

THE CASE OF CANON N.



AS RECOUNTED BY BISHOP ALOIS C. HUDAL



IN

RÖMISCHE TAGEBÜCHER: LEBENSBEICHTE EINES ALTEN BISCHOFS



Leon J. Podles

Published by The Crossland Foundation, April 11, 2009

© Copyright, Crossland Foundation, 2009

Introduction

I have translated a section of Bishop Alois Hudal's *Römische Tagebücher: Lebensbeichte eines alten Bischofs* (Graz: Leopold Stocker Verlag, 1976) pp. 161-173. Hudal had encountered a priest who had gotten into trouble because of sexual abuse.

Hudal, the head of the German College in Rome during the 1930s and 1940s, is of great historical interest because he tried to reconcile National Socialism and Roman Catholicism.¹ This bizarre attempt, unappreciated both by the Nazis and by the Vatican, was motivated by a mixture of pan-German nationalism, anti-Semitism, anti-Communism, opportunism, and egotism (with the last element predominating). Hudal assisted the post-war escape of Nazi criminals, such as Franz Stangl, commandant of the extermination camp at Treblinka, in which a million Jews were gassed and cremated.² Hudal justified the help he gave these murderers because Christianity is a religion of forgiveness, as Judaism is a religion of vengeance (*Talmudhass*) – at least according to Hudal.

After the war the Italian press attacked Hudal for the help he had given to Nazis, and Vatican pressure finally forced Hudal to retire in 1953. In his embittered retirement he wrote *Römische Tagebücher: Lebensbeichte eines alten Bischofs* (*Roman Dairy: The Life Confessions*

¹ There is an extensive discussion of Hudal in Peter Godman's *Hitler and the Vatican: Inside the Secret Archives That Reveal the New Story of the Nazis and the Church* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

² Hudal's role in the escape of Nazi murderers from justice is discussed in Gerald Steinacher's *Nazis auf der Flucht: Wie Kriegsverbrecher über Italien nach Übersee Entkamen* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2009). The Red Cross document that indicates that Stangl's address in Rome was Hudal's address is reproduced on page 132. Stangl describes his meeting with Hudal in Gitta Sereny's *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* (1974. New York: Vintage Books, 1983) p. 289.

of an Old Bishop). In the chapter “Arme Brüder,” from which this selection is taken, Hudal recounted stories of people in trouble who came to him for help. There is no particular reason to doubt the veracity of these stories, but Hudal’s rhetorical purpose is to show himself a sympathetic person whom people seek out for help because they know he is the type of human being who will help. Thereby Hudal seeks to justify the help he gave to Nazi war criminals to enable them to escape justice.

Hudal is careful to conceal particulars of Canon N. We may assume he was from a German-speaking country. Hudal wrote his book in the 1950s. Canon N. seems to have been ordained around 1900. The case of N. had been decided long ago, and N. had lived his double life for twenty years, so the story seems to belong to the first third of the twentieth century.

When the Vatican laicized N., it still held him to the requirement of celibacy. In the 1950s Rev. Gerald Fitzgerald, founder of the Servants of the Paraclete, criticized this policy, and it was changed, so that now priests and religious who are returned to the lay state also receive permission to marry. However Hudal does not seem to realize that this permission would be irrelevant to Canon N., whose sexual desires were exclusively homosexual.

Also note the assumption of the existence of hereditary mental problems. This assumption is based on a biological determinism that was popular in many circles in the first half of the twentieth century (and later), but was somewhat contaminated by its use by the Nazis. The Church was suspicious of this concept for many reasons. Note also the general doubts that Hudal has about celibacy, although his sympathy for a national church and fear that celibacy isolates the priest from the blood of the nation has somewhat of a Nazi tinge.

Canon N.

I encountered a totally different type of human being in the poor brother of a foundation of canons, who because of repeated misconduct (179) was declared forfeit of all clerical rights by the Holy Office, the highest moral authority of the Roman Church, without being freed from the duties of this status in regard to celibacy. Years had passed since this decision. He made himself sick to death about it. He was sent from one monastery to another. Everywhere the first question of his brothers was, Why as a cleric doesn't he say mass? Marked with the sign of Cain, he went from place to place, fleeing a world that had no love or kind word for him. On the contrary, as soon as they learned of his past and of his errors, they judged and damned him again. Truly a poor brother!

