

[News](#)



The Peruvian bishops' conference announced Aug. 14 that Luis Fernando Figari, the controversial lay founder of Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, accused of sexual and psychological abuse, was expelled by the Vatican from the lay movement he established. (OSV News/Courtesy of Peruvian bishops' conference)



by Brian Fraga

Staff Reporter

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

October 3, 2024

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Harsh. Uncharitable. Abusive.

Alejandro Bermúdez acknowledges that those are accusations some critics have leveled against him about how he comports himself on social media, especially on X, the platform previously known as Twitter.

But even while acknowledging that he has sometimes been confrontational, Bermúdez told listeners during a Spanish-language [video](#) he posted Sept. 26 on Facebook that he had not done anything wrong because he was "telling the truth."

"I think that behind all this there are people who simply hate my community," he said in a Sept. 28 [thread on X](#) that provided an English translation of his remarks.

Bermúdez, 63, a Peruvian Catholic journalist and combative conservative media influencer, told his side of the story during the 24-minute Facebook video, which he posted a day after [Pope Francis expelled him from the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae](#), a lay-led Catholic movement based in Peru.

Contacted by National Catholic Reporter, Bermúdez declined to comment, adding via email: "As I stated in my X post, I am a journalist. I make questions, I don't answer them. You can quote what I have already written."

Bermúdez was one of 10 people expelled, among them a bishop and a priest, from the Sodalitium, the Peruvian bishops' conference announced on Sept. 25 in a [statement](#) from the Vatican embassy posted on the conference's website.

The Vatican statement said that an investigation had uncovered abuses within the troubled movement, "including with sadism and violence," as well as abuses pertaining to spiritual care, exercise of authority and financial management.

Advertisement

Bermúdez hosted Spanish-language programs on the Alabama-based Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) and sat on the board of several Catholic groups, including the Fellowship of Catholic University Students in Denver. Bermúdez said he currently assists as a contractor with [CatholicVote](#), a U.S. right-wing political nonprofit.

Until [his departure from EWTN](#) in December 2022, Bermúdez had served as executive director of the Colorado-based Catholic News Agency since its founding in 2004, as well as the ACI Group, which EWTN acquired in 2014.

The expulsions followed the pope's decision in August to expel the Sodalitium's founder, Luis Figari, after an investigation found that he had engaged in physical, psychological and sexual violence against recruits, including minors. Figari had founded the movement in Peru in 1971.

In Bermúdez's case, he was reportedly found to have committed "abuse in the exercise of the apostolate of journalism" as a member of the Sodalitium, according to the Vatican embassy's statement. In his video, Bermúdez bristled at the grounds for his dismissal.

"If bad journalism was a canonical crime, then all of my accusers should be charged, and probably many others," Bermúdez said during the video in which he defended his actions and criticized his detractors while questioning the motives behind the Vatican's investigation.

'Obedience was the backbone of the Sodalitium, but the only person that didn't apply to was Alejandro,' said former member Oscar Osterling.

[Tweet this](#)

Bermúdez's response did not surprise Catholic journalists, media professionals and former Sodalitium members who say that over the years they have been on the receiving end of Bermúdez's angry outbursts, in person and online.

"He's under no obedience now that he's not in the Sodalitium anymore. So he's like a sniper; he can just say whatever he wants, and he's doing it," said Oscar Osterling, a former member of the Sodalitium.

Osterling, a former member of a Sodalitium regional council in Peru, told NCR that in 2007, members wanted to remove Bermúdez from the community because of his behavior. However, Osterling said the Sodalitium lacked the protocols necessary to expel him.

"Nobody could tell him anything at all, because of his very aggressive personality and angry behavior," Osterling said. "Obedience was the backbone of the Sodalitium, but the only person that didn't apply to was Alejandro."

Appointed director of the Spanish-language news agency ACI Prensa in 1987, Bermúdez made a name for himself in Catholic media. Under his leadership, ACI Prensa expanded its global footprint with news agencies in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German and English.

Bermúdez was a frequent contributor to Catholic news outlets in the United States, and hosted several Spanish-language programs on EWTN's radio broadcasts. But even while cultivating an active career in Catholic journalism, those who knew him say he could be overly combative with media colleagues. He especially did not take kindly to those who criticized him or his news agencies.



