

RUNAWAY PRIESTS



HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

“In St. Peter’s Square, ... you’re just lost in the crowd. No one will look at you and think you’re a criminal.”

The Rev. **Lawrence Breslin**, a former college administrator in Rome



MONA REEDER/Staff Photographer

The Rev. **Joseph Henn** lives and works behind these double doors at the Salvatorian order’s Rome headquarters, which has a hotel and tourist center. He comes and goes as he pleases, even though he is wanted on U.S. criminal charges.

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tion the prudence of publishing such a document.”

“The response should be clean-up,” Brother Coldrey said, “but it is still all too often cover-up.”

The Vatican has long refused to address why it has not acted on numerous abuse complaints made against a close ally of the pope, the Rev. Marcial Maciel, the revered founder and leader of the Legion of Christ order in Rome.

Two of his nine accusers appealed several times to the Vatican in the 1970s and 1980s, with no results. The Vatican finally agreed in 1999 to review the alleged incidents, which the men said happened in Spain and Italy when they were young boys and seminarians. But a few months later, the Vatican mysteriously suspended the inquiry without ever taking testimony from the men, according to *Vows of Silence*, a new book by Jason Berry and Gerald Renner, investigative journalists who first reported the Maciel saga.

Alberto Athié, a former priest who had worked at a charity run by Mexico’s bishops, told *The News* that his career stalled after he notified Mexico City Cardinal Norberto Rivera and Vatican Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger about the allegations against Father Maciel. The cardinals wouldn’t comment. “I was told that Maciel was very beloved of the pope, that he had done a lot of good for the church, and that it wasn’t convenient to do anything to look into the accusations,” said Mr. Athié, who subsequently quit the priesthood.

Father Maciel, who has repeatedly declared his innocence, continues to enjoy support from John Paul. The pope celebrated the Legion’s 60th anniversary in St. Peter’s Square in 2001 and told a crowd: “I extend a particularly affectionate greeting to your dear

In the pope’s back yard

ABOUT THE VATICAN
It is the world’s smallest sovereign nation, surrounded entirely by the city of Rome. It has diplomatic relations with 174 countries and participates in the United Nations. It has no extradition treaty with the United States.

The Rev. Barry Bossa: Left the United States after his criminal past and new abuse complaints emerged in 2002.

The Rev. Edgar Hidalgo: Served house arrest with his religious society across from a main Vatican City entrance. He was recently jailed.

The Rev. Joseph Henn: Remains at his order’s world headquarters, one block from St. Peter’s Square, despite criminal charges.

The Rev. James Tully: Works near St. Peter’s Square for an umbrella organization of the world’s religious order leaders.

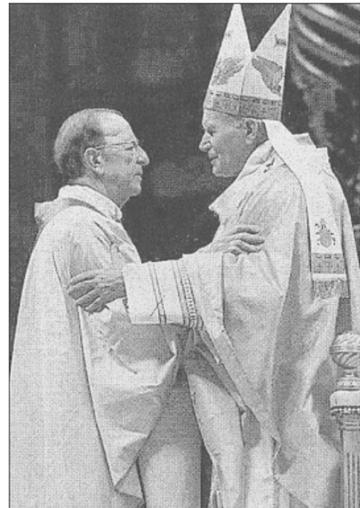
The Rev. John Baptist Ormechea: Works at his order’s headquarters next to a basilica and overlooking ruins such as the Colosseum.

founder, Father Marcial Maciel, whom I heartily congratulate at this significant juncture.”

‘Lost in the crowd’

The sidewalks and streets around the Vatican are brimming with clergy, seminarians and Catholic pilgrims of all nationalities. Cardinals and bishops, in their scarlet and purple vestments, meander through the scores of people. Police cars whiz by occasionally, escorting limousines with foreign dignitaries into the Vatican.

“You can stand out there in St. Peter’s Square and hear 50 languages spoken. You’re just lost in the crowd,” said Monsignor Breslin, the former college administrator in Rome. “No one will look at you and think you’re a criminal.”



