

The Legion of Christ

Written by Rebecca Anne Griffin

“The saga of the Legion of Christ represents one of the most egregious examples of how the Vatican ignored decades of reports about sexually abusive priests as church leaders put the interests of the institution above those of the victims.”

-Nicole Winfield, Associated Press (Cape Cod Times)

From my perspective, there are a few reasons why pivoting to and discussing this organization has value. First and perhaps foremost being that it serves as a counterbalance to the notion that the Catholic personal prelature of Opus Dei is original, unique, or special in any facet of its structure and charism. And I am including the horrific abuses of conscience and spirituality that Opus Dei has repeatedly been accused of under that umbrella. I have seen people be dismissive of the ‘cult of personality’ that surrounds Opus Dei’s founder, Josemaria Escriva because of the fact that the organization is ostensibly divinely inspired, placing it above reproach or error. That idea begins to fall apart pretty rapidly in the cold light of reality. I think that we, myself, the brave individuals who have courageously shared what they endured while in Opus Dei’s clutches, as well as the few mainstream media sources who can still be bothered to engage in real journalism have collectively put a sizeable dent in Opus Dei’s shiny ego. Yet even so, it is impossible to deny that the organization still maintains an aura of untouchability and uniqueness.

I am here today to provide additional context and perspective of Opus Dei through the examination of another scandal-rife Catholic organization, the Legionaries of Christ and the Regnum Christi Federation. Because the sad truth is that there is nothing ‘special’ about Opus Dei, and unfortunately, that extends even to the organization’s alleged crimes, scandals, failures, and shortcomings. And for anyone who feels the need to comment on my continued coverage of Opus Dei, I would like to remind them that as of recording this episode today (insert date/time), Opus Dei has yet to substantially and honestly engage with, acknowledge, and seek justice for the large and growing number of former members who have spoken out in the press, alleging grooming, labor trafficking, and spiritual abuse. A PR statement with an email address does not, in my view, constitute substantial and sincere appreciation for the lived realities of the victim/survivors and I refuse to pretend otherwise. And as we will learn later in this episode, Opus Dei is not the only or first Catholic organization to resort to straw manning, deflection, and deceit in order to protect its image.

The conversation about the LoC is extremely lengthy and involved. I did my best to include everything that I felt could be relevant in my outline, but everything we will discuss today is really just the tip of the iceberg. It’s a situation that is continuing to evolve, even to present day, as the full reality of the lengths the LoC and the Roman Catholic Church went to in order to protect its asset, the organization’s founder are still being revealed. If what I go over today piques your interest, I encourage you to use my references as a launch-point for your own deep dive. In light of everything that I have learned about Opus Dei and the LoC/RC, it seems pretty evident that there is a metastasized cancer lurking beneath the Church’s exterior, and that it is not the simple matter of “a few bad apples”.... But I may be getting ahead of myself in

saying that. Today, we will take a very close look at the organization, the LOC/RC, it's infamous founder, the conditions and environment which permitted and protected his crimes and indiscretions, and the shenanigans that the organization continues to be embroiled in after it's founder's passing. Welcome to The Deep Dive Project.

[Intro]

Before we begin, this is just a quick reminder that this is a totally independent venture and your support and feedback are greatly appreciated. I got the heads-up after my last upload that something funky was going on with my audio, and I appreciate that. Hopefully, that issue has been resolved. If you enjoy this video or find it transformational or educational in any way, please consider giving it a thumbs up and subscribing. It helps my channel out tremendously. Additionally, because of the fact that the issues I discuss are not always "monetization friendly", if you would like to support my work monetarily, you can buy me a coffee for five dollars, and the link for that is in the description of this video. You do not have to, so please do not feel any pressure. Simply watching my videos and sharing your thoughts helps so much. But for those of you who have helped my caffeine-fueled endeavor, thank you. It means so much.

So that being said, let's get into the topic of conversation today. Before we dig into the founder of the LoC, I wanted to give a quick overview of what the LoC and Regnum Christi are, for those who may be unfamiliar. I have done my best to make sure that I am pronouncing the names of the people and places discussed correctly, but I apologize in advance if I don't nail it every single time. I am an American heathen and although I am trying to learn Spanish, English is the only language I am fluent in and sometimes those proper nouns are just too advanced for my clumsy American tongue. Thank you in advance for the grace and understanding.

1. What is the Legion of Christ/ Regnum Christi?

a. The Legionaries of Christ

- i. The Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ, also referred to as the Legion of Christ, or just the Legion is a congregation of papal right composed of priests, deacons, and brothers in formation for the priesthood. It was founded on January 3rd, 1941, by a Catholic priest named Marcial Maciel.
- ii. According to their own website, they are, "Driven by the desire of Jesus' heart to set the world ablaze, the religious priests of the Legionaries of Christ support each other and work in communion with other Regnum Christi members in their mission to form apostles, people who let the love of Christ the King transform their hearts, their families and their world."
- iii. The Legionaries of Christ are a Roman Catholic religious congregation of priests and seminarians, and part of the Regnum Christi Federation. They live in communities, and make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.
- iv. According to their site, "the formation of a Legionary is a deep and transformative process that spans an average of 14 years, leading up to his priestly ordination. He is formed to be both contemplative and apostolic. Legionaries go out as missionaries in today's world. With great charity,

joy and zeal, they invite people into the adventure of living for Christ and transforming the culture around them. Each year they impact thousands of lives through youth work, education, parishes, missions, the sacraments, and spiritual direction.”

- v. In the past, it was described as a ‘conservative’ religious institute whose ability to attract large numbers of “young Catholics to religious vocations” and large financial donations made it a “favorite” of the Vatican, and one whose focus has traditionally been on “evangelizing society’s leaders...the wealthy and powerful”, in hopes that it would gain momentum as a beneficial impact on society.
 - vi. The organization began in Mexico, where its largest base remains. Houses of formation were established in Spain and Italy within its first decade, with chapters expanding into Ireland, the United States, France, and Central Europe over the ensuing decades.
 - vii. Legionaries have been described as easy to spot due to their militaristic haircuts, dress, and behavior. Legion culture has been described as ‘insular’ and ‘cult-like’.
 - viii. The order is engaged in a number of apostolates, including education, pastoral guidance, catechesis, evangelization and mission work, works of charity and mercy, and spiritual attention to Regnum Christi members.
 - 1. In 2021, three of the order’s four U.S. schools were named in the list of top 50 Catholic high schools developed by the Cardinal Newman Society (which essentially means that the society gave these schools it’s stamp of approval. The Cardinal Newman Society maintains lists of approved schools and universities).
- b. The Regnum Christi Federation, or just Regnum Christi was founded on January 3rd, 1959. According to their website it is “a spiritual family with four vocations and one mission: to make Christ’s kingdom present in today’s world.” It is composed of lay Catholics (regular folks), as well as the religious congregation of the Legionaries of Christ, the Societies of Apostolic Life of the Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi, and the Lay Consecrated Men of Regnum Christi. In addition to these adult membership categories, R.C. also has the Encounters, Convictions, Your Decisions category, or ECyD, which is the Regnum Christi Charism lived by children. According to the Regnum Christi Wikipedia page, ECyD formation is “intended to bring children to know, accept, and master themselves through discovering in Christ the full meaning of their lives.” ECyD children receive the same type of “accompaniment” as full-fledged, card-carrying, Regnum Christi adults. From my perspective, it seems like something like this could be very easily abused... but we will get into that later in the episode.
- i. Their motto is, “Christ our King, Thy Kingdom Come!”
 - 1. The Society of Apostolic Life “Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi” is an international society of pontifical right, approved by

the Holy See and part of the Regnum Christi Federation. “Called to a profound intimacy with Christ, and impelled by his love, we respond with an exclusive and total dedication to him through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience lived in multicultural communities.”

