2009 conviction for having sexually abused and corrupted Gabriel.

Through tears, Gabriel had testified that on two separate occasions in 1996 the priest once fondled him, and then performed oral sex on him in his office.

Gabriel, who for a time was placed in Argentina’s witness protection program
after suffering a break-in, physical attacks and threats, said he was shocked when Grassi testified that Bergoglio “had never let go of my hand.”

“We were all like ‘wow!’ It was Bergoglio,” he said.

Gabriel said he and his lawyer delivered a letter addressed to Francis two months after he was elected Latin America’s first pope, bringing it to the Vatican embassy in Buenos Aires on May 8, 2013.

In the letter, Gabriel identified himself as a victim of “aberrant crimes of repeated sexual abuse and corruption” by Grassi.

He lamented that court-protected details of his abuse had been exposed by the study, which he said had “denigrated” him personally and contradicted the stated “zero tolerance” policy of both Pope Benedict XVI and Francis.

“I suffered and continue to suffer,” he wrote.

He asked for an audience with the pope “and I earnestly beg you for compassion and help in recovering my faith.”

He never received a reply. In fact, his lawyer said they were threatened at the embassy and don’t know what became of the letter.

Asked why the Argentine bishops conference had commissioned the study, a conference spokeswoman said it was to help bishops understand the case better.
“The bishops conference considered that it could provide more information in view of the canonical procedure,” the conference said in a statement to AP.

Such a study, however, would be unthinkable for use in a canonical trial. While church trials do make use of police investigations and evidence from secular courts, a counter-study commissioned by an entire bishops’ conference could run into jurisdictional problems at a canonical trial, canonists said.

In addition, Gabriel’s attorney, Juan Pablo Gallego, said the books ended up on the desks of some Argentine judges deciding Grassi’s appeals and represented what he called a blatant, albeit unsuccessful lobbying attempt.

The diocese of Moron, which was responsible for Grassi, had long defended its decision to keep him in ministry even after the trial began by saying it didn’t want to prejudice the outcome.

Eighteen months after Argentina’s high court ruled against him, Grassi remains a priest as he serves his 15-year sentence in the Unidad 41 de Campana prison in the province of Buenos Aires.

The Moron diocese said Grassi had been removed from pastoral duties when the trial began, and that he now has been restricted from exercising any public ministry. The diocese told AP that the canonical case is now with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican office that handles sex abuse cases.

Julieta Anazco, president of Argentina’s Survivors’ Network of Ecclesiastical Abuse, said the Grassi case was a watershed for Argentina since the victims went up against a celebrity priest who had the backing of Argentina’s Catholic elite, and suffered the public humiliation of being accused of only seeking money.

“They have made the path of our struggle easier for us,” she said. “Thanks to their struggle, many of us were encouraged to denounce (our abusers) publicly.”

She cited the recent case of hearing-impaired victims of the now-notorious Antonio Provolo Institute who came forward to denounce abuse by the same Italian priest accused by Italian Provolo students who in 2014 alerted Francis and the Vatican to his whereabouts. Argentine police have arrested the Rev. Nicola Coradi and raided Provolo schools.

“Before Pope Francis can enact accountability for bishops and other church leaders, he has to own up to the harm he himself caused victims in Argentina,” said Anne Barrett Doyle of the online resource Bishop Accountability, which
Gabriel, a sex abuse victim of Rev. Julio Grassi, who did not want to show his face, holds one of four books written by Argentine criminal defense attorney Marcelo Sancinetti, that makes the argument that Grassi is innocent and his victims are lying, in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

has gathered the documentation on the Grassi saga.

The case has parallels to that in neighboring Chile, where Francis repeatedly defended a bishop accused of covering up for the country’s most notorious predator, the Rev. Fernando Karadima. Francis discredited Karadima’s victims, who placed Bishop Juan Barros at the scene of their abuse, saying their accusations were “calumny.”

Francis eventually acknowledged he had made “grave errors in judgment” about Barros, apologized to the victims and launched a Vatican investigation that resulted in all of Chile’s active bishops offering to resign.

He has offered no mea culpa about the Grassi case. Gabriel, who works odd jobs off the books and has no credit card, is waiting.

