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Zenit editors resign over differences with Legionaries

by John Thavis by Catholic News Service

ROME -- The six editors of the Catholic news agency Zenit have resigned, saying the agency has become too closely identified with the Legionaries of Christ.

"The initial vision of Zenit was never to make it a service of a particular congregation, but rather of the universal church. This has been the spirit with which we have worked throughout the years, and the spirit we could not betray," said a statement issued Oct. 10 by the editors of Zenit's French, Italian, Spanish, English, Portuguese and Arabic services.

Their departure follows the resignation in late September of Zenit's director, Jesus Colina. Colina, who founded Zenit in 1997 and helped build it into an agency with about 450,000 email subscribers, said he was forced out because he resisted pressures to identify the agency and its work more closely with the Legionaries order.

At that time, Colina said there had been a loss of mutual trust and transparency in the agency's relationship with the Legionaries.

In their statement, the six editors cited "years of fruitful collaboration" between Zenit and the Legionaries of Christ, but said they disagreed with the order's decision to "underline the institutional dependence of the agency on the Legion."

The statement said that, from Zenit's inception, the Legionaries of Christ had acted as "spiritual advisers" to the agency "to ensure fidelity to the magisterium." For the past 14 years, it said, the agency has worked independently of the religious order.

Colina told Catholic News Service Oct. 11 that the Legionaries had not financed Zenit during that period, but did control the board that oversees the agency.

A spokesman for the Legionaries of Christ, Father Andreas Schoggl, said the order had "always been involved with Zenit" in strategic decisions. At the same time, he said, Zenit's journalists operated with "editorial independence."

Father Schoggl said the decision to ask for Colina's resignation was not part of a policy change or a change in Zenit's editorial line. But he said it provided an opportunity to offer a more transparent explanation about the involvement of the Legionaries of Christ with Zenit.

"We see a need to do so, because the stress on journalistic independence (which is still the case) might have induced people to think that Zenit was just a private initiative of Catholics journalists," Father Schoggl said.

As for the departing editors, Father Schoggl said the Legionaries were grateful for their collaboration with Zenit in the past and wished them the best in their future endeavors. He said Zenit would soon be announcing a new executive director and a new international coordinator of editors and journalists.

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