The tragedy of this hard fate led me to speak up for a revision of the whole ecclesiastical process of handling cases and especially the judgment at the highest level. My suggestion was to free him from all priestly activities and duties and to prepare for him the way to a reasonable middle-class occupation.

I had no success, although this pitiable priestly penitent acknowledged his guilt with a flood of tears and a reasonable program of life as a layman would perhaps have saved him. This unhappy man, whose final fate deeply moved me for years and always came to the surface of my memory, belonged to a certain foundation of canons, whose essential purpose had become difficult in our world with its urgent social questions. They occupied themselves with the care of souls like many other old orders, which had become untrue to their original purpose for which they were founded, because secular priests are in the first place called to pastoral work. In any case these half-cloistered, half-secular minded men, lived a life unperturbed by earthly cares,

with which fathers of families and single people were oppressed in the factories of industrial cities.

Everything from getting out of bed to the obligatory pious exercises that broke the monotony of life is ordered according to a good rule. These men could fall into heaven from this vale of tears, if only from time to time the all-too-human did not disturb their rest. Like conservators in a museum of archeology they watched over immense art treasures of past centuries. The Roman Curia only rarely intervened with reforms, when for example offenses became too great or too well-known. The Curia did not easily discard outdated monastic forms, out of tender consideration for the usually canonized founders and dragged through the centuries outlived, rotten things, like an old woman who separate herself from the household junk of her youth. Only secular history from time to time mercilessly intervenes with its destructive and constructive power and destroys what competent authorities would neither preserve nor modernize.

The family history of this poor brother was strange enough. Canon N. came from a decayed family. The father was disposed to melancholy and sensuality. The parents' marriage broke up early on, because, among other things, the mother, advised by a pious confessor, from fear of danger to life in the case of a third birth, denied or at least discouraged the marital act so that her husband refrained from it, only soon to have an affair with an unmarried person, with whom he, over 60 years old, fathered children who embraced him with warm love and graced the evening of his life. He died, without being able to be reconciled to his first wife because a second, purely-civilly contracted marriage ruled out any possibility of reconstructing the life of his first family that had ended in divorce.

While the children outwardly gave the impression of being healthy human beings, the first-born son bore like a night shadow the heredity of the marriage contracted outside the church. He had often confessed, but as he explained to me during his visit to Rome, I was the only human being with whom he could speak outside of sacramental confession, without hesitating, like a human being to a human being or like a wounded, lost son to a father. He also became the victim of an unworldly confessor, to whom on the eve of his ordination as a priest he, with great hesitation, had laid open the state of his soul in the general confession of his life. This time it was a Jesuit, the spiritual director of the seminary in question, and so a member of an order that gazes into the world more deeply and more realistically than other religious orders do. He could not free himself from this frightening, perverse drive despite confession and spiritual struggles; he was afraid of the priesthood.

The confessor comforted him that everything would take care of itself through the grace of a priestly vocation. And so hands were laid on him. Given all these circumstances, would it not have been a holy duty to woo him away from an occupation so full of sacrifice? What would the early Church have decided in this case? It is a disaster to help such men into the sanctuary, because supernature can only to a certain degree conquer nature. With Bible verses (“I can do everything in him who strengthens me”) one doesn’t come close to the modern medical knowledge of the human organism. One could say, that questions in regard to heredity did not at the turn of the 20th century occupy the ecclesiastical authorities who make decisions when it is a question of the preparatory testing of candidates for marriage and ordination. However would a frank admission of physical impossibility have done any good in opposition to the opinion of many moralists that in the mental realm there is no true heredity and that nature under all circumstances can be overcome through prayer and the reception of the sacraments?