“I’m Catholic, but yes, there are moments when I don’t know if the church represents me.”

Winfield reported from Rome.
March 14, 2018

Vatican doctors photo of Benedict’s praise for Francis

By NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican admitted Wednesday that it altered a photo sent to the media of a letter from retired Pope Benedict XVI about Pope Francis. The manipulation changed the meaning of the image in a way that violated photojournalist industry standards.

The Vatican’s communications office released the photo of the letter on Monday on the eve of Francis’ five-year anniversary. The letter was cited by Monsignor Dario Vigano, chief of communications, to rebut critics of Francis who question his theological and philosophical heft and say he represents a rupture from Benedict’s doctrine-minded papacy.

https://apnews.com/01983501d40d47a4aa7a32b6af870661
In the part of the letter that is legible in the photo, Benedict praised a new volume of books on the theology of Francis as evidence of the “foolish prejudice” of his critics. The book project, Benedict wrote, “helps to see the interior continuity between the two pontificates, with all the differences in style and temperament."

The Vatican admitted to The Associated Press on Wednesday that it blurred the two final lines of the first page where Benedict begins to explain that he didn’t actually read the books in question. He wrote that he cannot contribute a theological assessment of Francis as requested by Vigano because he has other projects to do.

A Vatican spokesman, speaking on condition of anonymity, didn’t explain why the Holy See blurred the lines other than to say it never intended for the full letter to be released. In fact, the entire second page of the letter is covered in the photo by a stack of books, with just Benedict’s tiny signature showing, to prove its authenticity.

The missing content significantly altered the meaning of the quotes the Vatican chose to highlight, which were widely picked up by the media. Those quotes suggested that Benedict had read the volume, agreed with it and given it his full endorsement and assessment. The doctoring of the photo is significant because news media rely on Vatican photographers for images of the pope at events that are otherwise closed to independent media.

Vigano read parts of the letter during a press conference launching the volume, including the lines that were blurred out. A journalist who attended the presentation, Sandro Magister, transcribed Vigano’s comments and posted them on his blog. But Vigano didn’t read the whole letter. The Vatican didn’t respond to a request to see the full text.

Most independent news media, including The Associated Press, follow strict standards that forbid digital manipulation of photos.

“No element should be digitally added to or subtracted from any photograph,” read the AP norms, which are considered to be the industry standard among news agencies.

Vigano heads the Vatican’s new Secretariat for Communications, which has brought all Vatican media under one umbrella in a bid to reduce costs and improve efficiency, part of Francis’ reform efforts. The office’s recent message for the church’s World Day of Social Communications denounced “fake news” as evil and urged media to seek the truth.

*This story has corrected the day in the first and fourth paragraphs to Wednesday, not Thursday.*
Dec. 27, 2018

Pope Francis’ early blind spot on sex abuse threatens legacy

By NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — It has been a wretched year for Pope Francis, whose blind spot on clergy sex abuse conspired with events beyond his control to threaten his legacy and throw the Catholic hierarchy into a credibility crisis not seen in modern times.

The latest development — a high-profile verdict in a far-away country — cements the impression that Francis simply didn’t “get it” when he first became pope in 2013 and began leading the church.
Early missteps included associating with compromised cardinals and bishops and downplaying or dismissing rumors of abuse and cover-up. Francis finally came around in 2018, when he publicly admitted he was wrong about a case in Chile, made amends, and laid the groundwork for the future by calling an abuse prevention summit next year.

But damage to his moral authority on the issue has been done. Before his eyes were opened, Francis showed that he was a product of the very clerical culture he so often denounces, ever ready to take the word of the clerical class over victims.

The year started off well enough: Francis dedicated his annual Jan. 1 peace message to the plight of migrants and refugees. Soon thereafter, he baptized 34 cooing babies in the Sistine Chapel and urged their mothers to nurse, a typical Franciscan show of informal practicality amid the splendor of Michelangelo’s “Last Judgment.”

Then came Chile.

Francis’ January visit was dominated by the clergy abuse scandal there, and featured unprecedented protests against a papal visit: churches were firebombed and riot police used water cannons to quell demonstrations.