FILE 1997

The Vatican won’t say what happened to an abuse inquiry of the Rev. Marcial Maciel, who is close to Pope John Paul II. Father Maciel says he is innocent.

One sunny day this summer, the Rev. James Tully navigated his way past tourists in St. Peter’s Square without interruption and headed for a yellow Vatican postal box on the side of St. Peter’s Basilica, where the pope regularly blesses the faithful. Father Tully dropped in a couple of letters, then walked on to a nearby bus stop.

Father Tully, who declined to be interviewed, was moved to Rome two years ago, about a month after he was accused of sexual misconduct for the third time.

The priest had pleaded no contest to disorderly conduct in 1992 for giving three

Elsewhere in Rome

The Rev. Marcial Maciel: The Vatican has left him as head of the Legion of Christ order in Rome despite abuse complaints.

The Rev. Richard Mataconis: Leads English-language tours at ancient church burial grounds.

The Rev. Julian Fox: Was recently promoted to his order’s Rome offices to work in its communications department.

boys alcohol and grabbing one of them on the inner thigh during a baseball game in Milwaukee. Father Tully’s therapist wrote a letter during that case in which he said the priest “had never denied responsibility for his sexual behavior.”

An official with Father Tully’s Xaverian Missionary Fathers order said his transfer to Rome had nothing to do with abuse allegations. The priest was recovering from the stress of working in war-torn parts of Africa, the official said, and was not ready for parish ministry in the United States.

A few miles south of the Vatican, the Rev. Richard Mataconis works as an English-language guide at the Catacombs of St. Callistus, a popular stop for Catholics visiting Rome. He mingles with the adults and children on his tours, talking them through the ancient burial sites of popes and Catholic martyrs.

Father Mataconis was sued two years ago by two men who accused

him of abusing them in the 1970s at the New York junior seminary they attended. The suit ultimately was dismissed because the men had missed the deadline for filing a legal claim.

The priest, a member of the Salesians of Don Bosco religious order, would not agree to an interview. Salesian officials said they could not discuss the accusations, the circumstances of his transfer to Rome or his current assignments, citing pending litigation against the order.

“We trust that you understand our position,” their attorney said.

Not talking

Father Barry Bossa was chatting in the second-floor hallway of his order’s offices one afternoon when a doorman told him he had company.

“A visitor? For me?” he replied enthusiastically. His expression quickly turned

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The Rev. Barry Bossa

ROME CASE STUDY #3

He left the United States suddenly two years ago after an old criminal conviction resurfaced — and about the time several men made new accusations in suburban Boston. Prosecutors in Plymouth County, outside Boston, have since charged him in sexual assaults on four boys and have sought his extradition from Rome.



WANTED AGAIN

CURRENTLY

He lives in a neighborhood north of the Vatican at his Pallottine order’s Italian regional offices. He recently had a leg amputated and uses a wheelchair. He has no priestly duties, officials said.

HISTORY

He is accused of assaulting young boys while he was working as a lay Catholic teacher in New York and Massachusetts. In 1974, he pleaded guilty in Malone, N.Y., to misdemeanor sexual abuse, reduced from a felony charge, for performing oral sex on a 12-year-old boy and served no jail time. A Pallottine official said the order was aware of the conviction before it ordained him in 1981. But the New York Archdiocese, where Father Bossa has spent most of his ministry, said it only learned of the conviction in summer 2002. The archdiocese promptly stripped him of his ability to minister, a spokesman said. Within days, the Pallottines moved Father Bossa out of his Yonkers parish and shipped him to Rome about two weeks later, said the Rev. Terzo Vinci, a colleague who monitored Father Bossa in the United States. About the same time, several men told the Boston Archdiocese that Father Bossa had abused them in the mid-1970s when they were young boys in the Boston suburb of Bridgewater. They went to the authorities several weeks later. Father Vinci said the order didn’t know about the Boston claims until after Father Bossa was in Rome. The Boston Archdiocese has since made payouts to the accusers.