- a. Interested women enter into what is called personal accompaniment. After that, they attend a summer discernment course. If, at the conclusion of that, they decide that they are still interested in becoming a consecrated woman, they move onto the candidacy stage and take the first round of temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which will last for three years. Those vows are repeated once more and then the women move on to studying academics and seeking experiences living in apostolic community. After the last three years are up, with the intention that a woman would have matured and could fully discern whether or not she wanted to continue, she could ask to make her final vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the Society of Apostolic Life of the Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi. It is a very lengthy discernment process which should work very well at helping someone decide whether or not it is a lifestyle they should fully commit to.
2. The Lay Consecrated Men of Regnum Christi profess the same mission as the Consecrated women of Regnum Christi, which they say is to the make present Christ’s Kingdom in the hearts of people and in society.
 - a. They aim to accomplish this with a five-pronged approach which includes prophetic testimony, evangelization of temporal realities, availability, charity, and professional competence and joy, promotion of fraternal communion, and prayer, work, and offering.
 - b. The commitment process appears to follow the exact same path as the consecrated women.

2. Who was Marcial Maciel?

- a. Marcial Maciel Degollado was born on March 10, 1920, in Cotija, Michoacan, Mexico, the youngest boy of nine children, in a family with strong connections to the Mexican Catholic Church. This meant that many of Maciel’s relatives were priests. Four of his uncles were bishops.
- b. He had a troubled youth, riddled with physical abuse at the hands of his older brothers and verbal abuse from his father. He was sent to work in the sugar fields

to 'toughen up'. Many years later, he would tell one of his victims that the mule drivers had sexually abused him.

- i. While none of this excuses his future behavior, I do have a lot of sympathy and compassion for children who are forced to grow up in abusive, dysfunctional, and harmful environments. It makes me wonder who Maciel might have become, if he had been raised in a nurturing, caring environment and had been protected, rather than exploited. While not all children who are abused will grow up to become abusers themselves, research has shown that there is a correlation there. Food for thought.
- c. Maciel was expelled from two seminaries for unclear reasons. He was ordained to the priesthood only after one of his bishop uncles ordained him after private studies on November 26th, 1944.... It's almost like he shouldn't have ever been a priest. It must have been quite the ordeal, as the ceremony was filmed and the footage was used as propaganda for marketing years later.
- d. In 1941, Maciel founded his religious order, the Legion of Christ, with the support of Francisco Arias, the Bishop of Cuernavaca. He went on to found the lay arm, Regnum Christi, in 1959. His main, stated purpose in doing so was to form and motivate enterprising lay members of the Catholic Church to take an active role in the Church's mission on Earth. A particular focus of this mission was on the members of Regnum Christi and their spiritual formation.
 - i. Members were compelled to take private vows, never to speak ill of Maciel or any superior, and to report anyone who did, which earned them the accusation of being a "cult of personality".
 - ii. This behavior became so well-known that the order was accused of imposing a 'fourth vow' (in addition to the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience), which demanded "unconditional and uncomplaining acceptance of what Maciel said, "by pushing away and casting doubt upon all those who questioned his behaviour", making him unassailable.
 - iii. One interesting tidbit is that members of Regnum Christi would 'study' Maciel's letters as part of their "spiritual formation" ... sound familiar?
- e. Maciel was a known supporter and fan of totalitarian leaders like Franco and Hitler, admiring the absolute obedience that these leaders' followers had for them (i.e., the Hitler youth).
- f. In the years before his exposure as a predator, he had a good reputation in the Vatican, and was active in organizations such as the Interdicastrial Commission for a Just Distribution of Clergy, the IV General Conference of Latin American Bishops, and the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and the World, which is a helluva a title....
- g. He was also a familiar of JP II, with the then-pope allegedly admiring Maciel for his strict adherence to the magisterium and his ability to gain vocations to the Legion of Christ. It is also worth noting that the Legion gave the Vatican quite a bit of money over the years. The relationship was clearly mutually beneficial.

- i. An article published in the Independent stated that “senior figures in the church, who were often the recipients of the Legion’s financial largesse, rejoiced in his genius for fundraising and fortune building.”
 - ii. Maciel was also connected to high-profile individuals in Mexico and the United States, including former Mexican president Miguel Aleman, uber-wealthy Carlos Slim, who owns a sizeable stake in The New York Times, the Garza-Sada billionaire family, Spanish singer and celebrity Placido Domingo, and American actor Mel Gibson, as well as political figures such as Jeb Bush, Rick Santorum, and Thomas Monaghan of Domino’s Pizza (who went on to found Ave Maria University and the town where it resides, Ave Maria, Florida and who popped up in the last episode about Project2025, which is interesting).
- h. But then, in 1976, the Vatican received a dossier from Bishop John Raymond McGann, which included a 12-page, single-spaced letter addressed to Maciel. In it, Juan Vaca, a former seminarian student of Maciel, stated the priest molested him from the age of 12 to 24, along with an alleged 20 other victims. The dossier went ignored by the Vatican.
- i. In 1989, Vaca attempted to break some kind of ground with the Vatican once more, sending another long, detailed letter. This time, the Vatican responded. But on the subject of repercussions for Maciel, they were silent.
- j. On February 23, 1997, a report in the Hartford Courant exposed Maciel as a virulent, abusive predator by nine self-proclaimed victims of Maciel’s proclivities. The victims alleged they had been abused as youths and young men by Maciel, while studying under him in Spain and Rome in the 1940s and 1950s. This group included respectable academics and former priests who went on to lodge formal charges with the Vatican.
 - i. A commentary piece written by Steve Skojec and published on OnePeter5 gives fascinating insight into what life for Legion members was like during this time – and tellingly, what the Legion’s response to the scandal was.
 - 1. “In early December of 1996 – just weeks before I made my decision to leave – every full-time member of the apostolate in the United States was flown to the Legionary HQ in Cheshire, Connecticut on short notice (and at what must have been phenomenal expense) in the hopes that the crisis could be averted. We had just returned from Cheshire, where we had been for Thanksgiving, and we were told to pack our bags for a flight in the morning. No further explanation given. The briefings on the matter at hand – the expected forthcoming revelations of sex abuse accusations against Fr. Maciel in the Hartford Courant – appeared to have been segregated on need-to-know levels. The priests got one briefing, seminarians in houses of apostolate got another, and so on, down the line. When it came to the classroom full of

co-workers sitting there, wondering why we had been dragged there to wait for some unknown purpose, we were ultimately told very little at all. “Some accusations are coming out in the media against Fr. Maciel. They’re not true. Don’t even read them. If anyone asks, tell them it’s all false.”

- ii. Shockingly, they were told the following year that the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith would not be moving towards a prosecution.
- k. In retaliation, the Legion set up a website accusing the nine victims of fomenting a “conspiracy” against Maciel. People flocked to defend Maciel, including William Donohue of the Catholic League, who said the men’s claims were “balderdash”, and Father Richard John Neuhaus of “First Things” magazine, who stated that the charges were false with “a moral certainty”. JP II continued to sing praises of Maciel, calling him “an efficacious guide to youth” and applauding his ‘gift’ for attracting young men to the depleted ranks of the priesthood.
- l. In 2005, shortly after JP II passed, Ratzinger re-opened the investigation and the Vatican requested that Maciel withdraw from active ministry. Perhaps now that Maciel’s gatekeeper had passed away, Ratzinger was able to act unilaterally and address the situation appropriately?
 - i. Maciel stepped down the following year.
 - ii. In May 2006, Ratzinger, now pope disciplined Maciel, ordering him to live “a reserved life of penitence and prayer, relinquishing any form of public ministry” and a press communique was published to that effect. However, it is interesting to note that a 2006 article published in El Pais revealed that Rome had investigated Maciel for suspected pedophilia between 1956 and 1959. Keep that in mind, because it will come up again.
 1. While Maciel was suspended from his position as superior general of the Legion and expelled from Rome, the investigation netted no results and Maciel soon resumed business as usual, but this time with more power.
 2. That situation continues to haunt the Vatican even to this day, with a recent AP article discussing the details of newly opened archives from the Pius XII archives which further illustrate the lengths some went to in order to protect Maciel and, more importantly, the money and young men he was ushering into the Catholic Church via his religious order.
 - a. AP notes that “all versions of the Oct. 1, 1956 memo make it clear that Maciel had a great protector in the Vatican in the form of Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo, the No. 2 in the powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Other documents say the Congregation for Religious, “couldn’t proceed further against F. Maciel because of recommendations and interventions by high-ranking personalities.”

