



Alberto Athie, a former Mexican priest, took the difficult decision to leave the Roman Catholic Church following his investigations into a high-profile paedophile priest.

He holds up the letter he wrote 13 years ago to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. It details senior Mexican priest Marcial Maciel's sexual abuse of young boys.

As the founder of the Legionaries of Christ, Maciel was one of the most influential of world Catholic figures before his death in 2008. When Athie tried to deliver the letter to the Vatican, he was told that Cardinal Ratzinger was too busy to see him. Ratzinger's staff told him to show no one else the contents of the correspondence.

In his relentless efforts to get the Vatican to investigate the sex abuse cases, Athie persuaded his friend, Mexican Bishop Carlos Talavera, to take the letter to Ratzinger. Talavera later informed him of Ratzinger's response:

"I am sorry but this case cannot be investigated because Father Maciel is a great friend of the Holy Father and has done much good for the church. I am sorry but it isn't prudent." A charismatic figure, Maciel brought priests and other material benefits to the church and was repeatedly honoured, despite allegations of child abuse and drug addiction.

He enjoyed a close relationship with Pope John Paul II, who described him in 1994 as a model for the young.

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