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Austrian bishops cheerful after ad limina visits

Dennis Coday | Feb. 5, 2014 NCR Today

In the next day or two we will carry a story from the incomparable Vienna-based journalist Christa Pongratz-Lippitt about Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schönborn experience with Pope Francis last month during the Austrian bishops ?ad limina,? the visits all bishops must have with the pope every five years.

Here?s a taste of the story:

> ?It is fascinating to see how Pope Francis is encouraging, reviving and renewing the church. Our meeting with him was an excellent lesson on how to live the Gospel today,? Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna said after a 90-minute audience with the pope ?

That?s a pretty cheery assessment, especially given the recent frosty relationship between the Vatican and the Austrian episcopacy.

The Vatican has been upset with the rebellious the Austrian Priests? Initiative, which has called for the ordination of married men and women, among other things. The initiative?s 2011 "Call to Disobedience" so riled Pope Benedict XVI that he used the Chrism Mass -- the Mass at which sacramental oils are blessed and priests traditional renew their promises of fidelity -- to call them out.

Without specifying the country, Benedict said priests from a European nation had issued a call for disobedience of church teaching, specifically regarding the question of women's ordination.

Benedict asked, "Is disobedience a path of renewal for the church?"

Perhaps such campaigns are motivated by concern for the church, he said, and believe that "the slow pace of institutions has to be overcome by drastic measures, in order to open up new paths and bring the church up-to-date."

"But is disobedience really a way to do this?" the pope asked.

True renewal must be based on lives that are radically conformed to Christ and God's will, he said.

The Priests? Initiative (sometimes translated ?pastors? initiative) came up at this year?s ad limina visits including talk from the Vatican about sanctioning the priests involved, according to Bishop Manfred Scheuer of Innsbruck (**h/t to Pray Tell Blog [1]**). ?That [the idea of sanctions] is not gone, but today it is no longer in the foreground,? Scheuer said in an interview with in the Tyroler Tageszeitung [2].

Scheuer says that the word this year from the Congregation for Clergy and from Pope Francis was that the Austrian bishops had to bear responsibility for the situation. Tossing such issues back to the national bishops? conferences seems to be a reoccurring tactic of Francis.

Scheuer, like Schönborn, noticed a change in tone. ?One sees a different style which is more reserved, more respectful, and more alert.?

Scheuer, who has been a priest 33 years and a bishop for 10 years, says that being a bishop is high pressure job. That hasn?t changed under Francis, but he said, ?the pope has brought about a change in atmosphere. One can breathe easier.?

Read more hear. **Bishop Scheuer: ?Since Francis One Can Breathe Easier?[1]**

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