In any case even on the eve of his ordination this unlucky fellow, overcome by the volcanic power of his strange heredity, fell into his vice. Since his father was no longer available to talk to, he was ashamed to admit his tendency to his mother, who was very pious. One can hardly blame him. It is well known that children talk about their sexual experiences with no one less than with their parents and siblings. Only once did he muster the courage to hint at something to his mother: "Mother, why has no one ever spoken to me about the deep things of human life? Must I have an emotional and physical breakdown?"

He tortured himself with ascetic practices, with the murky guilt feelings and the pangs of conscience of the Middle Ages, without being able to achieve peace of mind, because always, like muddy torrents of thunderstorms, the lower drive and the unchained instinct intervened. The confessors whom he consulted held the horrors of hell before his eyes, unimaginable possibilities of punishment, which he knew from Dante's imagination. But nothing helped. He lifted himself up, only to fall again, until a boy brought him before the court with unrestrained accusations.

An expression of abysmal melancholy was in the eyes of this unhappy priest, in whose life alternated the knowledge of guilt, self-recrimination, and ever-repeated vows of continence. With all this he was a thoroughly active personality, full of hard work in pastoral care, religious instruction, organizations and societies -- a creative, young man. Wherever he came as a priest, new life awoke in the parish. No one could have suspected in the least that he had to carry along such a shocking tragedy for over twenty years of his priesthood, because he cleverly wore a mask that completely hid his inner affliction. He led a strange double life

As he, like a Mary Magdalene at my feet, with a stream of tears admitted his guilty life, I thought of Christ, who was deeply shaken and affected in his innermost being by thoughts of the rotting Lazarus. As John has reported to us, Christ spoke scarcely a word about it. Until then I

knew the poor man only out of the cold dossier of his order and of the proper ecclesiastical authorities, who are responsible for the handling of criminal offenses by religious and clerics, especially homosexual offenses, style named *crimen pessimum*, “the worst crime,” referring to the Old Testament expression.

In the files of his order I found only a short biography of this religious, with detailed reports of the young man with whom he had intercourse because they shared the same tendencies, until some circumstances, above all an attempt at extortion at the monastery, brought everything into the open. The judgment of his religious superiors and the decision of Rome were included. It read in the accustomed formula: “Return to the lay state with retention of the requirement of celibacy and without any hope of a later resumption of priestly duties, especially any pastoral work.”

The longer I looked at this wounded man, the more I said to myself: “You poor brother, what is a religious to do in the world under these conditions? You certainly do not need any more penance from the church. One who has so atoned and so wept has long been forgiven by God.” But men are hard in judgment about such strange characters. The files are quickly closed over the fate of a life. If he has erred, he did penance for it exceedingly, yes, too exceedingly through the pains of remorse over his life which had failed as the result of a physical-psychological abnormality. He sought salvation in religious life and not in that acceptance with which Antiquity regarded these murky border regions of illness, heredity, and human weakness, from which in most cases there is no escape, except by suicide.

It seems to be absurd that sexual desire and love of a male person from his earliest youth and for his whole life should be directed only to a person of the same sex, but this pathological manifestation is not rare, without one being able to label such men as a variation of normal men,

as Hirschfeld³ has tried to do. Only from the personal admissions of this poor canon was it possible for me to gaze into the abyss of the tragedy his life, which was like a novel. His entering the priesthood was influenced by, among other things, his deeply religious mother. He himself wavered between sanctimonious piety and a liberal attitude to life. In his being was a monstrous tension, an overwhelming drive, which he daily begged through prayer and religious exercises for heavenly strength to resist. It did not help him much. This unhappy human specimen openly described to me, how a magical power, despite established reasons to the contrary derived from moral norms, flung him into the arms of lascivious homosexuals, until there was no return. Who would think that the depths of this sexual underworld played and still plays a much greater role in history than one usually believes, that these psycho-pathological manifestations, in part are inherited, in part are acquired in the course of life (continual absence from the feminine, improper training in the seminary, military schools, life on board ship, novitiates in southerly regions with a climatically conditioned higher sexuality [!!!]) Scientific research has not yet said the last word, whether such unhappy persons actually possess the sexual glands of reproductive organs of one sex while the brain in its sexual-motor nerve center shows characteristics of the opposite sex.

