

A Message to “Cancelled” Priests by Archbishop Héctor Aguer



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I am told that this is how they are referred to, with the horrendous adjective that I print as the title of this quasi-letter. In good Spanish, *to cancel* means “to annul,” “to erase from memory,” “to abolish,” “to repeal.” Honestly, I had never heard that this would happen until now. I venture, then, an interpretation.

General Juan Domingo Perón, three times president of Argentina, coined a formula that expresses not only what he himself practiced, with a cynicism difficult to match, during his accidental periods of government, but also a deeply human, ancestral conduct (proper to the “old man,” according to the Apostle Paul) that can be observed in the most diverse political regimes. **The Peronist formula says: “for**

friends, everything; for enemies, not even justice.” It is amazing; Peronism, which has always tried to use religion, has managed to leave its mark on the Catholic Church. Although it is odious after so much time, we should not forget the burning of the oldest and most beautiful churches of Buenos Aires, in June 1955; and the disappearance, in the fire that burned the ecclesiastical curia, of the historical archive—or a good part of it—which gathered documents since the seventeenth century. The police of the regime committed this aberration, with of course the approving nod of Perón.

Whoever is not considered a friend, for example because of doctrinal differences—especially because of disagreement regarding the value and relevance of the ecclesial Tradition—or because of pastoral or political differences (*matters always subject to opinion*) is denied justice; it can then be said that he is *cancelled*. Knowing the doctrinal and pastoral situation that has been officially witnessed in the whole Church in the last years, for about a decade, let’s say, we can think without fear of being wrong, since we are dealing with many notorious cases, that **those who have been won over by relativism or incur in positions alien to Tradition may count on official sympathy: they are *friends*.** Regarding Tradition, we must remember that it is constantly updated, but always the same as itself; it is a living Tradition. **St. Vincent of Lérins explained that language can certainly adapt; one can say things *nove* (in a new way), but one cannot say *nova* (new things), that is, introduce novelties foreign to the immutable Truth.** There are phenomena such as the immanent schism of the German Synod, before which Rome is silent, to the confusion and scandal of faithful Catholics. Where will this path lead? **Synod means something like “to make the way together,” so... where to?**

Thinking about the case of so many cancelled priests, I allow myself to deal with a very painful one, in the diocese of San Rafael (Mendoza, Argentina). The conduct of Bishop Eduardo María Taussig, whom I have always esteemed as a brother and friend, and whom I still esteem today, was incomprehensible when he decreed that—as indicated by the State because of the pandemic, and because we should all prevent

contagion by our behavior—it was *mandatory* to distribute the Holy Eucharist in the hand. On two occasions, in telephone conversations that originated in calls from him, I advised him not to insist on upholding this requirement, which was contrary to the discipline in force in the Church, since the latter allows the faithful to freely receive Communion standing or kneeling, in the hand or in the mouth. But something even worse happened: **the majority of the clergy, who did not accept the bishop's requirement, were sanctioned, thus creating an untenable situation.**

I do not rule out that there was a certain ideological component in the opposition to the episcopal measure; the marches, hostile demonstrations against the bishop's see, and other reactions of the laity are unjustifiable. But I do not understand why Monsignor Eduardo did not try, with serenity and love, to make himself understood; the atmosphere created resembled *odium plebis*, something very painful. The bishop, in a case like this, should suffer it heroically, without weakening his position. Was the initiative to prohibit and oppose something decided by him, or was it indicated or suggested to him *ex auctoritate superiori*? **The situation of force devolved into something very serious: the closing of the Diocesan Seminary, and the dispersion of the numerous men in formation.**

In our country, since the mid-60s of the last century (I indicate an approximate date), **progressivism took over almost all the houses of priestly formation, and “little houses” were created with small groups promoted by some bishops; in them (this is my opinion) an integral formation was not developed;** they were a kind of imitation of the progressive seminaries. **If a bishop managed to exclude his own seminarians from that current, whose harmful fruits are undeniable, and adjusted their formation to the great ecclesial Tradition, he was frowned upon by “officialdom.”** On my part, at the end of the 70s, I was entrusted with the organization of the Diocesan Seminary of San Miguel, of which I was later rector for a decade, paternally supported and accompanied by the first two bishops of that diocese. Cardinal Antonio Quarracino, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, took me from there to

make me Auxiliary Bishop. Being dedicated to priestly formation, I do not know what was thought of me and the seminary I was directing; it was enough for me to have the approval and support of the Bishop. **But there were some cases in which a seminary with a traditional orientation, and to which young people from different parts of the country came, had to suffer from a bad reputation created by the ubiquitous progressivism.**

