Ex-Priest Apologizes for Seducing Teen-Ager

Religion: He expresses remorse for the 'evil of the past.' The woman, now 29, appears with him at a news conference.

By PATT MORRISON
TOM BANGHALL

Illustrated by the lights of a dozen news cameras, a former Roman Catholic priest apologized publicly Thursday to the woman he had seduced 10 years ago, when she was his teenage parishioner.

At another news conference Thursday, Archbishop Roger Mahony said the responsibility for apologies rests on 'priests who misled their vows of priestly celibacy, not on the archdiocese, which supervised the seven and advised one of them to stay out of the United States for several years after the scandal broke.

The apology that was issued Thursday came from Santiago (Henry) Tamayo, who read belligerently from his statement to the woman, Rita Milia, at his right and struggled to keep back tears.

'I had to go public and tell the whole truth. I knew that a cheap abortion would not undo the evil of the past,' said Tamayo.

'I had her full trust and confidence, yet I got sexually involved with Rita,' he said. 'With her advice, I was frightened and above all I wanted to remain a Roman Catholic priest. So I stayed in hiding abroad for years,' until, under stress and after suffering several strokes, 'I could no longer stand it.'

The woman, now 29, appeared with him at a news conference.

'The apology that was issued Thursday came from Santiago (Henry) Tamayo, who read belligerently from his statement to the woman, Rita Milia, at his right and struggled to keep back tears.

'I had to go public and tell the whole truth. I knew that a cheap abortion would not undo the evil of the past,' said Tamayo.

'I had her full trust and confidence, yet I got sexually involved with Rita,' he said. 'With her advice, I was frightened and above all I wanted to remain a Roman Catholic priest. So I stayed in hiding abroad for years,' until, under stress and after suffering several strokes, 'I could no longer stand it.'

Ex-priest Santiago (Henry) Tamayo reads statement apologizing to former parishioner Rita Milia, left.

Allred said one is still evaluating the documents Tamayo provided to determine if legal options are still open to Milia.

'To me it smacked of a cover-up,' said Allred. 'What else would you call it?'

Mahony answered questions at a press conference announcing the first issue of a Spanish-language church newspaper, Vida Nueva, mailed to 110,000 households.

He said he did not know what had gone on before he came to the archdiocese in 1985, 'but we do not advise priests to file their responsibility. We advise them to get their legal counsel and to work closely with their attorneys.'

The church, he said, is always 'very grieved when anyone in consecrated life breaks their vow,' but 'meaningful' apologies must come from 'the people who did the actions.'

'Asked about the archdiocese's advice that Tamayo stay in the Philippines, he said, 'I don't think it was a matter of cover-up, precisely.'

Milia had told The Times she had done Tamayo's bidding—going to his family in the Philippines to give birth—to protect the priests and the church. The Cesar delivery at Tamayo's brush-up clinic was complicated by high blood pressure and eclampsia.

'I almost died protecting their reputation...I wanted to do things quietly. If their reputation was hurt, it was their fault for not taking care of things,' Milia said Thursday. 'We think it is the height of hypocrisy for the church to preach on the family values, but on the other hand to take an active role in assisting priests who abuse their position of trust.'

Tamayo also thanked his former parishioners in several South Bay churches, some of whom contributed to a defense fund before he left the country in 1984, he said.

'I feel much better,' he said after his apology, 'I wish all my brother priests will come forward and feel as I do.'

Times staff writer John Dart contributed to this story.