THE PRIEST SAYS

“My lips are sealed,” he responded to a few questions, then waved away a reporter.

THE PALLOTTINES SAY

Father Vinci said the order transferred Father Bossa to Rome so it could keep him from children. “Rome is beautiful,” Father Vinci said, “but Barry Bossa is not enjoying the neighborhood. He’s just in exile over there, totally cut off from any form of ministry.” Father Bossa has not been accused of abusing anyone while serving as a Pallottine, Father Vinci said.

The Rev. Julian Fox

ROME CASE STUDY #4

He was assigned overseas in Fiji and then Rome after an abuse complaint was made to his religious order in Australia, the Salesians of Don Bosco, in the late 1990s. The accuser was paid a settlement a few years later, documents show.



SETTLEMENT PAID

CURRENTLY

He recently was promoted to the Salesians’ Rome headquarters, where he works in the communications office. He previously served as the order’s regional boss for Australia and the South Pacific.

HISTORY

A teenage boy at a Salesian boarding school near Melbourne, Australia, alleged in the late 1970s that he had been sent to Father Fox’s room for discipline and was sexually assaulted on several occasions, records and interviews show. At the time, a Salesian supervisor accused the boy of lying and the case went no further, his mother said. (Her son is terminally ill and unable to give an interview.) The mother said he didn’t tell anyone else until about 1997, when he confided in a jail counselor while serving time for robbery. The order was subsequently notified, and by 1999 Father Fox was working overseas in a leadership position in Fiji.

THE PRIEST SAYS

He refused to discuss the allegations, saying he was exonerated by a church review. “That’s in the past,” he said. “I’m not keen to be trolling through all of that again.” He also denied that as a regional supervisor in Australia, he ignored abuse complaints about the Rev. Frank Klep — who was convicted a few years later and put on community service. When police began investigating additional allegations against Father Klep, the order sent him to Samoa. He was recently deported, after *The Dallas Morning News* revealed he was a fugitive, and is now awaiting trial in Australia.

THE SALESIANS SAY

The order’s present Australian leader, the Rev. Ian Murdoch, acknowledged the settlement but would not comment further.

The Rev. John Baptist “J.B.” Ormechea

ROME CASE STUDY #5

He was sent to Rome last year, a few months after Chicago prosecutors determined that a legal deadline to charge him in the alleged abuse of several boys had passed. Civil lawsuits are pending against him.



LAWSUITS PENDING

CURRENTLY

He works in the archives department at the Congregation of the Passion religious order’s world headquarters.

HISTORY

In 2002, four men told Chicago investigators that Father Ormechea had kissed and fondled them when they were teenagers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One man’s father had confronted Father Ormechea years ago, and the priest wrote a response “asking for forgiveness,” according to records from the Cook County state’s attorney office. Civil lawsuits also allege that the order knew about accusations in the mid-1980s and let Father Ormechea remain in ministry. Prosecutor Shauna Boliker said she “could very easily see a chargeable case” based on the four men’s testimony, but she could not prosecute because statutes of limitation had expired. She shared this information with the Passionists in a late 2002 letter, a few months before Father Ormechea was moved to Rome from his most recent assignment in the Archdiocese of Louisville, Ky.

THE PRIEST SAYS

Father Ormechea refused to come out to the order headquarters’ reception area to meet with a reporter and declined to discuss the matter over the phone.

THE PASSIONISTS SAY

The Rev. Michael Higgins, Father Ormechea’s American superior, said parishioners expressed concerns in the mid-1980s that the priest was too close to children but did not specifically accuse him of abuse. He said the first complaints came in 1993, before he was in charge, but were withdrawn within weeks. Father Higgins said the four men’s allegations were credible and he moved Father Ormechea to Rome, with approval from headquarters officials, because the order had no U.S. facility away from children. “I want him in a place where it’s very clear we’re taking all the precautions necessary,” he said.