Shame, sorrow, and constant worry made this poor brother pessimistic about life, while outwardly he seemed to be of very high character. In his monastic solitude he led frustrated, heroic battle against these sick drives. So it was a life full of pain and worry. He would rather

³ Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) was a German physician and homosexual who founded the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. Hirschfeld thought that homosexuality was inborn. In nineteenth century language, such men were “urnings.”

commit suicide than be defeated again and again. Actually he later chose the former, like not a few of these homosexuals do. That all belongs to the region of human tragedy, which compels to silence. The breakdown of the whole personality is, however, as this case of a brother especially told me, always an unavoidable consequence. The tendency to this sexual satisfaction, if it is not question of only a one-time childhood error, by experience is incurable.

The ones affected -- mostly it is men with an unambiguous facial expression – accustom themselves in this way to this false outlet of sexual life, so that they lose a taste for the opposite sex and not seldom become a strong woman-hater. According to the research of Professor Kraft-Ebbing there is in the current state of medical science no cure. The punishments imposed on such men by the church (laicization with celibacy) are definitely least suitable for healing. They lead in most cases to complete ruin, because the punishments are given without consideration to the emotional and physical condition of these homosexuals. It is not a question of a moral, but of a medical problem. How can one lock such men, especially for correction, into the rooms of a cloister, rooms often empty of every natural humanity, of refined culture, and of true love for fellow man.

Is it not more in the interests of the church and of religion, to free them from every religious duty forever and to give them back to the world? One can further ask, if such an ordination under these medical conditions can be regarded as valid despite good dogmatic and canonical arguments against it – the early Church thought otherwise – since there can scarcely be any possibility of the fulfillment of the duty of celibacy from the very beginning. It is fortunate that the number of such pitiable men is not according to careful statistics, very great. The actual conditions in southern climates are hardly determinable, because a veil is drawn over it for

understandable reasons. And so it would be easier here to begin another discipline based on medical reports.

He was the poorest of the brothers whom I encountered in my journey of life. The later suicide of this brother in the waters of the Salzach river has deeply disturbed me. In Rome I offered a mass for him, and I felt as if angels bore this Lazarus up on their hands into paradise, while his judges called to him: "Tell the Lord, that we are also coming over." This vision brought home to me the human tragedy that dwelled in such a life. He was no longer able to handle life. Despite all books of morality. It was a flight motivated by the greatest mental stress. Only God alone knows how many efforts at love and humanity, how much loneliness and smothered cries of pain were scattered on the way to this freely chosen death. Had this poor man really found no human being who with understanding and devoted love would struggle with him in order to keep him going? No gentle pastor and true friend with whom he could speak trustfully in his homeland? The knowledge of this man's fate and still more a congress of fallen-away priests in Italy led me to the following petition to the Holy Office, that reads as follows in German translation and was not without success, as the decision with serious consequences of Pius XII on Good Friday 1953 would show.⁴

⁴ I have not been able to find any decision made by Pius XII on Good Friday, April 3, 1953. It is unlikely that the Vatican would have transacted any business that day. Hudal may be remembering a talk that Pius XII gave on March 28, 1953, in which the Pope "described Communists and other enemies of Catholicism as 'lost sheep' and said they will always find the doors of the church open for their return" ("Pope Describes Reds as Lost Sheep," *Monassen Daily Independent*, March 28, 1953) or more probably a talk that the Pope gave to a Catholic Congress of Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology on April 12, 1953. The Pope in this talk advocated "an efficacious sexual education which in entire safety teaches with calmness and objectivity what the young man should know for his

Rome 8 December 1948

A short note and a suggestion on the report about the congress of fallen-away priests held in Rome (!) from October 12-15, 1948: Apart from the anticlerical pronouncements of this congress, that was so much the less pleasant, as it was held in the capital of the Catholic faith, there are two circumstances that are impressive: the number of fallen-away priests (the statistical report of 4,000 could well be an exaggeration) and the necessity of a certain care for these unhappy brothers, who, even if separated outwardly from the clergy by law, like lost sheep always remain the object of pastoral care that indeed may be difficult but is greatly needed and of a delicate kind.

