NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Macielís Son to Sue Legionaries: Details abuse, Tells NCR 'Dad promised $6 million'

Jason Berry | Jun. 20, 2010

Born in Mexico in 1980, Raul Gonzalez is a sturdy six-foot-one, with dark, close-cropped hair. He has a fair command of English, but faltered occasionally, searching for words, and at one point broke down and wept in describing the sexual abuse he endured, in childhood and adolescence, by his father, the late Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of an international religious order, the Legionaries of Christ.

Raul Gonzalez gave his account in a May 7 interview with *NCR*. A lawsuit scheduled to be filed today in Connecticut against the Legion of Christ alleges that the order facilitated Maciel's abuse of his son, adding a new chapter in a saga of deception and depravity, two years after the death of Maciel, who for decades wielded enormous influence in Vatican circles as a favorite of the late Pope John Paul II.

BREAKING NEWS: Macielsuit filed [1]in New Haven, Conn. June 21.

The Legion of Christ and its supporters adulated the founder, Maciel, as ?*Nuestro Padre*? (Our Father) and vilified the ex-Legionaries he sexually assaulted after they made their accusations public. Now, in an ironic twist, the Legion has begun to seek some manner of reconciliation with his victims. The current head of the order, Fr. Alvaro Corcuera, 52, traveled from Rome to New York for a May 13 four-hour meeting, trying to make amends with Juan Vaca, 73, one of the founder's oldest victims, who as a young priest several times beseeched the Vatican to oust Maciel. A Legion spokesman confirmed that the director general met with Vaca but said Corcuera would not comment further until the Vatican names a new commissioner to oversee the Legionaries.

Pope Benedict XVI, who in 2006 banished Maciel from active ministry to "a life of prayer and penitence," recently decided to install a commissioner over the Legion of Christ at their headquarters in Rome, after a year-long investigation by a panel of bishops. In May, the Vatican denounced Maciel for a ?life devoid of scruples and authentic religious meaning.?

The lawsuit, seeking unspecified financial damages from the Legion and Maciel?s legal estate, will be filed in New Haven, because the Legion has its national headquarters in Connecticut, and because Maciel allegedly abused Gonzalez in several American states. The suit was prepared by St. Paul, Minn, attorney Jeff Anderson, who has represented hundreds of clergy sex abuse victims.

This reporter videotaped an interview with Gonzalez May 7 in Stillwater, Minn the day after Gonzalez met with his attorney. Anderson was not present for the interview.

(A Brian Ross report scheduled for this evening's ABC Nightline will include interview excerpts.)

Gonzalez was previously interviewed March 3 on MSV Radio in Mexico City along with his mother, Blanca Lara Gutierrez, and older half-brother Omar.

A recurrent theme in the May 7 interview was that Gonzalez feared his father and the Legionaries of Christ, and that he had concern for the safety of his brother, Omar, 33, who was also allegedly abused many times by Maciel. Omar lives in Mexico and is aware of the suit, Anderson said.

Raul was Maciel's natural son with Blanca Lara Gutierrez. She was 22 and Maciel 60 when Raul was born. Maciel provided her a home and support in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Omar, her son from a previous relationship was three years old when Raul was born. The father they knew as Raul Rivas ?visited us maybe every four months,? said Raul.

On those visits, he said, his father always stayed in a hotel.

"I have memories," he continued. "Like, ?my dad is coming.? I was always at the front of my house waiting for his car to arrive. ... My dad told my mom that he was a CIA agent." Later, said Gonzalez, "Señor Raul," as neighbors called Maciel, told Blanca that he worked as a detective for Shell oil. "Señor Raul" and Blanca had another son, Christian, in 1993.

The Gonzalez Lara family lived comfortably on money Señor Raul sent; none of them, said Gonzalez, knew he was a priest until 1997 news reports of the ex-seminarians' charges. At that point, Gonzalez insisted that his mother not let Christian be alone with the father.

Maciel never appeared in family photographs, though he often took pictures, the son said.

In 1987, when Raul Gonzalez was 7, he traveled alone for the first time with his father, to Colombia. He said he resisted a single attempt Maciel made to have sex with him. "My human instinct tell me, you can't. And I moved and he stopped. He didn't force me."