Chilean opposition to Francis had actually begun three years prior, when the Argentine-born pope appointed Juan Barros as bishop of the southern diocese
Francis defended Barros because one of his friends and advisers, Chilean Cardinal Javier Errazuriz, defended Barros. Francis in 2013 had named Errazuriz to his inner circle, a formal parallel cabinet of nine cardinals who meet every three months at the Vatican.

Chilean victims, though, had long charged that Errazuriz had been deaf to their claims while he was archbishop of Santiago, giving cover to abusers and their enablers. Francis disregarded the victims’ concerns and appointed Errazuriz to the high-profile cabinet post.

In the wake of his disastrous trip to Chile, Francis slowly came around to the victims’ view, in part in response to reporting by The Associated Press. He ordered an in-depth investigation into the Chilean church, admitted to “grave errors in judgment” and personally apologized to the victims he had discredited. He accused the Chilean leadership of creating a “culture of cover-up” and secured the resignations of every active bishop there, Barros included. He vowed that the Catholic Church would “never again” hide abuse, and earlier this month the Vatican announced Francis had fired Errazuriz from the cabinet.

Also removed was Cardinal George Pell, who left his post as the Vatican’s economy minister in June 2017 to stand trial for historical sex abuse offenses in his native Australia. Like Errazuriz, Pell had been the target of abuse victims’ ire for years, well before Francis brought him to the Vatican, given his prominent role in Australia and the church’s horrific record with abuse there.

Both men deny wrongdoing. But their continued presence on the Council of Nine, as the cabinet is called, became a source of scandal for the pope, who bid them farewell in October with a letter thanking them for their service. For Pell, the C9 removal suggests he won’t resume work at the Vatican since his five-year term expires early next year.

They are not the only cardinals on the hot seat: The current archbishop of
Santiago is under investigation in a broad criminal inquiry into sex abuse cover-up. Prosecutors in a dozen U.S. states are investigating church files. A cover-up trial in France has two cardinals as defendants, including the Spaniard who heads the Vatican office that processes sex abuse cases. The Holy See invoked sovereign immunity to spare Spain’s Cardinal Luis Ladaria Ferrer. But it has no such power to protect Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, the archbishop of Lyon, France, who is accused of failing to report a self-confessed abusive priest to authorities. Francis has said French justice should take its course but has praised Barbarin as “brave.”

Despite such problems, with the Chile scandal largely atoned for and decisions made to purge his inner circle of compromised members, Francis
appeared by summer to be well on his way to steering himself out of the 2018 sex abuse crisis.

Then Round 2 hit.

In July, Francis removed U.S. Archbishop Theodore McCarrick as a cardinal after church investigators said an allegation that he groped a teenage altar boy in the 1970s was credible. Subsequently, several former seminarians and priests reported that they too had been abused or harassed by McCarrick as adults.

A month later, a grand jury report in Pennsylvania revealed seven decades of abuse and cover-up in six dioceses, with allegations that more than 1,000 children had been molested by about 300 priests. Most of the priests were dead, and the crimes far pre-dated Francis’ papacy.

But the combined scandal created a crisis in confidence in the U.S. and Vatican hierarchy. It was apparently common knowledge in the U.S. and Vatican leadership that “Uncle Ted,” as McCarrick was known, slept with seminarians, and yet he still rose undisturbed up the church ranks.

Having removed McCarrick and approved a canonical trial against him, Francis should have emerged as the hero in the saga since he righted the wrong of St. John Paul II, the pope from 1978-2005 who had promoted McCarrick to begin with and whose record on abuse issues is far worse than Francis’ given his inaction.

But Francis’ get-tough victory lap was cut short when a former Vatican ambassador to the U.S. accused the pope himself of participating in the McCarrick cover-up.

In an 11-page denunciation in August, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano claimed that Vatican officials from the top on down over the course of three pontificates had known about McCarrick’s penchant for seminarians, and turned a blind eye.

Vigano wrote that he had told Francis in 2013, at the start of his pontificate, that McCarrick had “corrupted a generation” of seminarians and priests and that Pope Benedict XVI had eventually sanctioned him for his sexual misconduct.

