

Vatican: Disgraced Legion must rethink identity

by [Alessandro Speciale](#) in the [August 8, 2012](#) issue

The disgraced Legion of Christ religious order needs to rethink its identity before going forward with its internal reform, the papal envoy in charge of the group's overhaul told priests and lay members in a recently published letter.

Cardinal Velasio De Paolis was appointed in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI to oversee the order's reform after revelations that its founder, Marcial Maciel, had lived a double life, abusing children and fathering a son. Maciel had enjoyed iconic status in the Legion, despite strong suspicions that its leaders had been at least partly aware of his actions.

De Paolis wrote July 11 that the troubled group's various branches, which include priests, religious and laypeople, need "a common platform" to "regulate reciprocal relations . . . according to the identity proper to each group."

That "joint reflection on the identity and mission" of the order, said Andreas Schoeggl, a Legion spokesman, must precede final revision of the order's internal rules, which has lasted two years and was the main goal for the pope's takeover of the order.

The papal delegate's letter came to light after several observers have criticized the slow pace of reform inside the Legion.

On June 22, Thomas V. Berg, a former Legionary, wrote "The Legion's Scandal of Stalled Reform" on the conservative blog First Things. According to Berg, "The Legion's superiors . . . have fostered a culture of institutional opposition to the radical reform that is truly required."

Schoeggl denied that was the case. Still, new scandals have buffeted the Legion in recent weeks. Its most famous priest, Thomas Williams, admitted fathering a child, while his superiors acknowledged covering up for him for years.

More recently, dozens of women who attended a Legion high school in Wakefield, Rhode Island, accused school officials of abuse and deception in a letter sent to the Vatican and obtained by the Associated Press. —RNS