- iii. A formal trial was never held and Maciel was never defrocked.
 - iv. Maciel moved to a house that he shared with other priests in Jacksonville, FL, where he died on January 30th, 2008, at age 87.
- m. In February 2009, news broke that Maciel had led a double life.
 - i. The Legion publicly acknowledged that Maciel had fathered a daughter.
 - ii. The General Director of the Legion went around to each of the Legionary Territories and publicly apologized for Maciel's behavior.
 - iii. Because of this, Pope Benedict XVI personally intervened and initiated a formal Vatican visitation of all legionary houses.
- n. Later that same year, a Spanish daily published an interview with a woman who had had a child with Maciel in 1986 and was living in a luxury apartment in Madrid, which Maciel had purchased for her.
 - i. A day later, Mexican media reported that attorney Jose Bonilla would represent three of a possible total of six of Maciel's natural children, in a civil lawsuit to recover Maciel's estate. It was alleged that Maciel owned several properties in Mexico and around the world in his own name. According to Jose Bonilla, whose son was attacked by a teacher at one of Maciel's schools, Maciel took an adoptive son and natural son – Omar and Raul – on trips to Europe, using an alias of Raul Rivas. Of course, they were also victims of Maciel's disgusting pedophilia.
 - ii. Additionally, it became known that Maciel had had at least one other child with another woman. Norma Hilda Banos was 26 years old when she gave birth to Maciel's daughter in 1987.
- o. On March 4th, 2010, the Catholic News Agency (CNA) published a story titled, "Legion of Christ Responds to Founder's Alleged Children", and it's... kind of insane.
 - i. The response came following an interview that was broadcast live in Mexico and then later in Spain, in which Maciel's mistress, former domestic worker Lara Gutierrez and her three sons Omar, Jose, and Cristian gave detailed accounts of their relationship with the late founder of the Legionaries. Lara stated that her relationship with Maciel began in 1972 when he was 56 and she was just 19 years old.... A gross detail that I have been unable to forget since I read it. It would seem to me that Maciel preyed on a variety of vulnerable personality types – anyone who could stroke his clearly engorged ego and satisfy his sexual cravings was fair game.
 - ii. Lara stated that Maciel had told her that his name was Raul Rivas and that he was a CIA agent and security man for oil companies.
 - iii. Following that interview, the Legion of Christ in Mexico released two statements. In the first, the organization expressed it's "shared suffering and pain" with the members of the Gonzalez Lara family. In the second, it was revealed that Maciel's son Raul had requested \$26 million from the Legion in exchange for his silence. In response, the Legion publicized a

letter in which a Fr. Carlos Skertchly, L.C. wrote to Raul stating that, “In no way can we accede to your request for money in exchange for silence...we prefer to seek and face the truth, no matter how painful it may be.”

- iv. In the second statement, another L.C. priest, Fr. Jesus Quirce Andres, rector of Anahuac University alleged that, in essence, Raul had attempted to leverage the scandalous nature of his relationship to Maciel as his son for financial gain, claiming that in recorded phone calls, Raul stated that he felt entitled to “a legacy of \$6mil” for him, his younger brother, and his mother. Fr. Andres stated that, “I was ignorant of the fact that our conversations had been recorded by Raul. It surprises and offends me, especially since Raul himself had asked for complete reserve and discretion regarding the topic”. Raul went on to sue the Legionaries in the U.S. for their complicity in allowing Maciel to “maintain an incestuous relationship with him for many years.”
 - 1. The entire affair strikes me as a very messy “he said- he said”. As far as what actually happened, how these conversations were carried out, and precisely what precipitated them, we may never know. But the entire situation paints a very ugly picture for all of the people connected to Maciel.
- p. Pope Benedict XVI ordered an apostolic visitation of the Legionaries of Christ, sending five bishops from five different countries, working independently to each other to conduct an extensive investigation which took them to nearly every one of the religious order’s houses.
 - i. The official report was published on March 15th, 2010, and submitted to the Vatican.
 - ii. The following week, the Legion of Christ and Regnum Christi issued a joint statement acknowledging Maciel’s history of abuse and apologized.
- q. The Vatican announced that the Pope would name a delegate to the Legion and a visitor to Regnum Christi, because “the conduct of Maciel has given rise to serious consequences in the life and structure of the legion, such as to require a process of profound re-evaluation.” The Vatican also denounced Maciel for having created a system of power that enabled him to lead an “immoral double life devoid of scruples and authentic religious meaning”.
- r. The Vatican also held the Legion’s feet to the fire by stating that it had created a “mechanism of defense” around Maciel to shield him from accusations and suppress damaging witnesses from reporting abuse, stating that it made him “untouchable”. It decried the “lamentable disgracing and expulsion of those who doubted” Maciel’s virtue, and acknowledged the hardships of Maciel’s accusers through the years when they were ostracized and ridiculed, commending their “courage and perseverance to demand the truth”.

- s. It would seem that only after the man's death was the organization or the Vatican prepared to step up and do the right thing. Did the network of protection that surrounded Maciel during his life die with him?
 - t. During my research, I found a document that was published in December of 2013 titled, "Code of Conduct And Other Directives Pertaining to Safe Environment Issues in North America for the Legionaries of Christ." It is 27 pages and broken down into four sections, plus an introduction and an appendix. It speaks to the general conduct Legionaries should exhibit in their ministry and apostolate, including interactions with minors and educational institutions. On the subject of reporting obligations, the document states that "The institute will require its members to report to civil authorities known or suspected sexual abuse of a victim who is currently a minor, regardless of the state's mandatory reporting laws." I will leave this document linked below for anyone who wants to read it. It seems comprehensive and appropriate and I would be interested in hearing from anyone who has direct experience with this type of directive or one similar. I do not know if this has been updated since 2013. I know that the Church as a whole, particularly here in the U.S. has gone to some lengths to ensure that individuals who will be interacting with minors or other vulnerable groups are properly trained and aware of the safe-guarding protocols that have been enacted. I suppose the jury is still out on whether or not these protocols are sufficient or comprehensive enough. Again, I would like to hear from my audience any thoughts you may have in regard to this issue.
3. Despite claims to the contrary, it is interesting to note that the order appears to continue to hold some type of reverence for Maciel as the founder of the organization, judging from the tone of Skojec's commentary published January 2019.
- a. In an article titled, "13 Years After Maciel Crimes Revealed, Legionaries of Christ Still Celebrating His Legacy", Skojec noted that as Catholics the world over were forced to come to grips with the fact that since 1941, according to a Vatican report the Vatican knew and did nothing about Maciel's "horrifying predation", the Legionaries carried on with their celebratory commemoration of the organization's founding by "13 boys and a young seminarian" – a turn of phrase that fails to land in light of Maciel's disgusting pedophilic behavior.
 - b. That same report sought to lay blame for the coverup on "a mafia", stating that they "were not the Church". It would seem to me that this is just another example of the No True Scotsman fallacy, which the Roman Catholic Church has continuously relied on practically since its inception under Emperor Constantine in order to deflect blame and avoid any type of meaningful accountability or reform.
 - c. Additionally, the report attempts to lay all of the blame for the coverup on "an institutional and cultish reverence for the Legion's superiors that he [Maciel] himself had fostered." So, which was it – a mafia of bad faith actors or a cult of personality created by Maciel himself? Given the fact that there is documentary evidence indicating that individuals in positions of authority within the Vatican

(presumably even the pope himself) were alerted of Maciel's crimes on more than one occasion over the span of more than fifty years, the entire thing feels more like a case of willful, blind ignorance than a clandestine coup to maintain one man's position of power in the Church. And while this is just my opinion, the reason why I feel that way is because of the Catholic Church's nearly two thousand year trend of downplaying, ignoring, and mishandling sex crimes and sexual deviancy, which is a matter of historical fact ("Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes: the Catholic Church's 2,000 Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse").