He was about 9 when his father sent word to Blanca for Raul to meet him in Rome. "My mom trusted him because he was my dad," he said. "Well, okay, go with your dad -- go on a trip, no problem."

He recalls his father meeting him at the airport in Rome with a blue Mercedes, taking him to an apartment where "my dad told me these are your aunts and this is your sister." This was Normita, a little over a year old at the time, and her mother Norma Hilda Banos, Maciel's second common-law wife, whom he had met in Acapulco several years before, according to the publication *El Mundo* in Madrid. Maciel set up his partial, extended family for a month in Rome. A woman whose name Gonzalez can't remember assisted "Aunt Norma" with little Normita.

We went to the Vatican," he recalls. "We were in a small chapel and Pope John Paul II was offering Mass there."

Maciel arranged for Legion supporters to attend private Masses in the Apostolic Palace by virtue of financial gifts he and the Legion steered to then-Msgr Stanislaw Dziwisz, John Paul II's close assistant. (See NCR two-part report, April 16th issue [2]and April 30th issue [3], 2010.) He has since become a cardinal in Cracow.

Gonzalez does not recall receiving communion from the pope. He says that John Paul shook hands with the visitors. He does not recall where his father was during the Mass. "I was with Norma, the mom, and my little sister, Normita," he says. "I kissed [John Paul's] ring."

But the person who took the photograph of young Raul and Normita, holding hands with a Swiss Guard, was almost certainly Maciel. Raul retains possession of the photos. The man wanting to leave no visible trace with his Cuernavaca family took photos that mattered to him personally.

Gonzalez did not question Norma's relationship with his father; in the naiveté of a complex childhood he

accepted things as they were.

The "family" traveled *tout ensemble* to Sorrento, Capri and Naples on a sunny holiday. In Rome, he said, "during the days, [Maciel] left and then he came home at night," presumably after tending to his duties at the Legion complex.

The boy returned to Mexico after a month. Over the years his father would call long distance and speak to the boys. "He always told us, 'Don't forget to go to Mass'...'Be good boys.' And to be honest, I appreciate those advices...[like] 'Don't lie.' That's the good thing he left us."

Not long after Raul's 10th birthday Maciel arranged for him to live with a family in Dublin, Ireland, attend private school and learn English. This was in 1990 when, he said, the severe suffering began.

Vaca?s vindication

If John Paul had acted on the allegations against Maciel that Juan Vaca detailed to the pope in a 1989 letter, in a request for dispensation from his vows as a priest, Maciel's career would have been derailed, cutting his access to Legion funds, and perhaps preventing Gonzalez from going to Ireland.

Vaca entered the Legion in Mexico in 1947, at age 10. Repeatedly abused by Maciel in Spain from age 12 through adolescence in Rome, the young priest went to Orange, Conn., as the Legion's U.S. director. In 1976, when Vaca left the Legion, joining the diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y., he sent a blistering 12-page letter to Maciel, naming 20 other victims. With support of Bishop John R. McGann, he sent the letter to the Vatican in a formal protest, which achieved nothing. With McGann's support he petitioned the Vatican to punish Maciel again, sent via diplomatic pouch from the Vatican Embassy, without action. His final attempt in 1989, again through Vatican channels, included an impassioned cover letter to John Paul specifying what Maciel did. In 1993 Vaca received the dispensation; the allegations against Maciel were ignored until another ex-Legionary, Jose Barba, filed the canon law case in 1998.

Corcuera, the current Legion director-general, 52, comes from an upper-middle class Mexico City family. Upon being contacted by him, Vaca arranged to meet at Mercy College in midtown Manhattan where he is an adjunct professor of psychology and sociology. They met alone in a conference room, Vaca told *NCR*. "He embraced me in a manly, Mexican way and was about to kneel down in asking my forgiveness, but I said no, and had him sit at the head of the table, and I to his immediate right.

"He was relaxed, and kind. After a while, I called him Alvarito" ? the way of changing a name into a term of endearment among Mexicans. Vaca, married for many years, said he assumed a paternal role, asking the younger priest about his background. Corcuera recalled his youth in a Legion school, inspired by Maciel, joining the order in Mexico, on to seminary in Connecticut, where he had had Vaca as a superior. (The campus is now up for sale.) Vaca did not remember Corcuera, telling him he had worked with many seminarians before leaving for the Rockville Centre diocese. "Alvaro said, 'You were nice to me.' He went on about how, when he became director-general in 2004, the election came as a surprise for him. I said: 'Well, Maciel trained you for the job??