A screenshot from the 24-minute Facebook video that Peruvian Catholic journalist Alejandro Bermúdez posted Sept. 26, a day after Pope Francis expelled him from the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, a lay-led Catholic movement based in Peru (NCR

screenshot)

In April 2018, according to [testimony provided to the Vatican](#) during its investigation into the Sodalitium, Bermúdez sent an angry email to the Catholic journalist and papal biographer [Austen Ivereigh](#) after Ivereigh had taken to Twitter to criticize an article in Catholic News Agency. Ivereigh posted a screenshot from the email, in which Bermúdez reportedly wrote: "If you attack CNA I will make you pay. Period. Check your Twitter account."

Bermúdez also lashed out on social media against Catholic author Dawn Eden Goldstein after she criticized articles in Catholic News Agency. Following criticisms that she posted on Twitter in April 2019, Bermúdez responded in part by accusing Eden of being a drug user.

Ivereigh and Goldstein submitted written testimonies to the Vatican, which Bermúdez mentioned in his video statement. He accused Goldstein of having "an obsessive and inexplicable animus" against him. He said Ivereigh had a "particular loathing" for EWTN, Bermúdez's former employer.

"He's lashing out in all directions," said Goldstein, who is also a canon lawyer. She told NCR that the Vatican's decision to eject Bermúdez from the Sodalitium signals a new willingness to take allegations of workplace abuse seriously as grounds for ecclesial sanctioning.

"Something historic is happening here," Goldstein said. "The Catholic Church, from the top down, has said that workplace abuse is not acceptable, and that if you're abusing people in the workplace, while you may not be excommunicated, you will certainly be removed from a position of spiritual authority, which is what being part of a lay movement or religious movement is about.

"The Vatican is calling for a me-too moment that simply hasn't happened yet," Goldstein added. "I think it's absolutely stunning that Pope Francis has done this from the church's highest levels, to say that this is a conversation that we need to have."

While the Vatican took action against the Sodalitium, the Denver Archdiocese — where Bermúdez and other expelled members live — [issued a statement](#) defending Bermúdez as someone who had served "faithfully and with distinction" in the

archdiocese. The statements characterized the accusations against the expelled members as "decades-old allegations in South America."

"This news is inconsistent with our longstanding experience of the men who have served within the Archdiocese of Denver," the statement said.

While acknowledging that he has a 'volatile, impatient temperament,' Bermúdez said the allegations that he had threatened or intimidated subordinates were false, misunderstandings or wild exaggerations.

[Tweet this](#)

Osterling said he has written to the Denver Archdiocese, but received no response, offering to inform them in detail of the allegations against Bermúdez and the other expelled Sodalitium members.

"It seemed to me from their statement that the archdiocese knows nothing about the Sodalitium and that they know nothing about the cases, which are pretty bad," Osterling said.

In his video statement, Bermúdez admitted that he was accused of being a "boss from hell." While acknowledging that he has a "volatile, impatient temperament," Bermúdez said the allegations that he had threatened or intimidated subordinates were false, misunderstandings or wild exaggerations.

"I have had many employees and co-workers in more than three decades as a journalist, the vast majority testify to my professional integrity," Bermúdez said.

A journalist who worked at Catholic News Agency while Bermúdez was executive director there told NCR that he harassed and made demeaning comments about them, and that he demanded that staff be available at all hours of the day, even when on vacation.

"I just wanted to do my job and do the best journalism I could," said the journalist, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they did not want to incur Bermúdez's wrath online.

"He thinks he's done nothing wrong, and that's absolutely terrifying to me," the journalist said.

In his statement, Bermúdez also identifies Christopher White, NCR's Vatican correspondent, as one of his accusers. While White has previously written about Bermúdez and the Sodalitium in his capacity as a journalist, he did not participate as a witness in the Vatican's investigation.

Bermúdez said in his video statement that, despite his expulsion from the community, he would live the rest of his life as a consecrated "Sodalit." He also vowed to continue producing his Spanish-language podcast and maintain his presence on social media.

Said Bermúdez, "I have more ambitious apostolic plans on media."

A version of this story appeared in the **Oct. 25-Nov. 7, 2024** print issue under the headline: Conservative journalist bristles at dismissal from lay Catholic movement.