

Vatican investigators Monsignor Jordi Bertomeu, right, from Spain, and Archbishop Charles Scicluna, from Malta, walk outside of the Nunciatura Apostolica during a break from meeting with people who alleged abuse by the Catholic lay group Sodalitium Christianae Vitae in Lima, Peru, on July 25, 2023. (AP/Martin Mejia)

by The Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

May 27, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

After years of allegations of land dispossession by a now-dissolved Catholic group, the highest ecclesiastical authorities in the Andean country on Saturday held a symbolic reparation ceremony for the Indigenous people whose land was taken away.

The Peru-based Sodalitium Christianae Vitae was dissolved in 2025 by the late Pope Francis, after years of attempts at reform and a Vatican investigation that uncovered sexual abuses by its founder, financial mismanagement by its leaders and spiritual abuses by its top members.

The ceremony in Peru took place before the Indigenous people of Tallán, in the northern community of Catacaos.

“We are here to ask for your forgiveness in the name of the Church,” Msgr. Jordi Bertomeu, apostolic commissioner who was in charge of the dissolution process of the Sodalitium, said before a packed church. “We are late. We should have come 20 years ago, and we are truly sorry.”

The Sodalitium was founded in 1971 as one of several Catholic societies born as a conservative reaction to the left-leaning liberation theology movement that swept through Latin America in the 1960s. At its height, the group counted about 20,000 members across South America and the United States, and was hugely influential in Peru.

In 2011, former members complained to the archdiocese in Peru’s capital, Lima, about abuses by its founder, Luis Figari. But neither the local church nor the Holy See took concrete action until one of the victims and a journalist wrote a book in 2015.

Advertisement

After an attempt at reform, Francis sent his two most trusted investigators, Bertomeu and Archbishop Charles Scicluna, to look into the Sodalitium abuse allegations. Their report uncovered “sadistic” sect-like abuses of power and spirituality, financial abuses in administering church funds and even instances of harassing critics.

During Saturday’s ceremony, Bertomeu recalled a message Francis sent to the community in 2024, telling them: “Fight for your lands, I am with you.”

The land disputes date back at least a decade, to when Sodalitium-linked companies began legal action to evict people from thousands of hectares in Catacaos following several property transfers that are not recognized by the farmers. Dozens of farmers were prosecuted for alleged “usurpation,” and two community leaders were shot and killed during clashes stemming from the eviction efforts.

The religious ceremony took place months after the Peruvian Episcopal Conference announced a possible visit by Pope Leo XIV to the South American country at the end of the year.

“Forgive us, offer us your forgiveness, because we too need it,” said Bertomeu, who described Catacaos as a community “fearful and broken.”

Tania Pariona, secretary of Peru’s National Human Rights Commission, said the ceremony was a “historic gesture” in which the church “is taking the lead over the state, which has failed to protect rural communities.”