If the work for old, sick and unable-to-work priests by the nuns who are supported by Cardinal Spellman is a genuine challenge to humanity and love of neighbor, so in a certain sense a confidential work of charity would be more appropriate and urgent - to lead back fallen-away secular and order priests at least to an honorable employment and to a Catholic lay life.

In past decades so many congregations were founded, almost always with the purpose of work in schools, hospitals, clinics, and so forth, but seldom, or better said, almost never, does one read in the histories of the new works of charity that one of these founders at least in secret

personal conduct and his relationship with those with whom he is brought into contact ("Pope Approves Psychoanalysis but Cautions Against Its Abuses," *New York Times*, April 16, 1953). Or Hudal may be misremembering the date. In 1953 Pius XII gave permission for a married Lutheran minister, Rudolph Goethe, to be ordained a Catholic priest and to remain married. This was followed by similar permission to two more Lutheran ministers in 1952, and to a fourth in 1954 (Joseph F. Fichter, *Wives of Catholic Clergy* [Sheed and Ward, 1992] p. 97). Rudolph Goethe, whose wife attended his ordination, was a descendent of the poet.

had dedicated his help to the care of the clergy who had become faithless to their noble and holy call. So there is a lack of any realistic, not distorted statistics on the defection of secular priests and religious.

In the great cities without doubt there live several dozens of ex-priests, naturally avoided by the clergy, and in part perhaps not known as such. But how many of them are the cause of continual offenses or the originators of attacks in the press on Holy Church. It suffices to remember that the principal spokesmen and coworkers of the central organ of the SS (Black Corps) and by the ugly publication “Men around the Pope” were mainly were fallen-away priests (!).

The undersigned had the satisfaction of being able to bring back two fallen-away priests to the Church (one of them had become the leader of the movement “Freethinkers in Austria”), but with this opportunity he had to find out how many disappointments, difficulties, and obstacles opposed such an apostolate from all sides. Many times it was as if the devil would not release these unhappy priests from his claws, these priests, the victims of passions, but often also of the lack of a true and sound preparation in the seminaries and monasteries for the difficult tasks and duties of the priestly call.

May I therefore be allowed humbly to make the suggestion that by a command of the Holy Office in each diocese a priest be chosen and assigned sub secreto by the appropriate bishop, a priest, who along with his normal duties, in a delicate manner and without the public noticing much, would with the spiritual and affectionate support assist the cause of fallen-away priests living in the area of the diocese.

Could the Holy Office after the passing of a certain time get a report from the Ordinaries (a statistic concerning how many worked secretly in anti-religious organizations, what the cause

of their defection was, what kind the seminary and education of young people and so forth) so the collected material would serve for further decisions on the matter of the formation of future clerics?

The tragedy of many priests is heartbreaking. In a few months they destroy by public offenses what worthy priests have built up by wearisome toil – nevertheless the Roman Church cannot easily give in on the demand for celibacy without opening a door. Without doubt celibacy does not come either from the Bible or from the discipline of the early Church, which stood closer to the religious program of Christ than later centuries do. It is in itself difficult to change a counsel of Christ into a general requirement in so important a matter. Much less can the words of Paul to the Christian community at Corinth, which he wrote in the conviction that the world would soon end, be stated as a justification, without doing violence to the Bible. Celibacy belongs much more to those historically developed arrangements of experience that tomorrow can be done way with, without thereby hurting in its essence Christianity as a religious world view. Once things are established, going backwards is difficult, if not impossible.

The Catholic laity, who have a calm judgment about life and are not Pharisees, would scarcely be upset by a change of the present practice of the universal church. There was no upset when the fast before communion was changed by Pius XII! How many secrets and intimacies must a modern specialist in sexual diseases keep to himself. How much must a juvenile judge, bound by the confidentiality of office, keep to himself. The confessional would not suffer by this. The reaction against ever so small a change would come perhaps from priest-members of religious orders in whose ascetic system, and also in the world of secular priests, priesthood and family life have become things difficult to unite and whose morality revolves more around the

sixth commandment, as if faults against the love of neighbor would not in the end weigh more heavily, since such faults do not find their source in the natural drives of the human being.

