

Carson woman sues bishop over TV remarks

By Dan Weikel
Staff writer

A Carson woman who claims she was seduced by seven Catholic priests sued a Los Angeles bishop Thursday, alleging he defamed her by suggesting on television she was "sexually loose" with altar boys.

The lawsuit, which seeks \$6 million in damages and names Bishop Juan A. Arzube, is the second Rita Milla, 22, has filed against the Roman Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles during the past four weeks.

"It's the old strategy of attacking the rape victim's reputation through insinuation, slurs and innuendo, and it is utterly reprehensible that the

(Catholic) church would go to such lengths," said Gloria Allred, Milla's attorney.

Allred, known for her civil rights and feminist cases, announced the latest lawsuit at a news conference at the steps of the archdiocese headquarters in Los Angeles. Its red brick office building, surrounded by a Catholic church, Loyola Law School and other Catholic facilities, is at the hub of the church's bureaucracy in the county.

The suit was prompted by remarks made by Arzube during an interview with KMEX-TV reporter Jorge Ramos on Feb. 16. The broadcast was about her initial lawsuit and included the Catholic

Church's first reponse to Milla's allegations.

The case, filed Feb. 8, charges that she had a baby by one of the priests who allegedly seduced her while she was a teen-age parishioner at St. Philomena Church in Carson. It seeks child support for the 16-month-old infant and \$21 million in damages for her and her mother, also named Rita.

According to a transcript of the interview, Arzube told Ramos that someone called him who said he knew one of the priests named in the first case. The bishop claimed on the air the man said: "I, who know this priest, understand that this cannot be true. This girl has

had very bad actions even with altar boys. She is a person of bad reputation."

Arzube added, "Nevertheless, for me, this is not the subject. One is dealing here not with angels, divine beings, (but) humans. If they have acted badly, they have acted badly and will be punished.

"... We should understand that if under Christ's vigilance, it was possible that 11 of the 12 apostles should behave badly, I do not believe that at the present there is that percentage of bad priests in the world."

Although Arzube discussed Milla's allegations with KMEX-TV, he
Defamation / A11

Defamation

From page A1

refused to talk to *The Daily Breeze* about it. When reached at his home in Los Angeles, he said, "No comment. Goodbye."

Earlier, and for the benefit of television cameras from local stations, a worker from Allred's law office tried to serve Arzube with Milla's second lawsuit. But being close to noon, she was told the bishop was "out to lunch."

Outside the archdiocese offices, Milla's parents told reporters they were shocked as they watched the interview with Arzube on Channel 34.

"I felt terrible," Mrs. Milla said. "I feel he has lied and said this for nothing. It just is not true."

Family members said they no longer attend St. Philomena Church, and the younger Milla said, "I've just lost faith in both the church and God."

Milla's lawsuit further alleges that Arzube spoke with "reckless disregard" for the truth and that his statements were authorized by the church.

The purported seductions began six years ago when Milla was 16 years old, and eventually involved

at least seven priests, including the Rev. Santiago Tamayo of St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Wilmington, the original lawsuit says.

In January 1982, Milla claimed to have had sexual intercourse with the Rev. Valentine Tugade and the Rev. Henry Caboang that allegedly resulted in her pregnancy.

She claims that when she informed Tamayo she was pregnant, he suggested an abortion. Later, she charged, he arranged to send her to the Philippines where she had her baby and almost died during childbirth.