

BOLIVIA

Jesuit 'Father Pica's' sexual abuse diary

ECCLESIA

09-05-2023



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Like a veritable horror story, on 30 April *El País* published [also in English](#) an extensive investigation into the life of the Jesuit paedophile - now deceased - Alfonso 'Pica' Pedrajas; who in his lifetime allegedly wrote a 383-page diary, confirming at least 85 sexual assaults on minors and a dense network of cover-ups. The memoirs were examined by a team of journalists to confirm the passages referring to paedophile

crimes, including interviews with several surviving victims, the priest's nephew, and even an alleged 'boyfriend' who remained anonymous for fear of retaliation.

'Father Pica' was born in the Spanish city of Valencia and moved to Bolivia in 1961, where he completed his theology studies and took up residence until his death. His career was always linked to the field of education, he worked in schools in Peru and Ecuador between 1961 and 1971, and later in Bolivia he was vice-director and director of the Colegio Juan XXIII - a boarding school - in the city of Cochabamba. In 1989, he left the Colegio Juan XXIII to take care of the novices in Cochabamba and Oruro.

It is difficult not to feel sickened when reading the excerpts from the manuscript, which the paedophile titled *Historia*. The Jesuit, a serial predator, confessed to crimes committed during 40 years of priestly life in various schools in Latin America; but it was in Bolivia that most cases were reported. In particular, in the Juan XXIII College, which took in children from poor families and therefore more vulnerable.

When the religious died on 5 September 2009, due to cancer, his possessions were sent to Spain, where they remained stored in a family cellar. In December 2021, his nephew Fernando Pedrajas found the diary while cleaning and, realising the gravity of his uncle's confessions, tried to report the matter to the Society of Jesus in Bolivia and to the Spanish justice system, but received only silence and evasions as a response. So he decided to hand it over to the press.

"In the summer of 2022, Fernando maintained a brief e-mail correspondence with the current director of the school in Cochabamba where his uncle committed most of the abuses, but the director dismissed any kind of responsibility. Fernando then presented the diary to the Spanish Public Prosecutor's Office, which declined to take the case because the statute of limitations had expired. Finally, he reported it to former Jesuit provincial Osvaldo Chirveches, who was in charge of investigating abuses in the order. Since October, Fernando has still not received a reply on the status of the canonical investigation,' *El País* points out.

According to Fernando Pedrajas, Father Pica had confessed his crimes to his Jesuit superiors and confreres, who "instead of removing him and providing him with adequate help, justified his actions as physical, not moral, weakness. The only advice he received to overcome his 'weakness' was to pray a lot". We request an investigation and the assurance that this kind of abuse will not continue. "Once the facts are established, the Colegio Juan XXIII must publicly condemn what has happened, denouncing not only Father Pica's attacks, but also the passivity and lack of condemnation on the part of his

Jesuit confreres".

As expected, Father Pica's confessions have shaken the Bolivian Church. After the publication of the diary, former students of the Cochabamba-based college revealed that two other priests committed the same crimes on teenagers between 1983 and 1997. There are even videos and letters from the victims denouncing and identifying their attackers.

The Society of Jesus now asks for "forgiveness" for all that has happened. "The Society of Jesus of Bolivia repudiates and condemns these publicly denounced acts of paedophilia. The Society of Jesus of Bolivia wants to emphasise its policy of zero tolerance towards abuse, as Pope Francis himself has stated several times in this regard. We apologise for the pain caused", reads a statement published a few days later.

Later, at a press conference, the Bolivian Jesuits also informed of the suspension of eight priests who were serving as provincials, in order to check whether any public complaints had gone unheeded. And lawyer Audalia Zurita confirmed that they had filed a formal complaint with the Special Force to Combat Violence so that the sexual abuse could be investigated.

But Father Pica is just one of many cases. Three other cases of paedophile Jesuits have recently come to light: Luis Tó and Antonio Gausset Capdevila, alias Tuco, as well as the late Luis María Roma Pedrosa (this case was reported in 2019 by EFE). Two of the superiors who were aware of the cases have been suspended.

The former Jesuit of Oruro and former deputy, Pedro Lima, reported to the newspaper *El País* that he was expelled from the Order after revealing the abuses of Pedrajas, Capdevila and Tó. He dared to tell his testimony 22 years after that episode, after reading about the 'Father Pica' scandal. It should be noted that this is one of the names that appear in the diary.

In the expulsion letter, the Jesuits promised to finance Lima's educational fees so that he could study theology. Lima accepted and declares that he also received \$3,000 from the Catalan Marcos Recolons, at that time a high official of the order in Bolivia, who a few years later would rise to the highest rank of the order in the Vatican. "A year and a half later, Recolons called me on the phone to tell me that the society was sanctioning me and cutting my funds [for studies] because I kept talking about the paedophilia cases. It was a way to shut me up. He told me, "I will not allow you to speak [badly] about my Jesuit brothers"" Pedro Lima told the Spanish newspaper.

It is estimated that a dozen Bolivian and Spanish Jesuits are involved in this network of cover-ups that calls into question Pope Francis himself, who to date has not commented on the scandal. The truth is that the Society of Jesus is facing a serious crisis the consequences of which are still unknown.