I experienced in my conversation In September 1917 with the Serbian orthodox Metropolitan Letica of Sarajevo that in this difficult question political considerations play a role in the Eastern Church. He regretted, as we spoke of the grounds for union, that the Eastern Church had not long ago taken over this practice of celibacy from Rome on disciplinary grounds. “Nothing is more difficult than to transfer from one place to another pastors with families and children, even when it would further the interests of the Church.” Letica came out of a monastic environment. So there is no solution in regard to priestly celibacy in the universal church because the optional form would lead to envy, jealousy, and suspicion on all sides and with this undermine the entire discipline.

The solution could at most be a partial one in the case of wounded priests, poor brothers. On the grounds of medical reports, in very special cases, the return to the perspective of the early Church would be accepted, when the monastery with its ideal of life did not yet have a determining influence on the entire church.

More than the opportunists and Pharisees in the church, these wounded priests are to certain extent the demonic element inside the church, a hindrance to the effectiveness of divine grace. Parishes that have the misfortune to be in the care of such pastors die slowly like plants without the sun. I found striking the relevant observations in individual dioceses. When priests fell way, then were they ever the true ruin of the Catholic laity, which already no longer practiced their religion, but now took as an excuse the example of these priests.

Much evil in the Church stems from those who have gone off the tracks and from Phariseeism. Priests, who have inner resources, men of the law or men destined by nature to a

certain isolation, overcome all the crises that come from the physical. So it is perhaps comprehensible that exemption from the requirement of celibacy is not in principle easily granted by Rome even in the case of great offenses. If this door were once opened, many would choose the way of a public scandal, since they not all too seldom have received in seminaries and novitiates an inadequate explanation in regard to duties of this kind and of the whole area of sexuality.

This chapter will remain disturbing when one thinks of religious priests and those of the secular priests who because of offenses are thrown back into the world with the remaining condition of the above-named duty, as it is stated thus in all decrees with the stereotypical chancery formula: *Firmiter remanente lege celibatus*, - by which the law of celibacy remains unchanged. What is such a priest in this condition to do in the world? His residence in monasteries and in religious houses is impossible. In families, however, he, as a laicized priest, lives in constant danger. As understandable as it seems at first glance that congregations of religious especially seek to rid themselves of such a wounded brother by throwing him out into the world, one feels that something is not right in this system of justice.

But despite many reservations and lessons of history can one say that the Catholic priesthood with its daily liturgy and hourly prayer, duties which are taken over from the monastic ideal of life, can scarcely be united with family duties, so great and honorable as they are, without taking away something typical of Roman Christianity: the heroic ideal of the priestly call. National churches are unthinkable without priestly families but a universal church with married priests would gradually dissolve into ethnically divided churches.

No one can deny the shadow side and dangers of celibacy, that are so well known to priests and laity, such as caste spirit, egotism, lack of understanding about conflicts in marriage

and sexual needs, hardness of heart even to the atrophy of emotional strength, the asocial, the putting oneself above race and family, and by doing that removing himself the blood stream of his own people, the danger of an abnormal attitude to the opposite sex, because celibacy influences the character of a man no less that marriage does.

The secular priest lives in the world, which is no monastery, and cannot distance himself from the world through idealistic contemplations of the world. In addition, the overwhelming majority of men do not have the aptitude for the heroic and for the drive to extraordinary achievements. It therefore requires strong characters to hold fast to and to guard through all experiences the high attitude to life of the first priestly years. On the other hand, what a noble vocation is the Catholic priesthood, if all its sacrifices, especially giving up the happiness of a family and worldly diversions, are borne only in the interests of the community. If priests moving alone through the world do not consume their energy in religious egotism, but reveal themselves to all men as completely, generously apostolic.

Our age wants to see again this Christian-humanistic reality, a noble humanity with more natural and at the same time supernatural virtues. If the Church of the present had an army of selfless idealists, who would completely sacrifice themselves for the poor, the oppressed, and the social proletariat of the great cities against the might of the capitalistic ordering of society, she should doubtless again win Europe back to her religious ideas.