Vigano claimed Francis disregarded his 2013 warning and rehabilitated McCarrick from those sanctions, making him a key adviser and entrusting him with delicate missions to China and elsewhere.

Francis never responded to Vigano’s laundry list of claims. Instead, Francis
took to blaming the devil — “the Great Accuser” — for sowing division and discord in the church, an indirect jab at Vigano that only fueled conservative outrage at Francis and demands that he come clean about what he knew about McCarrick and when.

The Vatican didn’t help Francis’ standing any when, without providing any plausible reason, it blocked U.S. bishops from adopting accountability measures to try to restore trust with their flocks.

It now seems clear that Francis, at least at the start of his pontificate, was willing to overlook past sexual misbehavior or cover-up claims if those responsible had atoned. Francis launched his pontificate with his famous “Who am I to judge” comment, about a gay priest whom he had appointed to a top advisory position despite allegations he had had a string of lovers.

That comment, which won him plaudits from liberal Catholics and landed him on the cover of Advocate magazine, may now be his undoing. If he had judged his advisers more scrupulously at the start of his pontificate on their abuse and cover-up records, he might have retained more credibility in 2018.
VIDEO: Chile sex abuse victim’s credibility praised, challenged

One key witness in the Rev. Fernando Karadima’s 2010 trial is preparing to testify again, this time in a spinoff case with potentially more significant consequences.
The AP’s domination of the abuse story and its demand for accountability continued into 2019 when Vatican correspondent Nicole Winfield pressed Pope Francis on the sexual abuse of nuns by clergy during an in-flight press conference returning from the United Arab Emirates on Feb. 5. The pope’s response made headlines around the globe and marked the first-ever public acknowledgment by the pope that it was a problem, and he vowed to do more to address it. The New York Times on two successive days credited the AP investigation, and Winfield in particular, with bringing the issue to the fore.

**Pope publicly acknowledges clergy sexual abuse of nuns**  
Feb. 5, 2019 [https://apnews.com/397f2c76afc04532908035a66ccaacc8](https://apnews.com/397f2c76afc04532908035a66ccaacc8)

**The Daily, by the NYT: The Overlooked Scandal of Priests Sexually Abusing Nuns**  

**‘Sexual Abuse of Nuns: Longstanding Church Scandal Emerges From Shadows’**  
MEET THE TEAM

Nicole Winfield is the chief correspondent for The Associated Press in Italy and the Vatican. Nicole began her career with AP in 1992 in New York City and was based in Miami and at the United Nations before being posted to Rome in 2001. Most of her coverage focuses on the Vatican, though she has also reported on conflicts in the Gulf, Afghanistan and the Israel/Palestinian territories. She teaches a writing class at Temple University’s Rome campus and lectures visiting student groups about journalism and the Vatican. She graduated from Johns Hopkins University.

Eva Vergara has dedicated her professional life to the world of international news agencies: first she held a position with United Press International, and then she went on to work with The Associated Press for more than three decades. She studied journalism at the University of Chile. Prior to that, she completed her Bachelor of Social Sciences.

Luis Andres Henao is a multimedia reporter with 10 years of experience working in the Southern Cone region (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay). Based in Buenos Aires, he has worked throughout Latin America and the Caribbean for The Associated Press, and previously for Reuters. His coverage includes breaking news on natural disasters, a special assignment in Antarctica and an investigation examining Pope Francis’ role in the clerical abuse scandal in his native Argentina. Henao has a bachelors degree in journalism from Emerson College and a masters degree from the Columbia University Graduate school of journalism.

Rodney Muhumuza is a Uganda-based correspondent for The Associated Press since 2012. He has coordinated coverage across the East African region, commissioning and editing stringers’ copy from countries such as South Sudan and Somalia. He has covered labor unrest in South Africa, Ebola in West Africa, extremist attacks in Kenya, and the U.S.-backed jungle hunt for rebels in Central African Republic. He was educated at Uganda's Makerere University and holds a master’s degree in journalism from Columbia. Muhumuza was a staff reporter for Uganda's Daily Monitor newspaper from 2005 to 2010. In 2009 he was an Alfred Friendly Press Fellow at The Kansas City Star.