

Press Release:

Landmark RICO \$400 million Lawsuit Against Vatican-Linked U.S. Entities

A historic \$400 million civil lawsuit was filed, April 2, 2025, in the Superior Court of California under the title Seryani v. The Holy See and Affiliates. The Amended Complaint alleges a far-reaching pattern of financial misconduct, fraudulent inducement, and misuse of charitable nonprofit status by U.S.-based Catholic entities operating under Vatican direction.

The focus of the complaint is the Los Angeles-based Western Lieutenancy of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, the archbishop of LA , Nevada-based Queen of Peace Foundation and the Bishop of San Bernardino.

The case presents what may be the most extensive and well-documented RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act) action ever brought against entities tied to the Vatican. The complaint includes eleven causes of action, 45 supporting exhibits, multiple sworn declarations, and substantial case and statutory authority. Four American defendants: Margaret Roman, Rosa Cumare, Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomes and Cardinal Roger Mahoney, are listed as well.

At the heart of the case is Plaintiff Benjamin Seryani, who was recruited by the Patriarch of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem for this position. Seryani was given an ecclesiastical appointment to manage and oversee all aspects of the final construction and establishment of the American University of Madaba (AUM) — a project presented as Vatican-backed and fully funded. The suit claims that Seryani invested years of labor and more than \$31 million in services for the project. When the time came for the Vatican to pay Seryani for his investment and services, he was told that he would need to sign documents to authorize an international money laundering scheme involving the Vatican Bank. When he refused to participate, he was abandoned, defamed, and cut out of the enterprise.

The 1,384 complaint (including documents and exhibits) reveals the transnational enterprise involving religious nonprofits based in California, offshore financial intermediaries, and ecclesiastical officials operating under Vatican governance. It accuses the involved entities of using their religious authority and tax-exempt status to mask private enrichment, donor deception, and the rerouting of funds through shell organizations and unregulated foreign bank accounts.

While no criminal charges have been filed, the civil allegations carry immense legal and moral weight — challenging, for the first time in decades, the financial integrity of the Vatican's U.S.-based operations and their oversight of charitable institutions.

The case seeks compensatory, punitive, and treble damages, as well as injunctive relief and declaratory rulings. It also signals the potential for regulatory scrutiny from the California Attorney General, IRS, and other oversight bodies responsible for the governance of nonprofit institutions.

Attached is a PDF file of the complaint

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