- i. At this point, at least some clergy seemed prepared to deal with the situation head-on, rather than continuing to downplay and detract from how bad things had gotten. In a 2019 interview, Cardinal Braz de Aviz stressed the importance of an immediate Vatican response, noting that, "I have the impression that allegations of abuse will grow...we are only at the beginning...we've been covering up for 70 years, and this has been a huge mistake."

4. Scandals in the Legionaries of Christ

a. Sex Abuse:

- i. Marciel Maciel... enough said.

ii. Thomas Williams:

1. Known for his work as a TV commentator and popular spiritual writer and speaker, issued a statement on May 12th, 2012 confirming that he had fathered a child and would be taking a year off from public ministry "to reflect on my commitments as a priest".
2. Williams was a Michigan state native and had been ordained a Legionary priest in 1994 and he went on to become one of the best-known American members of the Legion of Christ, due to his media and public speaking exposure. He had served as a religious affairs analyst for NBC, CBS, and Sky News, and had published 14 books on Catholic spirituality and doctrine. He also acted as publisher of an order-sponsored web-based news agency called 'Zenit' for 10 years. High profile. Well known. Ostensibly well-respected, too.
3. Williams was forced to come clean after a report of his affair reached the Vatican via a group known as the Association of Aid for Victims of the Legion of Christ. In an article written by John L. Allen on NCR, it was reported that that same report "also asserted that Williams has had sexual relations with students at the Legion's university in Rome, Regina Apostolorum" where he had served as

faculty and that “Williams had a sexual relationship with the daughter of a prominent American Catholic personality”. Williams refused to comment on specifics, stating simply that “I am truly sorry to everyone who is hurt by this revelation,” which is the epitome of a non-apology if I have ever heard one.

4. As a result of this information coming to light, Fr. Luis Garza, the top official for the Legionaries in the U.S. sent a nationwide letter to members which stated that Williams would “undergo a period of reflection, prayer, and atonement.”
 - a. Another interesting aspect of this situation is the fact that because William’s indiscretions did not involve a minor or accusations of abuse, he was not subject to the Vatican’s anti-abuse procedures. In my opinion, this shows a gross lack of understanding on the Vatican and the Legionaries part. Williams was essentially a celebrity. He was a well-known public figure who was ostensibly well-respected and liked. Just because the people he went after weren’t children doesn’t mean that there wasn’t a power imbalance at play, particularly in regard to the alleged relationships he engaged in with seminarians at the university where he had been a faculty member. The Cape Cod Times noted that “until he left active ministry, Williams was the most publicly prominent priest in the 900-strong order.”
 - b. Additionally, the news about Williams followed on the heels of confirmation from the religious order that at least seven other priests belonging to the Legionaries were being investigated for alleged sexual abuse of minors that “date(s) back decades.”
5. In the beginning, Williams stated he would not reveal the name of the woman he had fathered a child with, citing “respect for the privacy of the woman and her child”,
 - a. But a year later, the Cape Cod Times wrote a piece detailing his wedding plans, so that clearly didn’t last long. It was revealed that the woman was Elizabeth Lev, the daughter of former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See Mary Ann Glendon. It was also revealed that Williams’ superior had known about Williams’ child and affair since 2005, but had “allowed Williams to keep teaching and preaching morality.” WHAT?!
 - b. That same article also states that, “[Lev] had initially denied an intimate relationship with Williams”, which gives the entire thing an odd flavor and again brings me

back to my observation that Williams was in a position of power because of his celebrity... who could deny him?

- c. Williams' and Lev's origin story is... bizarre, if it is to be believed. Which... eh. We will get to that. But it's also interesting to note that, according to an article which we will discuss in a moment, Williams shared a home with Maciel in the 90's for nearly a decade.
6. While I was looking for more information on the Williams scandal, I came across the ReGAIN or Religious Groups Awareness International Network, which monitors harmful groups in mainstream churches and religious groups. It was founded by ex-Legionaries who are critical of the Legion and its founder. I have linked the ReGAIN site below if you would like to look through it.
7. As an interesting aside, I discovered that the organization was actually sued by the Legion in August 2007. "The lawsuit alleges that written property of the Legion, including letters written by Maciel and copies of unpublished principles and norms 'intended only for dissemination and use by Legion members' were stolen and posted online 'out of context...as part of a concerted effort to wage a malicious disinformation campaign against the Legion.' The Legion pleaded that the value of the alleged stolen property was 'worth at least \$750,000.' The president of ReGAIN has asserted that, to the best of his knowledge, 'nothing was obtained improperly,' and expressed the opinion that the lawsuit request for information on anonymous message board posters was an action "proving that the Legion is a cult which controls information, stifles freedom of expression, and goes after dissenters.'" I couldn't find any information on what the ultimate decision in this case was, if the Legion won or lost, or if ReGAIN was obligated to pay any fines. What I DID find was a veritable rabbit hole of lawsuits that have been filed against the Legion over the last fifteen years or so. More on that in a moment.
8. The case reminded me of a similar lawsuit which was carried out in Madrid, Spain between Opus Dei and the website OpusLibros, because of the fact that OL had published internal documents on the website. Opus Dei had traditionally vehemently denied the existence of these documents, but in suing OL proved that the documents did, in fact, exist. OL was ordered to remove the documents from its site, and that was that. If you would like to learn more about that, check out episode 13 of the Opus Dei deep dive, which I have linked above, if you're watching this on YouTube.

- a. One article I found on ReGAIN, titled “The Crimes of Uncle Ted and Father Thomas (Williams, Legionary of Christ)” discusses the state of pedophilia and sexual deviancy within the Catholic Church and the Legionaries in particular. It was written by Ann Barnhardt and originally featured on her blog.
 - i. The article begins with a condemnation of the bishops and clerics who for decades knew of the pederasty occurring within it’s ranks and, rather than reporting and condemning the individuals at fault, chose to harbor them and outright deny that there was even an issue to begin with. I think that this perspective has been more or less totally validated by the overarching body of research and media pertaining directly to the Catholic Church’s sex abuse crisis.
 - ii. But in regard to the Legionaries of Christ in particular, Barnhardt refers to Williams as “the pretty-boy face of the truly evil racketeering organization, the Legion of Christ.” She is also the source which alleged that Williams shared a home with Maciel for a decade during the 1990’s.
 - iii. And the version of events Barnhardt recounts in regard to Williams’ relationship with Lev (which is a matter of fact) is pretty wild. The claims she makes, which could be easily fact-checked line up with the research that I’ve done. But some of the insights she seems to have into intimate personal details regarding the individuals involved are much more difficult to parse. I am going to read through what she says, but I’d like everyone to maintain a healthy degree of skepticism, since it is impossible to know how accurate this story is and where it originated from, since Barnhardt does not bother to cite any sources.
 - 1. Fr. Williams, flying high as the number three of the \$30+ BILLION-dollar Legion of Christ criminal racketeering organization, was recruited by Neo-con Catholic darling and John Paul II advisor Mary Ann Glendon to recruit Glendon’s Machiavellian apostate daughter, Elizabeth Lev, into the Legion. Glendon and Williams were both teaching at

the Legion's University in Rome. Williams, it should be noted, was no less than the DEAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MORAL THEOLOGY. Glendon's daughter, Lev, was a hyper-promiscuous art history major who had just relocated to Rome. Glendon knew that her notoriously sexually aggressive and amoral daughter would, despite her apostasy, be more than happy to enter "spiritual direction" with Fr. Williams with an eye towards a sexual affair with this "sexy" priest.

