

CLARIFICATION

Sexual abuse: Prevost could follow Benedict XVI's example

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In recent days, many have written to our editorial office about my articles concerning the reported allegations of the cover-up of paedophile priests in Peru by Robert Prevost, the then bishop of Chiclayo, who is now Pope Leo XIV.

We have been asked in particular to rectify these articles following interviews published in several newspapers with two Peruvian journalists who denied the allegations and praised Monsignor Prevost's work in helping victims of sexual abuse in Peru. I therefore feel compelled to return to the subject, not to retract my statements, but because there is clearly a need for clarification. I will proceed point by point:

1. We have not slandered Bishop Prevost or Pope Leo XIV. Last September, we reported on the allegations made in a Peruvian TV investigation and published all the relevant documents. These allegations concerned three sisters from the Diocese of Chiclayo who claimed that they had been molested years earlier by a particular priest, and who complained that they had never been heard as witnesses in an official canonical investigation. We accurately reported the allegations and the responses of both the diocese and the alleged victims, as well as a series of strange events that occurred after Monsignor Prevost was summoned to Rome to lead the Congregation for Bishops. This included the dismissal of the lawyer representing the three girls, who was prevented from pursuing the case. It is worth remembering that this story took place during a pontificate that distinguished itself by covering up for its 'friends'; the Barros (Chile), McCarrick (United States), Zanchetta (Argentina) and Father Rupnik cases prove this.

Notably, the article published in September contained documented facts that have never been denied or clarified. Specifically, if an alleged victim claims never to have been called to testify in an investigation after reporting abuse, a journalist's statement that Monsignor Prevost has always been attentive to victims of abuse, or that the accusations are revenge by other abusers, cannot be considered a denial. While this may well be the case and is not ruled out, the question that needs to be answered is whether the alleged victims were listened to and whether their testimony was included in the documents reportedly sent to Rome.

Therefore, with regard to that article, there is nothing to correct.

2. Above all, the issue we raised in the first article in September was one of appropriateness. In other words, is it really appropriate to promote prelates who have

been involved in issues that have been devastating for the Church in recent years to positions of such high responsibility? We raised this same issue on the eve of the conclave in relation to several cardinals, not just Prevost: it is an issue that makes the Church susceptible to blackmail by the outside world. However, immediately after the election of Leo XIV, we also wrote that while everything that has been published is true, we can free ourselves from this burden by providing clarification and ensuring immediate prosecution, which would also guarantee the rights of the accused, at least in the most sensational cases of abuse that went unpunished during the previous pontificate.

3. The Peruvian journalists who, while in Rome for the 12 May press conference with the Pope, gave interviews accusing certain newspapers of defaming the Pope and exonerating him of all charges are Paola Ugaz and Pedro Salinas (*pictured, LaPresse*). Since 2015, these two journalists have been waging a veritable crusade against the apostolic society 'Sodalitium Christianae Vitae', founded in 1971 by Luis Fernando Figari, with accusations of systematic psychological abuse and even some cases of sexual abuse. The outcome of these journalistic investigations was first the placing of the society under commission, and finally its dissolution. This was pushed by Cardinal Prevost himself, *as Ugaz told Agensir*, and was signed by Pope Francis on 14 January, taking effect on 14 April. "The bishops who stood by us to bring the truth to light can be counted on the fingers of one hand," *Ugaz and Salinas told Avvenire* (the Italian Episcopal Conference daily newspaper). "One of them is Robert Prevost. For this reason, they tried to make him pay. There is no doubt about it."

While we will not discuss the events surrounding Sodalitium and the reasons that led to its dissolution, we would like to see evidence of the claim that the accusations against Prevost are an act of revenge. The documents and sequence of events are still there to be clarified, and we have every right to request this evidence.

Moreover, a curious detail stands out in these interviews: a photograph taken at the end of the hearing on 12 May shows Paola Ugaz with Pope Leo XIV, who is wearing a scarf that she gave him. She was therefore definitely in Rome, as reported by *Agensir*, the agency of the Italian Episcopal Conference, and other newspapers. However, *Avvenire mysteriously reports an interview with Ugaz and Salinas*, dated 13 May, which appears to have been conducted in Peru by a special correspondent. Do Paola Ugaz and Pedro Salinas have the gift of ubiquity, or did *Avvenire*, which has an office in Rome, send a correspondent to Peru just to make a phone call back to Rome?

4. Finally, I would like to humbly suggest the example of Benedict XVI, who did

more than anyone else in the Church to combat sexual abuse by clergy. Pastorally: he met victims of abuse everywhere, and his [powerful letter to the Church in Ireland](#) on 19 March 2010 should be revisited and reflected upon. Canonically: he introduced stricter rules to punish and prevent these crimes. Theologically: he clarified the roots of this sad phenomenon (see the [notes written for the 2019 Summit on Sexual Abuse](#) convened by Pope Francis).

When Pope Benedict was accused of covering up a paedophile priest at the beginning of 2022, just a few months before his death, he responded with an 82-page memoir clarifying all his actions, as well as with a [letter to Catholics in Munich and Freising](#) on 8 February. In other words, he chose clarity and transparency, fully aware of the seriousness of sexual abuse committed by clergy and its impact on the Church's mission.

Can we hope that Pope Leo XIV will follow the same path for the good of the Church?