

Former Vatican bank chief resigns

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — U.S. Archbishop Paul C. Marcinkus, a central figure in an Italian banking scandal and once one of the most influential men at the Vatican, has retired after a controversial 38-year curial career.

On Oct. 30 the Vatican announced the resignation of the 68-year-old archbishop as pro-president of the commission that runs the Vatican City State. Last year he left the helm of the Vatican bank, known officially as the Institute for the Works of Religion.

A day later, the Vatican announced that Venezuelan Cardinal Rosalio Jose Castillo Lara, a longtime Vatican official, would take over as president of the Commission for Vatican City State.

Cardinal Castillo Lara will, in effect, take over the management role of Archbishop Marcinkus and the formal presidency held by Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, who is retiring at age 77. Cardinal Castillo Lara is also head of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, which handles Vatican investments.

In a written statement, Archbishop Marcinkus said he was grateful to Pope John Paul II for granting his request to retire. He said he wanted to return to the United States and "make myself useful in whatever pastoral work I may be able to do."

In an interview with Catholic News Service, the archbishop said he felt enriched by his years at the Vatican, even though some people there made him feel like "a pariah, a leper" at times.

He said he would return to Chicago for Christmas, then try to work out a new assignment, probably helping out in a parish.

In a letter to the archbishop, the pope expressed his deep gratitude for the numerous and delicate tasks successfully entrusted to him. The pope also praised Archbishop Marcinkus' moral strength in facing trials that have "weighed heavily" on the archbishop and given him reason for bitterness. The letter was not made public, but its contents were made available to CNS in Rome.

Archbishop Marcinkus gained worldwide notoriety when the Vatican bank became involved — unwittingly, he and the Vatican maintained — in the \$1.2 billion collapse of Italy's Banco Ambrosiano in 1982. The entanglement eventually cost the Vatican \$240 million.

But to Americans and others familiar with him in Rome, the prelate was best known for hard work, plain-spokenness and a willingness to do people favors.

After he entered the Vatican's Secretariat of State in 1952, Archbishop Marcinkus rose quickly through the curial ranks and gained a reputation as a talented organizer who got things done.

In the early 1980s, he performed three of the most important jobs at the Vatican: running the Vatican bank and the Vatican City State and acting as unofficial advance man for papal trips.

But the low point in his career was connected to his banking role. Although all legal charges against him were eventually thrown out, Archbishop Marcinkus said the Banco Ambrosiano affair would always stay with him.

"There's no way in which I can get away from it. It's like the scarlet letter you carry around with you all the time," he said in the CNS interview Oct. 29.

After Banco Ambrosiano collapsed and the body of its president, Roberto Calvi, was found hanged from a London bridge, the Vatican bank was discovered to have written letters in support of bad loans Calvi had arranged to finance secret operations.

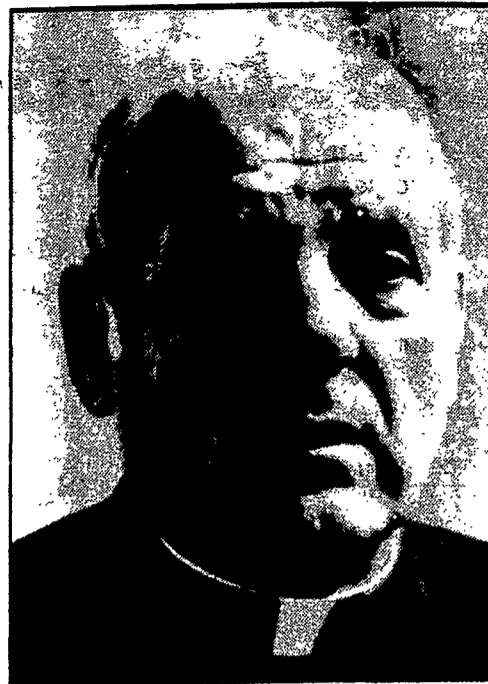
The Vatican conducted its own study and concluded that the letters had no legal weight and that the Vatican bank was an innocent victim of Calvi's schemes. Nevertheless, the Vatican agreed in 1984 to make a "goodwill" payment of \$240 million to Banco Ambrosiano's former creditors — a decision criticized by Archbishop Marcinkus in the interview.

"I was always against that payment, because we didn't do anything wrong. The Vatican didn't have to put out a cent. And when you have to knock down some of your capital, it hurts," he said.

Italian prosecutors, meanwhile, after a five-year investigation, issued warrants for Archbishop Marcinkus and two other Vatican bank officials in 1987 on charges of complicity in fraudulent bankruptcy. They reasoned that the Vatican bank officials either knew or should have known about Calvi's illegal operations.

After a squad of Italian police tried unsuccessfully to serve the warrant on the archbishop at a Rome residence, he was forced to live within the Vatican walls for several months in order to avoid arrest. In 1988, Italy's Constitutional Court ruled that the warrants were invalid because of the Vatican's status as an independent state, and the charges were dropped.

Born in Cicero, Ill., the son of a Lithuanian window washer, Archbishop Mar-



File photo
Archbishop Paul C. Marcinkus

cinckus was ordained in 1947 and came to Rome in 1950 to study canon law. In 1952 he was chosen as one of a handful of young priests to work in the Vatican Secretariat of State, at a time when the Vatican was trying to internationalize the Curia.

He served for several years in the Vatican's nunciatures in Bolivia and Canada before returning to the Secretariat of State in 1959. There he worked under the wing of Cardinal Giovanni Montini, the future Pope Paul VI. In 1971, his former mentor named him to head the Vatican bank — despite his lack of banking experience.

Since 1981, Archbishop Marcinkus has overseen the affairs of Vatican City State — including plant operations, building maintenance, post office, police, health system and Vatican museums. Known as a hands-on manager, he often could be seen driving around the 109-acre state to personally inspect projects and services.

In recent years, the archbishop has also done Sunday parish work at a Rome church, celebrating Mass, preaching and hearing confessions. He said he wanted to avoid becoming too "detached from people, sitting behind a desk."

He said he'll be looking for similar work in the United States.

"Parish ministry has always been my goal, and I have tried each day to be faithful to that calling, approaching all my work from a pastoral view," he said.

Pope plans to visit Fatima in May

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican has confirmed a papal trip to Portugal next May, including a stop at the Marian shrine of Fatima to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II.

The May 10-13 trip was announced Oct. 31 by the Portuguese bishops' conference and confirmed shortly after by Joaquin Navarro-Valls, Vatican press officer.

May 13 is the feast day of Our Lady of Fatima and is also the 1981 date of the assassination attempt.

The Portuguese bishops said that, besides Fatima, the pope will visit the capi-

tal of Lisbon, Angra Heroismo in the Azores, and Funchal, the capital of the Madeira province.

Several days before, the pope anticipated the announcement by saying he hoped to visit Portugal in May.

In a Vatican interview with the Catholic Radio Renascenca of Portugal Oct. 27, the pope added that the trip might include the beatifications of two of the three shepherd children who saw Mary six times at Fatima in 1917.

The church has recognized the validity of the apparitions and Fatima is one of the world's main Catholic pilgrimage sites.

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