News



Pedro Salinas, a Peruvian journalist and former member of Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, talks to Reuters during an interview in Lima Oct. 16, 2018. (CNS/Mariana Bazo, Reuters)

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After a court ruled in his favor, Peruvian Archbishop Jose Eguren Anselmi of Piura unexpectedly withdrew his defamation suit against two journalists who accused him of knowing about abuses that occurred within an influential Catholic movement.

Winning the initial suit against Pedro Salinas, the archbishop said, "gave rise to a series of unjustified reactions, including within the church," so for "a greater good, which is the unity of the mystical body of Christ," he was withdrawing his claim, said a statement released by the Archdiocese of Piura April 24.

The following day, the archbishop released a statement saying that he would "renounce my right to defend my honor" and also withdraw a separate lawsuit against journalist Paola Ugaz.

"I am motivated by the same reasons that led to withdraw the complaint against the journalist Pedro Salinas Chacaltana," he said.

Ugaz said that while she was "relieved and happy" the archbishop dropped his suit, she continues to receive threats of litigation from other members of the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae movement, according to Peruvian newspaper El Comercio.

As an example, Ugaz tweeted April 24 a notarized letter from a real estate business affiliated with the Catholic movement that threatened to sue her for her participation in a documentary on the abuses that occurred within Sodalitium.

Although Eguren won his suit against Salinas April 8, bishops in the country distanced themselves from the lawsuit and said the church needs the help of journalists and survivors of clergy sex abuse to overcome the current crisis.

"My intention in presenting a lawsuit against Mr. Salinas was to defend the fundamental right to my good name that we all have," he said.

Salinas and Ugaz co-authored a book titled, "Mitad Monjes, Mitad Soldados" ("Half Monks, Half Soldiers"), which detailed the psychological and sexual abuse, as well as corporal punishment and extreme exercises that young members of Sodalitium

Christianae Vitae were forced to endure.

Eguren, a professed member of the organization since 1981, filed the lawsuit after Salinas wrote a 2018 article accusing the prelate of having known about the abuse.

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The archbishop then filed a separate defamation lawsuit against Ugaz for her participation in the documentary produced by Al-Jazeera as well as a series of tweets she posted during Pope Francis' visit to Peru in 2018 in which she accused the archbishop of knowing about the abuse.

According to El Comercio, Percy Garcia, Eguren's lawyer, said that the court's sentence against Salinas – a one-year suspended prison sentence, a $22,250 fine and 120 days of community service – "no longer has any effect."