

# JOSE ENRIQUE STECK'S ROOM

## Here he was a victim of Ecclesial sexual violence

I met the Sodalitium of Christian Life at the age of 12, when I was in sixth grade. They came to my school to teach the Religion course. They presented themselves as the people who knew what was best for us and who understood the rebellion against our parents from the perspective of what they called “God's Plan”, a plan that they would lead us to know and that we did not have option to reject because, otherwise, our life on Earth would be terrible. Little by little they selected us and concentrated on those that the founder Luis Fernando Figari indicated. Many years later we found out that they filmed us at school and took the videos to him so he could choose the boys he was interested in.

I was a victim of physical, psychological, spiritual (from several Sodalitium leaders) and sexual violence (from Sodalitium's number 2 leader, Germán Doig, who died in 2001, a year after my complaints).

### A NOISY CHILDHOOD

My parents were very famous. My father was the owner of Gente magazine and my mother was the best-known model, having been Miss Peru Playa.

My parents' world was too noisy, superficial and artificial for me. I never felt part of it and, having the same name as my father, I always felt like “the son of”, which led me to a constant internal struggle to find my own identity throughout my childhood and adolescence, even until I was 30 or further.

From a very young age, I felt that I didn't fit in either at home or at my school, my two worlds. I was neglected at home, in the care of nannies and maids, with a workaholic father and a mother who slept until lunchtime and then left the house until nightfall.

They divorced when I was 8 years old and that greatly affected my emotional stability. I was a victim of bullying at school and I didn't like fighting or sports. My refuge was reading and writing. That's how I was alone in charge of my school's wall newspaper for almost all of high school.

## HE WHO OBEYS DOES NOT MAKE A MISTAKE

When I was between 15 and 16 years old, my spiritual director, Germán Doig, asked me to help him in the Vida y Esperanza publishing house, a Sodalitium company. Since my father was a well-known journalist and Doig knew that I wanted to study Communication Sciences, according to him, he was helping me discern my vocation, to see if that was really my path or if I should pursue a life of consecration in the communities of the Sodalitium.

One afternoon, when I was 16, he told me that, since I had expressed my desire to live in his communities, as my spiritual director, it was his duty to examine that I met the physical, psychological and spiritual conditions to face the rigors of life in community. One of the Sodalites' slogans was "half monks, half soldiers," so their training sought to make us the best of those two worlds to re-evangelize the planet from Latin America. Without my parents' permission, as was the case there, he subjected me to different psychological tests over the years (without being a psychologist). He read me the results, always highlighting that I had problems with the father figure and that, therefore, I was going to have problems with authority. To do this, the solution was for him to be obedient without questioning anything, since in the Sodalitium one of the common phrases was "he who obeys does not make mistakes" and they affirmed that the original sin of Adam and Eve was a sin of disobedience and for him all evil entered creation.

Along those lines, I also had to review my physical conditions. He told me that there was a lot of exercise in the communities and that he knew that I was not good at sports, so I had to check if my body was ready for the efforts to which they would subject me. He locked the door to his office and asked me to strip to my underwear. There was no one else outside. He ran his hands over different parts of my body to, according to him, make sure my muscles were in the necessary condition. I don't remember when I felt discomfort and why it stopped, but I do remember that, after that sensation occurred to me, I felt guilty for having let myself be carried away by a few seconds of weakness, believing that something bad or strange was happening, since He was my spiritual father, the direct representative of the founder of the Sodalitium, both holy men, and I trusted them completely. Noticing my discomfort, he asked me to get dressed and we continued working as if nothing had happened. After that incident, his relationship with me was colder and more distant even though he remained my spiritual director until shortly before I turned 18 and began living in the community.

## BREAK THE SILENCE

Once in the community, there were a series of acts of subjugation of the will through physical and psychological violence that I denounced in considerable detail in my six columns in 2000, in what constituted the first public complaint about the abuses in the Sodalitium, opening this opened the door to hundreds of more complaints over the following years and the Sodalitium case became one of the three most important in the contemporary history of the Catholic Church in Latin America, along with that of Fernando Karadima (Chile) and Marcial Maciel and the Legionaries of Christ (Mexico).

Currently, there are even reports from the Sodalitium itself, publicly acknowledging the existence of 66 victims of different types of violence. One of them is me. The Vatican has also publicly recognized me as a victim and protected witness in an investigation against the Sodalitium that remains open.