Vaca said Corcuera insisted he was elected at an open chapter, not hand-picked by Maciel. When Maciel stepped down in 2004 from the post he had held for decades, Cardinal Ratzinger had just ordered an investigation based on the 1998 case, which had hung in abeyance under pressure from then-Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who had received financial gifts from the Legion [NCR April 16 issue and April 30 issue, 2010.]

Said Vaca, "I asked point-blank if Corcuera knew about Maciel's abuses. He said no. I said, 'You knew he sent

money to the ladies,' meaning the mother in Madrid, Norma, and her daughter. He said, 'I learned after 2004.' He didn't give a specific date on when he learned it, and I didn't press him."

After letting Corcuera talk for an hour or so, Vaca recounted how Maciel had abused him and other seminarians decades ago, and how, he claimed, he pulled Maciel, passed out on morphine, from drowning in a hotel bathtub in Tetuan, Morocco, in 1957, a year before Corcuera was born. "He felt ashamed,? said Vaca of Corcuera. ?He hung his head, whispering 'I do believe you.' He put his face in his hands."

Corcuera told Vaca that Legionaries had recently begun circulating his 1976 letter denouncing Maciel, naming the 20 other seminary victims. If that is true, it marks a striking shift from last summer, when two Legion priests in Rome told this writer that Legion seminarians were being taught about Maciel's heroic life, even after news of the daughter, Norma.

"I accept your apologies," Vaca says he told Corcuera, "but this is not a solution." He said the Legion should provide "honest and fair compensation for all the harm and damages" to him and the other victims.

Corcuera replied that the Legion in Rome had formed a committee to explore the issue. He asked what he thought would be fair compensation, says Vaca. Vaca told Corcuera to look at what American dioceses had paid in victim settlements. "I said, 'The Legion had for years been slandering me. Think about that. Come up with an amount. I'm not going to tell you how much.'"

The Legionaries of Christ website [4] began posting defenses of Maciel -- and criticism of the accusers -- after the *Hartford Courant* published a report critical of the Legion in 1997. Legionary Father Owen Kearns, publisher of the Legion-owned *National Catholic Register*, denounced the victims for "a coordinated conspiracy to smear Father Maciel." At the time he called Vaca "a proud, status-conscious man angered and disappointed at his professional failures," who had wanted "greater power in the Legion." Vaca, however, had resigned the Legion in his 1976 letter to Maciel.

The website came down in 2006 after the Vatican punished Maciel.

Kearns recently issued a general apology to Gerald Renner and this writer for his comments following the *Hartford Courant* report, but he did not identify victims by name.

With a master's degree in behavioral science from Long Island University, Vaca was a counselor for disabled students at York College in the City University of New York, on the fourth year of a 5-year tenure track position, when he was terminated in 1999. "I do believe that because of the Legion attack on my credibility and character, they did not renew my contract," he told *NCR*. His superior cited budget cuts for the job loss, explains Vaca. But he points to a Kearns statement that he never held the position of national director of the Legion, which was false and hurt him professionally, he says. He halted his doctoral studies for financial reasons, and at age 62 had to restart his academic career.

Corcuera and Vaca parted on cordial terms, he says, with the Legionary promising to work on the compensation issue. At Corcuera's request, Vaca provided names and contact information for men in Mexico whom, he said, Maciel had also abused.

Professor Jose Barba of Mexico City, who filed the 1998 canonical case, told *NCR* that Corcuera had made no attempt to reach him. Barba added: "I have made my views on him public and he knows I do not believe or trust him."

Jim Fair, the Legion spokesman, said that Corcuera has met privately with several victims in Mexico, "and leaves it to them to speak if they wish."

Memories of years of abuse

By Gonzalez's account, he was 10 when Maciel sexually abused him and Omar on a trip to Madrid, in 1989, and photographed them in the process. "My dad told me his uncle, this guy, used to masturbate him, and I have to masturbate him. ... Why do you say that to a kid?"