- a. That is literally how the rest of the blog reads... I half expect Barnhardt to pull a 'Gossip Girl' in the next minute.
2. Essentially, the story from Barnhardt's perspective is that Lev baby-trapped Williams, "leveraging her womb into a multi-million-dollar blackmail/child support package." Lev has the child, who was born with severe mental handicaps, and allegedly abandons the boy to the care of a friend. I won't even dwell on the things Barnhardt had to say about Lev's friend, because they flirt heavily with homophobia, and that's just not the tone I want in my video. But it is Barnhardt's opinion that the same environment which made Maciel's crimes possible also aided and abetted Williams and his familiars.
 - a. Is this all a matter of fact, or the product of speculation? I have no idea. I have linked ReGAIN in my reference list down below, so feel free to take a look around and draw your own conclusions.

iii. William Izquierdo

1. In December of 2013, the National Catholic Register published an article with the headline, "Legion of Christ Acknowledges Abuse Committed at Connecticut Seminary." The territorial director of

the Legion in North America, Father Luis Garza released a statement in which it was revealed that the results of an independent investigation conducted by a third party uncovered “significant evidence of sexual abuse.” By 2008, Izquierdo had ceased exercising his ministry, due to rapidly declining health and on-set dementia. He was living out the last of his sorry days in a facility receiving care.

- a. The article also notes that, “A total of 35 Legionary priests have been accused of sexual abuse of minors throughout the congregation’s history, the Legion has revealed, although Father Clariond told the Register he expected more to emerge in the future. Of these 35, nine have been found guilty (including the founder) and punished canonically (two were laicized, and seven had sanctions imposed on their life and ministry), 14 have been acquitted (10 priests were found innocent after an investigation was made, according to Canon 1717 of the Code of Canon Law; the other four cases involved imprudent behavior, but not crimes that would require sanctions), and two had already left the ministry when the allegations were presented, and, therefore, no canonical procedures were initiated against them. Ten other cases are still under review. Of six accused Legionary of Christ superiors and formators, three have been found guilty of sexually abusing adults under their authority, one of whom includes Maciel. The other three have been acquitted. Two cases were judged to have been imprudent behavior that did not warrant restrictions on ministry.”

iv. Oscar Turrion:

1. On October 7th, 2017, Reuters published a story from Vatican City in which it outlined the Legionaries’ most recent “fall into disgrace”. Father Oscar Turrion was the rector of the Pontifical International College Maria Mater Ecclesiae, a seminary for men in the Legionary order studying for the priesthood.
 - a. Turrion revealed to his superiors that his mistress had given birth to a daughter – and that he had previously had a son with the same woman, several years ago.
 - b. He blamed his secrecy on “weakness and shame”, stating that he had “lost his grounding” when news of Maciel’s behavior rocked the order and the Catholic Church at large between 2006 and 2014.

- c. He alleged that he had not misappropriated any of the seminary's funds, instead supporting his secret family with donations from 'friends'.
 2. Some thoughts – Do we really think he was supporting his secret family with “donations from friends”? What friends?? And it said he “lost his grounding” when the revelations about Maciel became public starting in 2006 – more like he saw it as license to do whatever he wanted!
- v. Fernando Martinez Suarez:
1. Between 2019 and 2020, the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ withdrew Suarez's clerical status, due to an investigation conducted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which found him guilty of sexually abusing at least eight little girls between the ages of six and 11 from 1991 to 1993 (although the organization only recognized six of the cases), while he was working in the Cumbres Lomas Institute in Mexico City and Cancun. They stated, “the Legionaries of Christ will assume the responsibility that Fernando Martinez leads a life that corresponds to his status as a religious who has lost the clerical state, and reaffirm their determination to walk the difficult and demanding path of reparation and healing.”
 2. As it turns out, Suarez, like Maciel, had a history of allegations that had followed him for more than fifty years. The first accusation to be released dated from 1969. And while the religious order released statements indicating that it had every intention of swift and immediate action in these cases, one of Suarez's victims takes a dim view of their P.R.
 - a. Ana Lucia Salazar, one of the reporting victims stated that “they try to make up the structural system to bury the truth...[thinking that] people do not understand and...think that it is a lonely pedophile, when in fact they are welcomed and supported by the institution.” Ana has accused the order of encouraging “a structural complicity.” This stems from the fact that when she was abused at only eight years old, her parents went to the school authorities and were told not to report the incident because it would get Ana – not the institution or the order – in trouble.
 - i. She also pointed out the irony in the fact that, only upon making her testimony public did the Legion decide to start an investigation. At that time, she had become aware of the fact that Suarez had been transferred to Salamanca and was in contact once

again with minors in a novitiate, “it is an attitude on the part of the institution of reintegrating their pedophiles over and over and put[ting] them to feast...[on] children. There is a structural complicity on the part of the institution.”

- b. In an even more sickening and insidious twist, activist and former member of the Advisory Council of the National Commission on Human Rights, Alberto Athie pointed out that, according to a published letter, Suarez had been one of Maciel’s many abuse victims, which indicates just how long-lasting and damaging Maciel’s legacy of abuse really is. Athie indicted not only the Legionaries and the Vatican, but also the Mexican authorities, “because complicity is not only within the Legion but within the competent Mexican authorities that have never opened an investigation in the matter...we were never called to present information, we were never asked to add anything about it.”
 - c. From start to finish, there is once again a clear pathology of protecting the predator, laying blame on the victims, and denying the truth. One would think, after the embarrassing spectacle that Marciel created, and the Legionaries’ expressed desire to “face the truth” and deal with the consequences, they have not learned from the past or changed their behavior, preferring instead to once again fall back on the same modus operandi that the Church as a whole has favored for 2,000 years.
- vi. In 2020, the Legionaries of Christ once again committed to “the objective recognition of abuse that can facilitate the path of healing”, by publishing data from 27 different priests who had sexually abused 170 minors, the majority of them males between the ages of 11 and 16, as part of a renewal process they claim was initiated as a result of the scandal of Marcial Maciel.
- 1. Which is weird to me, because at this point, Maciel is just patient zero – there are a host of other problematic individuals - to say nothing of the institutionalized attitude of denial and suppression that has so clearly been implemented before, during, and after Maciel’s life and death.
 - 2. The report was titled “Truth, Justice, and Healing”, which along with providing the data on the 27 offenders and their victims also included steps taken to care and provide aid for the victims, as well as develop safe environments in the congregation. The cases occurred throughout South America and the United States, and the legionary priests are identified either by first and last name or with

a numerical code, with the intent that the information will be updated as new data is acquired.

3. The order outlined planned steps for the coming year, stating that it will “reinforce professional and systematic care and listening to victims...establish an independent program for the economic reparation of victims...[and] examine possible cases of cover-up and gross negligence.”
 4. That all sounds very good, and perhaps, at long last, the order will start to actually follow through on what it claimed it intended to do following Maciel’s death in 2008.
- vii. However, a 2024 blog post on the blog *Veritas Liberabit Vos* and titled *Cover-up, Negligence, and Delay as a form of Legionary Abuse* makes a number of claims, not the least of which is that the 2020 report previously mentioned does not actually present any evidence of an investigation, did not mention any ecclesiastical authority or refer to any external body that could independently verify the information in the report.
1. “Acting in [the] dark is typical of those who do not walk in the light because [their] works are not good.”
 2. The author of the blog takes a dim view of the Legion’s alleged dedication to dealing with abuses and helping victims, observing what seems to them to be a drawn-out and protracted charade, stating that “when you wait [to] make the truth about an event or about certain responsibilities, delaying resolutions, delaying procedures and hiding investigations [are acts] of revictimization...in four years they have not been able to clarify...a single case, not even the [known cases]! *Liberabit Veritas* points out that beyond the personal responsibility of Garza and his ilk...the Congregation is institutionally guilty and the delay in recognizing the truth, the concealment of reports and the secrecy [in the proceedings] give true testimony of institutional responsibility.”
 3. The blog hosts a number of articles pertaining to different aspects of the Legionary scandal. I have linked it down below.
 4. I wish that I could say that I felt confident in these various measures and protocols, and that I could take the Legion and the Catholic Church as a whole at their word when they release statements expressing sorrow and a plan to reform and enact changes. Unfortunately, they both have a horrible track record at this point. Have we seen the end of the sex abuse crisis? Time will tell, but I’m not holding my breath.
- viii. In 2023, another victim of abuse came forward, claiming that between 2008 and 2010, she had been the victim “of serious abuses of conscience, power, sexuality, and even torture by priests, seminarians, and authorities

of the Legionaries of Christ congregation, who normally acted in a group and under the influence of drugs.”