Returning to San Rafael, **it was not possible that the unjust cancellation of priests and seminarians could continue indefinitely.** I am greatly saddened by the situation of Monsignor Taussig; did he resign on his own initiative, or was the “resignation” imposed on him by the *superior auctoritas*? Can the damage that has been caused be healed soon? What will be the fate of so many good priests who have been cancelled?

I have dwelt on this case—I believe that my memory has not betrayed me in expounding it—because it is close to my thoughts and heart; but I am informed that in the whole Church the phenomenon of priestly cancellation is to be met with. For example, **if a priest wishes to celebrate in Latin, or to use the 1962 Missal, or if in his preaching he deals with themes that the Catholic Church has abandoned (such as themes of spiritual doctrine that should not be neglected), he will most likely be cancelled. He will be left without a normal pastoral office entrusted to him, and he will be deprived of the economic income necessary to lead a decent life; his family, or the faithful who follow him with devotion and gratitude, will have to help him survive. That this should happen in a Church in which (it is said) the value of mercy has been rediscovered is simply scandalous.** It is scandalous that the good bishop of Arecibo, Puerto Rico, Most Rev. Daniel Fernández, was deposed on Wednesday March 9 for defending conscientious objection to the ridiculous “moral obligation” to vaccinate, imposed by the Holy See. I will return to this case in future articles.

The pontificate of **Benedict XVI**, and his decided and wise intention of evangelizing culture and vindicating natural and supernatural Truth, had enthused many priests (including me), but **his**

passing to the status of Pope Emeritus (what a strange thing!) has cast a shadow over the Church, and has opened cracks in it through which many of its members are slipping out. It is well known that similar problems have arisen in the history of the Church; the gaze of faith must be directed to the origins, to the apostolic times, of which we have testimonies in the New Testament. On several occasions, the present Holy Father has invited his listeners to “make a mess” (this is a figurative and familiar expression with which he has especially stirred up young people)—to promote agitation and hubbub, to manifest the situation in which one is living, but to do so noisily, seeking the participation of others and opposing something. But I am sure that you would not be pleased if the “cancelled” priests joined together to “make a mess.” How would you react if that happened?

Now I address myself personally to you, cancelled brother priests, with a word of understanding and consolation. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul began by writing, “Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all consolation (*pasēs paraklēseōs*), who comforts (*parakalōn*) us in tribulation (*thlipsei*)...if the sufferings (*pathēmata*) of Christ abound in us, our consolation (*paraklēsis*) also abounds,” May you, dear brothers, live these words intensely! **Live with fortitude the situation of injustice you are experiencing, free from all indignation and acrimony.** The Apostle teaches us to live joyfully in hope. It may seem excessive to speak of joy and hope in this context, but I do not mean a worldly hope that the temporal situation will change, although this would be a legitimate, human attitude. **I am referring to theological Hope, which connects us with Heaven.**

One of the most beautiful dimensions of Catholic spirituality, which the tradition elaborated from the teaching of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, is the trustful abandonment into the hands of God. The Sulpician school and, in general, French spirituality, passing through St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, reached Blessed Charles de Foucauld, to whom we owe the following prayer:

“Father, I abandon myself to You:
do with me what You will.
Whatever it is, I thank you.
I am ready for anything, I accept everything,
provided that your will be done in me and in all your creatures.
I desire nothing more, Father.
I entrust my soul to you:
I give it to you with all the love of which I am capable.
Because I love you, I need to give myself,
to place myself in your hands without measure,
with infinite trust.
For you are my Father.”

This passive attitude has a wonderful power to change things. Pray for one another; pray also for those who make you suffer. Do it before the Tabernacle, adoring the Lord who is present there. Entrust yourselves filially to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God made Man, Mother of the Church, Mother of each one of us.

What more can I say to you? I am close to you. From my heart, I bless you and I ask you to bless me.