He was nearing eleven when Maciel arranged for Gonzalez to live in Dublin with an Irish family, attend private school and learn English. When the call came to join his father for a weekend in London, he was homesick for his mother. "I started crying. And I said, 'I want to see you, you know.""

In London, "I saw my dad, and he took me for a walk."

At this point in the interview he began sobbing.

"I knew this was going to happen," he said, of his emotions.

He described a stroll in London as Maciel bought magazines, took him back to the hotel and showed him "hard-core pornography" to arouse and then abuse him.

After two years study in Dublin he returned to his home in Mexico.

Other vacations with his father often included Omar.

"When we were on holidays, one abuse converted to another abuse," he continued. "All the days that we stayed with my dad, on every trip, there were abuses." He said Maciel hired young prostitutes when they were on a beach trip to Colombia; he also, according to Gonzalez, had various sexual encounters with his sons in Florida and New York. The grooming rituals he described -- of Maciel claiming his leg was in pain, asking the boys for a comforting touch, then a massage, then more -- hauntingly echo the accounts of Vaca and the early seminary victims, decades before Raul's birth, teenage boys standing in Legion infirmaries as Maciel rubbed his abdomen in pain, asking them to massage him, guiding them into genital contact, telling many of the boys he had permission from Pope Pius XII for sexual relief because of his pain.

Although Raul spoke of loving his father, he says, "I was afraid all my life. ... Because my dad told me where he worked there were people really dangerous."

In 1997, as the Mexican media picked up on the *Courant* reporting of Maciel, a lowbrow magazine, *Contenido*, put Maciel on the cover with a digest of the allegations. On seeing that, Gonzalez called his father. "It's not me," Maciel said initially. But his father told him to buy up the magazines. "He sent a guy with this envelope, like $2000," which Gonzalez used to buy up copies. "But we never confront him. We were in shock. That's when we read that the congregation was...powerful." The family feared that "if we make a scandal, they are going to disappear us."

Learning Maciel's identity he likened to "whoom...a brain explosion."

With Blanca financially dependent on Maciel, the family refused to
confront him about being a priest. "Nine years of abuses and I was in shock," said Gonzalez. "I was angry. I was sad. I have a lot of feelings. ... The abuses of my brother, like I said, were really strong."

He described his brother's sexual abuse in graphic detail.

In 1998, Raul Gonzalez sank into a depression so deep that he could no longer sleep. "Your daddy always says, 'Go to Mass. Don't smoke. Don't drink.' ... So then you see that he's a priest."

Maciel arranged for psychiatric treatment in Madrid, yet in a highly manipulative way, according to the son. Gonzalez stayed the several months with his half-sister, Normita, and "Aunt Norma." Being reunited with "family," and pleasant memories of Rome, apparently reinforced his silence as an incest victim. In the sessions with the psychiatrist he says he was unable to reveal what father/Father had done, instead expressing fears that he was gay. The psychiatrist, he says, assured him: "You are not homosexual. This will pass." He prescribed anti-depressant medications which Gonzalez says he took over the several years, with care from a doctor on return to Mexico, until he became too drugged out.

Later, he traveled to Barcelona with Maciel, finally resisting the sexual advances. At that point, he said, Maciel lost sexual interest in him.

The last time Gonzalez saw his father was in 2000. They communicated by phone intermittently. In 2003 Maciel told him he had funds for him in a Swiss bank. "He always told me that his will is to give us $6 million...the trustee was going to be in Switzerland."

In 2004, when the Vatican investigation, stalled for years under John Paul and Cardinal Sodano, began under Ratzinger's order, the family in Cuernavaca heard from Maciel less and less. Although he paid for Gonzalez?s university studies in Puebla, Mexico, the household support ebbed. According to Gonzalez, Maciel had secured several small pieces of commercial property to provide Blanca some income.

They learned of his father's death in 2008 on TV news in their home. He and Omar "started crying. It is normal. It is our dad...That moment you put the abuses on standby and you focus now on the death of your dad. Why did you do it? Okay, I couldn't tell you in person. But I know that you can hear me. And tell me, why you did that, the abuses?"

After the news broke in 2009 of Normita's existence, and reports from Madrid describing the other family's financial security, the family in Mexico wanted compensation from Maciel's estate.

