

**[Next pope must forthrightly confront church sex scandal](#)**  
**[Bishops with a history of sheltering priests who molested children will forever taint John Paul II's legacy as a great leader](#)**

- Jason Berry  
Sunday, April 10, 2005

As the world's cardinals prepare for the Vatican conclave to elect a new pope, they owe it to the faithful to choose a man who will confront the crisis that stains Pope John Paul II's legacy: bishops and religious order superiors with a long history of sheltering priests who molested children.

One contender they should not choose is Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. In 2002, he compared the American media to Stalin and Hitler for reporting the scandal. He also helped a Costa Rican priest accused of child molestation find a safe haven in Honduras, according to a recent Dallas Morning News investigation.

The drenching TV coverage in Rome has downplayed the abuse crisis. But a clergy "sexual underground" -- a term coined by Barry Coldrey, an Australian member of the Irish Christian Brothers -- has rocked the church not just in the United States but in many countries.

In the early 1990s, Australia, Canada and Ireland saw epic scandals in which adults who were raised in large orphanages run by Coldrey's order testified about being sexually brutalized.

In 1994, Brother Coldrey spent six weeks in Rome doing research at his order's archives for an internal report, which found its way to the media. Ten percent of the Irish Christian Brothers members -- a huge percentage -- had sexually assaulted youths, he wrote, and hid "within a sympathetic underworld of other clergy and church workers who are merely breaking their vows by having heterosexual or gay sex with consenting adults."

Pope John Paul II's first extensive briefing on the issue came in March 1993 by bishops and cardinals from several countries, just as the archbishop of Santa Fe, N.M., Robert Sanchez, resigned because of a "60 Minutes" report of his abuse of teenage girls. John Paul called for prayers for Sanchez, expressed concern for those harmed, and scored the media for sensationalism.

As coverage of the abuse crisis spread in Western countries, and then to Argentina and Chile, John Paul's few comments were terse and sorrowful. But he refused the U.S. bishops' request for a streamlined process to defrock pedophiles. His response to the worst crisis of the modern church was passive to a fault. After the Boston scandal exploded, he met with U.S. cardinals in Rome and made his strongest comment, saying

there was "no room" in the priesthood for men who commit such evils. He also called on "the power of conversion" for such priests, obscuring what the church should do about them.

John Paul's role as a catalyst in bringing down the Soviet Union and in reaching out to Jewish communists and Muslims assures his position as one of history's great popes. Yet his papacy is riddled with paradoxes.

A champion of human rights to people under dictatorships, he chose as secretary of state Cardinal Angelo Sodano, a former papal ambassador to Chile who befriended the sadistic dictator Augusto Pinochet and tried to intervene on Pinochet's behalf when he was under house arrest in London, facing indictment by a Spanish court. Several weeks ago, when Sodano met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, he asked her to help defuse a class-action sex-abuse lawsuit against the Vatican by a Kentucky lawyer, something over which she had no control.

Within the Roman Curia, Sodano is a powerful supporter of another man who stands today as perhaps the most notorious priest in Rome: Marcial Maciel Degollado, a Mexican who founded a religious order called the Legion of Christ. In documents sent by a Long Island bishop to the Vatican in 1976 and 1978, Juan Vaca and Felix Alarcon -- who had left the legion but remained priests -- accused Maciel of sexually assaulting about 20 seminarians. Nothing was done.

In 1989, Vaca, on leaving the priesthood, again wrote John Paul with detailed allegations. Again, nothing happened. In 1998, Vaca, Alarcon and six other former members of the Legion of Christ, after giving media interviews, filed a canon-law case against Maciel. John Paul never acknowledged the allegations. He praised Maciel in Mexico City as an "efficacious guide to youth" in 1994 and for his "integral promotion of the person" in a November 2004 ceremony at the Vatican.

"It's inconceivable that the pope had not heard about the allegations," says David Clohessy of St. Louis, director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. "It must be very painful for Maciel's victims to read and hear such glowing comments. ... The pope's treatment of Maciel and Cardinal (Bernard) Law (of Boston) -- giving him a basilica in Rome -- rubs salt into deep wounds."

In a split at the highest levels of the Vatican, as Sodano heaped praise on Maciel, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the chief theologian, reopened the dormant canonical investigation just before John Paul died.

Last year, the reform group Voice of the Faithful, which began in Boston and has several chapters in California, among other states, submitted a petition to the Vatican with 25,000 signatures, asking Pope John Paul II to meet with a group of abuse survivors.

"We received no response whatsoever," said James Post, president of the group. "We want the new pope to meet with an international delegation. In the litany of major

problems facing the new pope, the abuse crisis is global and the blackest blemish on the moral authority of the church."

*Jason Berry's books include "Vows of Silence: The Abuse of Power in the Papacy of John Paul II" and "Lead Us Not Into Temptation."*