1. The abuse took place while she was studying at the Cumbres Mujeres school.
2. In 2005, she began to participate in the ECyD (Education, Culture, and Sports), the girls’ club associated with the Lay Consecrated Apostolic Life Society of Regnum Christi for students between 10 and 16 years old. Through this club, she became interested in pursuing a vocation as a Consecrated member of Regnum Christi.
3. At 16, she left her parents’ home and moved into the student center full time. Shortly after that, she took the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as a Consecrated. Shortly following that, abuse at the hands of various members of the Legionaries of Christ and the Consecrated began.
 - a. “On some occasions [an assistant] took me to sectors of the house or other places where I was subjected to various group sexual and physical violations by priests and seminarians of the congregation...[using] different forms of [forcing] submission, such as taking drugs, threatening me or leaving me without [food] so that I was weaker.”
 - b. In 2019, the unnamed victim filed a canonical complaint with the Abuse Prevention Department of the Chilean Episcopal Conference that resulted in two related, but separate canonical processes.
 - i. The first related to abuses committed by a Consecrated member and a former Consecrated member of Regnum Christi.
 - ii. The second related to abuses committed by priests of the Legion of Christ and was referred to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in Rome.
 - iii. Both cases were closed after only two years, citing a lack of credibility and contextual background information necessary to open a canonical trial against the aforementioned Legionary priests.
 - c. The victim has condemned this decision, pointing out that the congregation for the doctrine of faith has acted with deliberate blindness, avoiding seeing the overwhelming evidence that existed.
 - i. “In this way, I can affirm with certainty that the negligence of the defendant has been the sole and exclusive cause of the enormous and irreparable damage that I have suffered.”

- ii. This victim is still awaiting an acknowledgement of the harm she endured.
- ix. Aggressive recruitment & spiritual stagnation – The Legion has been accused of targeting underage individuals for recruitment.
 - 1. Steve Skojec, writer and founding publisher of OnePetterFive.com (which I cited previously) shared his experience with the religious order, stating that “I have a long history with them. They were a profoundly formative influence on me – and they almost cost me my faith. I am fortunate inasmuch as I was never a victim of the sexual abuse that finally brought down their founder. But he created a fiction – dressed up in a superficial veneer of Catholic orthodoxy that drew in countless good men and women wanting to live their faith in a difficult time in the Church. It used up many of them and tossed them out, hurting and lost. It was essentially a spiritual bait and switch, with loud papal approval, and it has damaged countless souls. I was one of them.”
 - a. Steve first came into contact with the Legionaries and Regnum Christi when he was 14 years old. He held various youth leadership positions, as well as the dubious distinction of being the first young men’s Regnum Christi team captain in the North American Territory. He states that he was “deeply invested”, living in close community with Legionary priests during his senior year of high school while attending the Highlands School in Irving, Texas. He went on several mission trips, became a full-time member of the Regnum Christi ‘co-worker program’, and worked with youth in a Regnum Christi school near Atlanta, GA.
 - b. During this period of his life, he states that, “I was being groomed for the priesthood. And the vocational pressure I felt – I was told by more than one Legionary priest that they “knew” I had a vocation – played havoc with a lifelong struggle I had with scruples and chronic anxiety”, which was worsened by his Catholic upbringing.
 - c. The issues within the order were many and glaring, but Steve brushed them off. “It bothered me that they lied to people all the time, and with such ease – even in very serious situations. They manipulated and used their recruits. They sought to sign up the wealthy and the powerful over and above the genuinely virtuous. They used events like mission trips – ostensibly to evangelize fallen away Catholics or non-Catholics – to lure in energetic young Catholics who would then be aggressively recruited by current members. A group of Regnum Christi men were told by

the priest with us at one particular mission that if we weren't there to recruit people, there was "something wrong with you."

- d. He goes on to describe the emotional, mental, and spiritual anguish he experienced as a result of his supposed "vocation." He writes, "I was desperate. I was being made to believe I had a vocation even though I didn't want one. I was brainwashed into thinking that Maciel was some holy guru who could discern God's will with a clarity that could cut through all my anxiety and confusion. I thought he had some power to tell what only God could."
- e. Upon finally waking up to the false reality he was living in and the spiritual terrorism he was being exposed to, he attempted to make an amicable exit. Unfortunately, that wasn't in the order's M.O. He details a truly bizarre situation that feels eerily similar to things we've heard described by former members of Opus Dei.
 - i. He writes, "it was a cult operation, and you were either all in or all out. They deployed Saul Alinsky's thirteenth rule against me so fast it made my head spin; "'Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.' Cut off the support network and isolate the target from sympathy." The legionaries contacted my friends around the country in other assignments. They contacted my acquaintances. They called my girlfriend's mother and sister – I had never even met her sister. They began telling everyone who knew me that I had left because I 'wasn't generous' and that they should not get involved with 'what happened between Steve and the Legion.' I was a member of a cult, and the cult subverted the good of the individual to the good of the enterprise – which existed to serve the cult leader. Even though I never had a conversation with Maciel, my entire life was dominated by the culture he created."
 - f. Steve's entire article and account of his time in and recovery from the Legionaries of Christ is incredibly compelling and well-written. I have left it linked down below, and I highly recommend that you read it.
- 2. The RedUNE site, which functions as a prevention network of sectarianism and abuse features articles pertaining to various sects, religious and otherwise. The site is in Spanish and although I was able to translate everything, the translation is a bit dicey at points. I have edited some of the quotes that I took from the article we will be discussing for clarity's sake.

- a. The article titled “Why Not End Life Here” details an anonymous account of life within the Legionary framework. It opens with an observation, “I was less than a month [from] having left the Catholic sect of the Legionaries of Christ to which I had belonged for two decades. My years of youth had vanished, enslaved body and soul, obeying in everything the guidelines of the sexually depraved Marcial Maciel and his henchmen, saying that he obeyed God himself.”
- b. The article details an extremely strict and rigid environment in which novitiates were essentially brainwashed, forced to disconnect from familial ties (ostensibly to avoid worldly temptations), and to identify solely with the organization as their “new spiritual family”. Novitiates were only permitted to speak to loved ones three times a year, and could only write to them every 15 days (although correspondence was always opened and read, in order to ensure that it did not contain anything which might interfere with the recruit’s new “saintly” way of thinking.
- c. The author notes how important it was for new recruits/novitiates to read sets of letters Maciel had allegedly written as part of their spiritual formation. These writings were elevated in importance above even the Bible.
- d. Additionally, recruits were not permitted to discuss doubts or struggles they might be having with anyone other than the superiors who were seen as “the voice of God.” And if a recruit did decide to leave, they were removed quietly, without fuss or even a goodbye, the reasoning given that “it was better this way so as not to cause scandal.”
 - i. Why would someone deciding that the order was not for them be a “scandal”? Surely people leave religious orders, monasteries, or convents all the time, upon discerning that their vocation did not lie with the religious order in question.
 - ii. An organization or order that cannot grapple or contend with the fact that they may not be a fit for everyone is a gigantic red flag, in my opinion, and indicates a rigidity that is extremely concerning.
 - iii. The author also states that, “when you leave the Legion of Christ, you are abandoned to your fate...it should be noted that in the countries where they operate, they do not pay social security for their members and do not enroll them in a retirement plan, because in theory they will take care of you. What they don’t tell you is that when you leave the organization you leave in an almost destitute

state with no money and no legal rights accumulated during the time you were with them. Unfortunately, in many groups within the Catholic Church, there is this reality that the Vatican does not want to face for all the money it would entail.”

