

## *Vatican Expels 2 Cardinals Implicated in Sexual Abuse From Pope's Council*

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ROME — The Vatican announced Wednesday that it had removed two cardinals implicated in sexual abuse cases from a powerful council of advisers picked by Pope Francis to guide him on matters critical to the future of the Catholic Church.

One of the cardinals is George Pell of Australia, who has been facing charges of sexual abuse of minors in legal proceedings that are subject to a gag order in that country, suppressing news coverage until after they have concluded.

The other is Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz of Chile, who has been accused of covering up abuse.

Members of the nine-member council of advisers, known as the C9, who met in Rome this week, had asked the pope to reflect on the “work, structure and composition of the council, taking into account the advanced age of some members.” According to a statement on Wednesday by a Vatican spokesman, Greg Burke, the pope had done just that.

Mr. Burke’s statement said the pope had written in October to both Cardinal Pell and Cardinal Errázuriz, and had concluded by “thanking them for their service” over the last five years.

The pope also dismissed a third Cardinal, Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, the 79-year-old archbishop of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

But Cardinals Pell, 77, and Errázuriz, 85, the other oldest members on the council, had much more than their age going against them.

In June, Francis granted a leave of absence to Cardinal Pell, the highest-ranking Roman Catholic prelate to be formally charged with sexual offenses, so that he could defend himself in Australia.

He has been facing charges of “historical child sexual offenses” in the county court of Victoria.

For years, Cardinal Pell was considered the Vatican’s de facto finance chief, and his allies in Rome attribute the charges against him to church infighting.

But he also has been accused in hearings before Australia’s Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse of mishandling misconduct cases against clergy members while he served as the leader of the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Sydney.

More accusations subsequently surfaced that he had sexually abused minors beginning early in his priesthood.

He has repeatedly denied the accusations, including during an extraordinary news conference in the Vatican last year, when he said, “I’d just like to restate my innocence.”

The proceedings against him in Australia have been extremely secretive because of the Australian gag order, which is designed to prevent the swaying of juries.

Cardinal Errázuriz, the retired archbishop of Santiago, is well over the usual retirement age and, along with the rest of the Chilean bishop’s conference, had tendered his resignation to Francis in May.

Months earlier, during a trip to Chile and Peru, the pope had defended Chilean bishops against accusations of covering up abuse. That remark, and other missteps, led to an outcry among victims of sex abuse and their supporters, who considered the pope tone-deaf on an issue that has jeopardized his legacy.

The pope ultimately changed direction, dispatching his top sex abuse investigator to Chile and convening all the Chilean bishops at a meeting in Rome, where he accused them of mishandling and covering up an extensive child sexual abuse scandal in the country. They offered their resignations en masse.

Francis has accepted the resignation of several of the bishops so far, but not that of Cardinal Errázuriz.

In September, Pope Francis defrocked — or “reduced to the lay state” — the Rev. Fernando Karadima, Chile’s most infamous pedophile priest, seven years after a Vatican investigation relegated the priest to a life of “prayer and penance” for his sex crimes.

And in October, The Associated Press reported that some victims of Father Karadima had filed a criminal complaint against Cardinal Errázuriz, accusing him of perjury and of covering up Father Karadima’s crimes. The cardinal has denied he did so.

One of Father Karadima’s principal accusers, Juan Carlos Cruz, recounted in an interview this year that the Chilean cardinal had inferred that Mr. Cruz, who is gay, might have liked being molested, “so he wasn’t sure I was a victim.”

Emails leaked in 2015 showed that Cardinal Errázuriz had tried to block Mr. Cruz from being appointed to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which the pope had created in March 2014, to offer best practices for dealing with the issue.

Pope Francis is facing the greatest crisis of his pontificate as the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church has exploded once again in countries around the world. In the United States, especially, civil authorities have more aggressively investigated abuse in the church, including widespread abuse in Pennsylvania over decades.

Attorneys general in about 16 states have undertaken their own investigations.

In August, the pope’s former ambassador to the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, accused him of knowing about the inappropriate behavior of a former American cardinal, Theodore McCarrick, who resigned as a cardinal in July and was ordered by the pope to a life of prayer and penance.

Opponents to Pope Francis have seized on the accusations, which have until now been unsubstantiated, to weaken the 81-year-old pontiff.

In October, the pope reluctantly accepted the resignation of the former cardinal’s successor, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who in a report by a Pennsylvania grand jury was frequently cited for poorly handling accusations against priests when he was the bishop of Pittsburgh.

Francis suggested that Cardinal Wuerl could have defended himself (he in fact did) but chose not to for the unity of the church and was thus a model for the future unity of the church.

Abuse victims and their supporters, while dubious of the accusations against the pope by Archbishop Viganò, have nevertheless expressed repeated concern that Pope Francis, for all his attention to the plight of migrants and the poor, has insufficiently safeguarded minors.

They want a concrete, systematic and universal set of norms that enforces zero tolerance and accountability within the church when it comes to sex abuse.

The pope, who has championed a collegial approach to church governance that empowers bishops and takes into account their cultural diversity, has responded to the crisis by scheduling a meeting in February of the presidents of bishops conferences.

In November, the pope surprised American bishops at a meeting of their conference in Baltimore by sending a letter that required them to delay voting on measures to hold bishops accountable for failing to protect children from abusive clergy.

The reason was to avoid interfering with the February meeting, his supporters said, acknowledging that the action only raised expectations that the pope would force the church to take concrete demonstrable actions to address the abuse.

Neither Cardinal Pell nor Cardinal Errázuriz attended the meetings in Rome this week. Among the subjects discussed, according to the Vatican statement, was the February meeting with the presidents of the world's bishops conferences on the theme of the protection of minors.