NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Hummes now at the bat on laicizations

Thomas C. Fox | Aug. 3, 2009 NCR Today

The letter below, to be published in the Association of Chicago Priests' publication, contains an interesting take on the Vatican's approach to non-laicized priests.

The letter, by John Horan, follows:

Eminence Claudio Cardinal Hummes, O.S.F.

Dear Cardinal Hummes:

> Congratulations on the new responsibility you have just taken on. This past April, Pope Benedict XVI granted you the power to dismiss from the priesthood and release from the obligation of celibacy, priests who are living with women, who have abandoned their ministry for more than five years or who have engaged in seriously scandalous behavior. I am one of those you will be dismissing ? not for the scandal part but for the woman part.
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> It is a big job you have taken on. World wide, there are many thousands of us and, to add to the challenge, most bishops have no idea who or where we are. We have been on the ?pay no mind? list for such a long time that tracking us down will be quite a headache.
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> I have seen your picture on Wikepedia. You seem like a kind man and your vitae demonstrates that you have Doctor of the Church quality brains. You clearly have some iron in your soul as demonstrated by your advocacy for homeless, indigenous people and your stance against the dictatorship in Brazil. But you have been away from parish work for a long time and prolonged exposure to the curia can cause cataracts. I am appealing to your kindness, brains and iron.
>
> First off, understand that this project is a matter of paperwork, a re-organizing of files in cabinets, a clearing of the priesthood balance sheet. It has nothing to do with protecting the good of the church, avoiding scandal or getting things right in the eyes of God. God knows the Catholic Church has a good deal of work in those areas, but releasing thousands of us from the obligation of celibacy should be about around 10,000th on the Vatican to do list.
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> Secondly, some historical context needs to be established. You may not realize it, but the Vatican has zig-zagged for years about laicizations. Under Paul VI when large numbers were leaving, there was a fairly straightforward, but slow process. John Paul II pursued a much harder line, apparently in the belief that he could stem the tide by making laicizations virtually impossible. It didn't work. The unintended consequence was to diminish the credibility of the process. In his later years, he switched to a strategy wherein a petitioner had to lie, and state that he never really had a vocation at all. Most of us could say that we had a genuine vocation to priesthood, but not to celibacy. Now, Pope Benedict has done a complete about face. Forgive us if we are a little confused but the Vatican has changed its strategies like

most of us change socks.

I left the Vatican priesthood during the late 1980?s when the church was NOT granting formal dispensations from the obligation of celibacy. During my ?exit interview? with Cardinal Bernardin he said that I could apply for a dispensation, but it would not be granted until I was much, much older. I remarked that the Vatican was playing hardball. He agreed, but his eyes told me that he had no stomach for such silly tactics. (By the way, what SHOULD be on the Vatican ?To Do? list is to put Joe Bernardin on the canonization track.)

So, let?s be clear. In the 1980?s the Vatican would not grant that which was asked for and now, 20 years later, will take that which has not been offered. In light of this context, please be careful about tossing out phrases like ?abandon our ministry.? This revisionist bit of history is a lie, pure and simple.

I am no ecclesiastical prognosticator, but I have to believe that you are on anyone?s short list for Pope. The Congregation for Clergy is a big job and this chance to clean up the sacerdotal balance sheet is litmus test of the first degree. But you should know that it is only important in Vatican circles and in diocesan offices. Everywhere else, Catholics find it funny and upon deeper reflection, really quite infuriating.

I?ll give you an example. My wife and I have been in a civil marriage for the last 19 years. We couldn?t get married in the Catholic Church because I didn?t have a dispensation the Vatican wouldn?t give. Our marriage has been full of consensual sex. When my wife found out that our sex, in the eyes of the Vatican, was causing serious scandal, she laughed right out loud. ?Our lawn is a scandal?, she said. ?Our consensual sex is a sacrament.?

I fear most women married to ex-priests will not, like my wife, find this particularly funny. They will instead fume and wonder out loud why the Holy See has such a hard time seeing real scandal and such an easy time manufacturing fake scandals.

This notion that our church will become ?leaner and purer? are concepts best applied to cuts of meat and not the Church of Jesus. Cardinal Hummes ? if your kindness, brains and iron could only understand how absurd this all is to all of us, if only you could muster up a real giggle about these forced dispensations, you would surely make a terrific Pope.

So, to make things easier for you, here is my address; 1528 West Glenlake, Chicago IL 60660. I would be happy to be dispensed from the Vatican?s notion of priesthood and released from the obligation of celibacy. I wonder, will you send us some sort of note? My wife and I would like to know when the deal is sealed. I wonder if you will let our home parish know? My home parish is St. Gertrude on the north side of Chicago. I think you would be surprised by their reaction. Talk about a scandal! I would love if there was a way you could send someone from the Archdiocesan staff to deliver the dispensation at my place of work. I have started two schools on Chicago?s West Side. Our students are wonderful and the place is full of beatitudes. You would be proud of the work we ?non-dispensed? ex-priests do. I am sure you would never use the phrase ?abandon our ministry? again.

Good luck! You have an uphill battle ahead of you. I think Melchizedek is right, but I will encourage other ex Vatican priests to ask for their dispensations and to send you a note expressing their views, all the same. It will make for some exciting reading.

Best Wishes,

John Horan

Ordained; May 13, 1981
Left the Vatican Priesthood; June 10, 1988
Was civilly married and began consensual sex; October 27, 1990

For those of you who would like to drop Cardinal Hummes a line, here is his contact information:
His Eminence Claudio Cardinal Hummes, O.S.F.

Official Web Site [1]:

Mailing Address: Palazzo delle Congregazioni, 00193 Roma, Piazza Pio XII, 3 Telephone: 06.69.88.41.51 Fax: 06.69.88.48.45

Click here [2] for more information about this new responsibility for Cardinal Hummes.

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