## **FACING TRAUMA**

It was only in the year 2000, after I publicly denounced some of the abuses I suffered in the Sodalitium, that I began to be aware of what happened to me and process it.

Until about 3 years ago I accepted the sexual assault and grooming that I suffered for years, before that I said that it had only been an attempt.

In 2010, the first reports of sexual assault by Germán Doig were made public and the victims' narrative was the same as mine, only in some cases it involved penetration. In my case, since I had not reached that point, I denied that I had been a victim of sexual violence, but over time I understood that I had.

It has been difficult for me to integrate into society in every sense. I have not achieved any consistency in my work, in addition to the fact that after my complaints I have been and continue to be persecuted, harassed, defamed, threatened and stigmatized.

Emotionally, I have many problems with the feeling of abandonment, distrust and insecurity.

I am an introvert, I have social anxiety and a lot of fear of meeting new people and establishing friendships. I suffer from insomnia, I have been diagnosed with depression and I was on medication for a couple of years (2016-2017). I have had very fluctuating friendships and love relationships and three divorces before I was 40 years old.

I don't feel part of any group and they always see me as the strange one, the different one.

It was only four years ago (at 50) that I was able to access specialized trauma therapy.

Later, through my contact with other survivors around the world, I was able to understand the magnitude of the damage I had suffered and continue to suffer.

I continue with weekly therapy sessions and sometimes I feel like I am damaged beyond repair, even though I recognize notable progress in recent years. But the process of fighting to heal often confronts me with new wounds and I feel that the advances and setbacks are cyclical.

From a very young age, I remember having suicidal thoughts and with the violence in my life that has had peaks that have brought me very close to trying. I'm still struggling with that.

## **WHO DID I BECOME**

Since I reported, in 2000, I felt that I had to do something for others with my pain and that is how I know that I have achieved and continue to achieve many important things in this fight.

For the moment, I have decided to dedicate myself 100% to activism. For example, the law changed in 2018 and there is no longer a statute of limitations for the crime. I also managed to commit to a congressional candidate who was elected, that the Congress of the Republic of Peru open the Investigative Commission on Sexual Abuse against Minors in Organizations, which included The Sodalitium.

This commission was a very important milestone and, despite the fact that its final report of more than 1,300 pages could not be brought to debate in the Plenary due to pressure from the political partners of the Sodalitium in Congress, I finally managed to get another congresswoman to unarchive it and make it public.

The Vatican is also investigating the case and this year has taken some measures, such as requesting the early resignation of the former archbishop of Tumbes and Piura, José Antonio Eguren, a member of the founding generation of The Sodalitium, and the expulsion of the founder of The Sodalitium, Luis Fernando Figari. Both were mentioned in my complaints from 2000, the first as my direct psychological abuser. Also this year, the Vatican ordered silence in networks and media to a traditionalist far-right Spanish priest who was very famous for having attacked me on social media.

Today I am founding president of the Peru Survivors Network and co-founding vice president of the Latin American and Caribbean Brave Movement.

## **WHY SHOULD THEY LISTEN TO THE DEMANDS OF THE SURVIVORS**

I have not gotten justice or healing for myself and at this point I have already given up on them.

The Peruvian State has become an agent of permanent secondary victimization. The formal complaint in 2017 by five survivors of the sect, including me, has not progressed due to pressure from the political and economic partners of the Sodalitium. We could not report sexual violence because the statute of limitations expired until 2018, so we had to do so for three other crimes (psychological harm, mental kidnapping, and illicit association to commit a crime).

The complaint has been filed, unfiled, passed from prosecutor's office to prosecutor's office and from court to court and there is not a single person reported despite the fact that the organization itself has publicly accepted the abuses and the existence of victims and aggressors.

Victims are not taken seriously by the State, which means that almost no one wants to report it and that the aggressors remain unpunished and encouraged to continue with their crimes. This also leads to the concealers and associates of the aggressors and, in this specific case, of The Sodalitium, questioning our complaints and us being stigmatized. Victims and survivors are accused, attacked, excluded from work, removed from social life and our mental health is used as a weapon against us.

That is why governments must listen to us, because the State becomes a second aggressor and many times worse than the first.



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