Gonzalez said he wrote the Legion in 2003 seeking confirmation of the trust account, but received no reply. Maciel, he continued, told him "that Señor Alvaro Corcuera or Señor Marcelino de Andreas were going to look after us after his death." He said that he called the Legion headquarters in Mexico City, leaving messages for both men, to no avail.

Meeting with Investigator

Last fall, Gonzalez said, he and his family had two meetings with Bishop Ricardo Watty, the Vatican-appointed visitator, or investigator, of the Legionaries in Mexico. He and Omar "gave to Ricardo Watty letters to Pope Ratzinger." He says they also asked to meet with Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, to no avail. In their first meeting with Watty, he says, they asked their mother to leave the room while the two brothers told the bishop how Maciel abused them. Watty "was okay, a good person," he continues. "He showed that he really felt sorry about what happened." Although they received no response from the pope, he says, Watty arranged for him to meet with Legionary Father Carlos Skertchly, an official at the order's Anahuac University in Mexico City. A long, circuitous series of meetings ensued, in which Gonzalez says he provided documents proving Maciel's relationship and intent of financial support.

On March 3, attorney Jose Bonilla in Mexico City told *NCR* that a trust fund Maciel supposedly established for the family turned up empty. The Legion gave Raul a copy of a trust they told him was taken away from

Normita, the daughter, in Spain, according to Bonilla.

The day after the MSV interview, the Legion released a statement on Skertchly's meetings with Gonzalez, saying that the Legion rebuffed his demand for $26 million in which he had reputedly promised silence in return. Bonilla withdrew as legal counsel, citing professional ethics over a client bargaining silence for money. In the May 7 interview, Gonzalez faulted Bonilla for giving him poor advice in the Legion negotiation. The financial demand he made with Skertchly, he said, was for the $6 million Maciel said was in the trust in Switzerland, and $10 million each for himself and Omar as incest victims.

If Watty's rationale for putting Raul Gonzalez in direct dialogue with the Legion was to achieve reconciliation for a victim, the move not only backfired by showed the bishop being duped himself. The Mexican media coverage on Skertchly's letter spun favorably for the Legion, casting Raul Gonzalez as a spoiler, trying to squeeze big bucks out of a religious order that is a national institution in that country. No American lawyer would let a client negotiate for himself, even with a bishop setting things up.

In the following excerpt from the May 7 interview, which has been edited slightly, Gonzalez seemed genuinely taken aback by the first question on his dealing with the Legion.

So you asked him for $26 million. That's a lot of money.

?You think so for abuse?"

I think a lot of people would.

?You can cry, the guys of the church can cry. Like Pope Benedict cried when he went to Malta. Tears dry. They dry. Your heart and your soul is affected all your life...

?The pain you feel. The rage you have inside your soul,? Gonzalez continued. ?[Maciel] stole my soul. I'm the soul that pushes on my brother. I want to help him. Even if I die, I want to help my brother first.

?Pope Benedict in 2006 moved my father, my daddy, or Marcial Maciel to rest. To pray. Why didn't he bring him to jail?

?And Benedict, he tries to start to make it clean. He said, months ago, that he's going to start looking out for victims. Okay. Maybe it's not his job specifically -- that's the job of the Legion. But the pope has to tell those guys to start doing something,? Gonzalez said.

?Six million dollars was my inheritance that my dad promised us,? he said. ?And I will ask a question. If I offer you ten million dollars, would you let yourself be raped for nine years??

Jason Berry is an author and producer of a film documentary on Maciel, "Vows of Silence." The Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute supported research for this report.t

Support independent Catholic journalism.

Support independent Catholic journ

Image not found http://ncronline.org/files/images/donate_ncr.gif

June 21-25 NCR Webathon

Source URL (retrieved on *07/10/2014 - 11:11*): http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/maciel-s-son-sue-legionaries-details-abuse-tells-ncr-dad-promised-6-million

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/lawsuit-filed-against-legionaries-christ
[2] http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/money-paved-way-maciels-influence-vatican
[3] http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/how-fr-maciel-built-his-empire
[4] http://www.legionariesofchrist.org/eng/index.phtml?height=800&width=1280&sw=1&sw2=

[5]
http://openx.ncronline.org/www/delivery/ck.php?oaparams=2__bannerid=30__zoneid=56__cb=a2fbd2d8b1__oadest=ht