1. Keep that financial aspect in the back of your mind, because it will come back later.
 - e. The article goes on to say that every aspiring Legionary priest was expected to follow in Maciel’s footsteps because he was elevated to a level of god-like importance within the order. Myths about his alleged holiness abounded, including fabrications such as he could read a person’s mind and know what sins he had committed, or whether or not someone had a vocation, and that he could predict the future. And all of this flourished even as accounts and reports of his criminal misconduct and pederasty continued to pile up at the Vatican.
 - f. The author also alleges financial abuse, stating that “during my stay in the congregation, I did not receive money and I was not allowed to receive [money]. When that happened, it had to be delivered to the superiors because a religious must be ‘poor’ (in that we were not allowed to follow the example of Maciel who had large sums of money at will).”
 - i. The reasoning for this is clear. “For this sect, there were two priorities that were money and finding new members...the vast majority of victims remain silent about everything that happened in there and the damage we have suffered, first because it is very difficult to understand what is happening to us and second because we cannot find an adequate channel for justice to be done to us. As much as there is talk within the Catholic Church of this group and other destructive sectarian groups within it, the Vatican turns a deaf ear when it comes to imparting justice and helping victims.”
 - g. I have linked this article below and it is well worth reading in its entirety.
3. Offshore Holdings in Tax Havens – Blackrock who?
- a. As if all of this garbage isn’t damning enough, a deep dive wouldn’t be complete without some financial scandal as well. And as it turns out, the Legion of Christ has more than its fair share.
 - b. In a 2021 article published on the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists titled, “Secret Real Estate Purchases are

a Driving Force Behind the Offshore Economy”, authors Gibbs & Armendariz ask, “what do a Beatle, an autocrat’s daughter, and a scandal-plagued Catholic order have in common? Each made multimillion-dollar investments in real estate through offshore companies or trusts that disguised the property’s ownership.”

- i. This information came into public view thanks to what is being referred to as “the most expansive leak of tax haven files in history”. Journalists from the ICIJ obtained more than 11.9 million financial records, containing 2.94 terabytes of confidential information from 14 offshore service providers, the enterprise that set up and managed shell companies and trusts in tax havens around the globe. The majority of the documents were created between 1996 and 2020 and included info on more than 29,000 beneficial owners, the ultimate owners of the offshore assets.
- ii. It is worth noting that owning an offshore company is legal. However, the anonymity that it provides can and is used to cover a variety of illicit activities, including money laundering, tax evasion, terrorism financing, and human trafficking.
- c. In the Legion’s case, the leaked files exposed the fact that approximately \$300million had been stashed overseas for the Legion of Christ, with millions invested with a corporate landlord that evicted struggling U.S. tenants during the pandemic.
 - i. In another 2021 article titled “As Catholic Order Fought Sex Abuse Claims, Secret Trusts Devoted to it Poured Millions in American Rental Properties”, author Spencer Woodman notes that “the confidential records show that the trusts became a secret partner in the ownership structure of...[one Florida apartment complex], working with the landlord to invest \$2 million in the complex in 2015. The trusts invested millions more in other modest residential buildings in Florida, Texas, Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois.”
 1. But the plot thickens. The article goes on to note that, “soon after the Vatican announced in 2010 that it would seize the operations of the troubled order and launch a new investigation, high-profile Legion of Christ operatives began quietly setting up one of a trio of New Zealand trusts designed to

hold money for the Legion...two of these trusts, formed shortly after, secretly moved millions of dollars around the world...these two trusts would come to hold nearly \$300 million in assets devoted to the LoC...at a time when victims of sexual abuse via its priests were seeking financial compensation from the order through lawsuits and through a commission overseen by the Vatican.”

2. When asked whether the Legion had disclosed these trusts to the Vatican, the order stated that, “religious institutes do not have an obligation to send detailed information to the Vatican regarding their internal financial decisions or organization.”
 3. Allegedly, the Legion had no knowledge of the two trusts’ operations. But Woodman notes that “the two trusts were funded by scions of a prominent industrialist family in Mexico, including Fr. Luis Garza Medina, one of the Legion’s top leaders” at that time.
 4. And while the Legion and Fr. Garza-Medina doubled down and claimed that the funds were all intended to be used for charitable purposes, Garza-Medina’s sister Roberta (who had been in Regnum Christi during high school) told ICIJ that “historically the Legion used offshore structures to divert religious and charitable money for more self-serving purposes.” Roberta stated, “a lot of their money was held outside the Legion by their financiers, by people with power of attorney who are completely faithful to the Legion...so you’re never going to find it.”
- ii. And while all of this is playing out, a 2011 civil litigation came to light which accused Legion leadership and other members of “defrauding an elderly Catholic woman out of \$60 million in charitable donations to the order.”
 - iii. Then, “police in Milan opened a criminal investigation in 2013 into whether senior Legion clergymen offered a bribe to induce an Italian sexual abuse victim to recant testimony he had given prosecutors. Four Legion members were charged with attempted extortion and obstruction of justice. The case is pending.”
 - iv. A researcher at the Tax Justice Network told ICIJ that, “trusts allow you to enjoy things when it’s the right time

but not have the downsides of technically owning the money...on paper, they can say: 'I have nothing to do with this.'"

- v. It would seem to me that an organization embroiled in the type of scandal that has plagued every move the Legion of Christ makes would have a vested interest in appearing as destitute and financially incompetent as possible. Especially as the investigations and lawsuits continue to pile up. This is not the behavior of a religious order with a vested interest in righting wrongs and addressing issues. It is clear as day that the Legion (or those acting on the order's behalf) had a vested interest in obscuring the truth, which was that (in my opinion), leadership up and down the Legion echelon knew of and likely benefited from the existence of these trusts.
 - 1. "A review of numerous leaked records shows that all three trusts are extensively linked to the highest levels of the Legion. Prominent Legion officials help govern all three trusts. The three trusts have the same addresses, the same trustees, are administered by the same trust company, and have accounts at the same Swiss banks...the trusts' managers hoped they would qualify as purely "charitable or religious" for the purposes of gaining benefit of New Zealand's tax treaty with the U.S. But the [New Zealand tax specialist analyzing the three trusts] warned that...the trusts had 'no express prohibition on the appointment of non-charitable beneficiaries." Those beneficiaries could be changed at any time.
 - 2. All of the articles that I found discussing this issue are linked down below for anyone who would like to go down the rabbit hole some more. But I think we can all get a pretty clear picture of what's going on.
- 5. So that concludes the financial segment of this episode. The final aspect that I want to look at concerns the personal anecdotes people have shared online, via social media about the impact that Regnum Christi and the Legionaries of Christ had on their lives.
 - a. One individual shared that "my parents joined at the Chicago YFE when I was 3. I was in ECYD and then attended the Precandidacy in RI before being a coworker at Overbrook Academy. That was 2008. In 2009 I got consecrated and then found

out about the Founder's scandals. All told I was part of RC from birth until 23. It made up the foundation of my faith. When I left RC I left the Catholic Church.”

- b. Another said, “my mother was involved in RC and I was involved in ECYD , which was where pretty much where all the daughters of RC members would go and have meetings while the RC members did their meetings. I was quite young and I don't remember a huuuge amount but the entire time we were involved, even as a 10 year old I remember a constant strong sense that everyone there thought they were better than me and my family. There was just this incredible sense of elitism down to us ECYD girls to our RC moms. Years after we left after the situation with Fr. Macial, my mom and I were talking about it and even she agrees that there was always a sense of elitism about it. It never felt like we were Holy enough, never pure enough.”
- c. Under a post on a pro- Catholic community where someone asked whether they should accept a position at a Regnum Christi school, an individual shared a heartbreaking account of their experience working with the organization. They wrote, “I worked for them for a while. It was absolutely soul crushing and heartbreaking to watch these wonderful, vibrant, enthusiastic, chatty and fun girls be broken down systematically. By the end of their second month, they were quiet, reserved, stressed out, anxious, jumpy and just completely different. All lost weight, no matter how thin they were when the year started. Some lost chunks of their hair, most were on antianxiety and antidepressant meds. Anyone considered even mildly overweight - like size 10 - was put on diet meds and had food restricted. Yet when anyone was sick, they were typically denied helpful meds and extra rest. That said, I adored the girls I came to know, even though I was always aware that they couldn't speak freely with me. Some had awful things happening at home and found ways to ask me for help, and I always complied. Tricky because I knew they would get in trouble for talking openly to me. I know a lot of them have left RC and are doing so much better, but I still worry for others. Some of the advisors/instructors/professors who were also RC had serious mean streaks. They found joy in creatively belittling the girls and their own peers. I remember one incident when an advisor I knew pretty well asked me a question about a group of girls and I said they were all super nice and friendly when I talked to them. Her response was 'well, yeah, of course they are, they HAVE to be' then cackled and tried to take it back. Nice.”
- d. On another post, another young woman shared her harrowing experience with Regnum Christi and the Legionaries. She wrote, “I was raised in a really benign part of the Catholic Church, but the Regnum Christi was heavily involved in my school so I eventually became involved with them. I was part of ECYD for a while and they were the main reason I walked away from the church. The priest in charge of my school and the local youth groups was somewhat young and I developed a close relationship with him around the age of 12, I trusted him completely and would confide in him for anything that bothered me, only to realize later I was being groomed by him. I didn't have the language back then to

express this but I did know his behaviour towards me was far from appropriate. (Hugs, kisses, touching my leg/thigh as we spoke, etc). Luckily I realized what was happening and I was at a place where I could somewhat speak up about it and kept my distance, but he was kept around even after raising complaints about it. Realizing this was happening really affected me and the way I saw church. That's only one aspect of the bad experiences I had with them, there was also the mentality that the only purpose and the expected results of the youth groups were getting more "vocations". (Literally said to me by a consecrated woman) Which meant heavily influencing teens and preteens into priesthood and consecrated life. I personally know people who were sent to their apostolic schools (pre seminary type of thing) when they were as young as 12 years old and were kept there until they were old enough to be ordained/consecrated. Also, looking back I find it incredibly disturbing that even though a lot of very real accusations had come up against the founder there was still an insane level of reverence towards him. I see them as a cult within the church and strongly believe they should have been disbanded after the truth about Marcel Maciel came out. But they bring a ton of money to the church, so of course that wouldn't happen."

- e. And the final personal experience I'll share was posted on another pro-Catholic forum in which Catholics were expressing concerns about LC priests infiltrating their religious academic clubs and activities. They said, "My family (and myself) had extremely negative experiences with them, and many families we know have had far worse. Marriages have ended, seminarians turned away to agnosticism and alcoholism, one person I know committed suicide (though the last one obviously can't be blamed on the Legion; those that were his friends simply suspect it did not help). The truth is that Fr. Maciel founded an order to satiate his perverted desires. The resulting structures and even emphasized spirituality thus naturally protect a lot of corruption at all levels of the thing, and promote the cult-like mentality mentioned elsewhere in this thread. Individuals in the order can be devout, and some are doing good things in the Church; indeed, that's part of the insidiousness of the whole thing. I have no doubt that Fr. Matthew here is a virtuous man, and what's more, an incredibly likable and charismatic individual (in the secular sense of the term). The Legion uses individuals like that, who are either gullible or willfully ignorant, to portray themselves as a positive force in the Church, when they still cause great harm.

Conclusion

If you have been following along with my deep dive into Opus Dei, there may be a few questions lingering in your mind, not the least of which could be, did Maciel and Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei know each other? I have scrubbed the internet looking for an indication that they interacted, but there are no public records of any interactions between the two. However, as I was looking for accounts and testimonies from individuals who had left RC/LC, I not-infrequently noted that the two organizations were often mentioned side-by-side. In addition to that, I did come across a few first-hand accounts from former members of Opus Dei

who alleged that Maciel copied aspects of Opus Dei's constitution and incorporated them into Regnum Christi (such as the five fields of apostolate, outlines for circles, etc.), as well as the general vibe and appearance of Opus Dei centers. In that same vein, in the book "Vows of Silence" by Berry & Renner, the authors note that

"The Legion of Christ, much smaller and not nearly as well known as Opus Dei has a similar kind of messianic Hispanic spirituality and unswerving fidelity to the pope. Both groups believe in money and power to advance the aims of the church; the work hard to recruit orthodox Catholics and view each other as rivals... The Legion... has an affiliated organization, Regnum Christi (Kingdom of God), [that] claims 'tens of thousands of laymen and women, as well as deacons and priests.' They are Maciel's cadre for infiltrating and 're-Christianizing' existing Catholic organizations. Maciel claims the idea for Regnum Christi came to him in 1949. Several ex-Legionaries say he borrowed the 'lay apostolate' idea from Opus Dei in the 1960's and took the name from a defunct European pious association." (pp. 244-245).

In the book, "The Pope's War", by Matthew Fox, Fox states that,

"Father Marciel Maciel's Legion of Christ was a favorite order of Pope John Paul II and cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. So enamored of Father Maciel was JP II that he invited him on this plane on several occasions when traveling to South America. The two organizations, Opus Dei and the Legionaries, have much in common – indeed the pope saw them in the same light, with Maciel's group boasting of its roots in Mexico and Escriva's in Spain. Both were in bed with aristocratic millionaires, extremely hierarchical, extremely patriarchal, admiring of uber-right causes (Maciel of Pinochet, the Chilean dictator), and run very tightly. In fact, Maciel's had a special twist to it: a vow was demanded of its members that they never criticized Maciel or their other superiors and that they report anyone who did. Secrecy trumped everything; spying was part of the vow. Both were fully committed to papalolatry. Whatever the pope says goes. They made the perfect vanguard for new anti-Vatican II religious movements." (p.125)

It is interesting to me that two totally different organizations, with two different founders could still exhibit many of the same sectarian characteristics that have left so many people scarred. I think that there is an interesting conversation to be had if we can stand to ask WHY. What were the conditions that not only permitted but appeared to approve the creation of the "cults of personality" that existed in these religious organizations? And can we positively determine that those conditions are no longer in place? I think that the answers to those questions may stray into a unique discussion, but it's not one that I am prepared to engage with in this episode. What I will conclude with is a quote from the book "Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes: the Catholic Church's 2,000 Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse", which discusses the RCC's sex abuse crisis, but which I also think hints at the conditions that allow organizations like the LoC and Opus Dei to persist. The authors Sipe, et al. noted that,

“clergy sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults has occurred from the earliest centuries. It has been known to church authorities and is a predictable but highly unfortunate feature of clerical life. It has been denied and hidden by bishops and popes who have consistently acted in a conspiratorial manner to prevent instances of abuse from becoming publicly known, especially to law-enforcement authorities. Such behavior patterns shock Catholics and non-Catholics alike. They are perplexed as to how the Catholic Church, with its tradition of strict and unbending sexual morality, can at the same time appear to not only tolerate it but enable thousands of sexually dysfunctional clerics with little or no honest regard for the physical, emotional, and spiritual devastation of their countless victims. Yet this sad state of affairs is predictable, but certainly not acceptable, within the much broader context of the institutional church’s traditional image of itself.”

It is my opinion that there is an institutionalized cancer within the Catholic Church that infected it from the beginning. I cannot pretend to have a solution for this issue because I believe that abuse will always thrive in an environment that fails to recognize all human beings as equals and instead prefers to cater to the human ego and pride.

So, for now, this is where I will conclude things. What is your perspective of organizations like the LoC and Opus Dei? Do you think we’ve seen the end of the Legionaries’ scandals? Do you think that the Vatican has intentionally shielded problematic people like Maciel and Escriva because of the money that they brought in? In your view, does the Roman Catholic Church have any credibility left? Do you think that the Church is capable of change? What would meaningful, substantial, and sincere change look like? Have you had experiences with either of these organizations, and if so, were they positive or negative? I am looking forward to reading the thoughts and comments you have. If you enjoyed this episode, please consider giving it a thumbs up and subscribing to my channel. Details to contact me or support my work are in the description of this video. If you made it to the end of this episode, congratulations – you are a rockstar and I appreciate you. Until next time, stay blessed and remember; nolite te bastardes carborundorum.

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