

Pre-Curran inquiry shows caution on dissent

By Agostino Bono
NC News

ROME — The 1975-79 Vatican investigation of Redemptorist Father Bernard Haring, a German moral theologian, shows the deep concern church officials had that criticisms of birth-control teachings were fostering a general lack of respect for the church's teaching authority.

It also shows that Vatican efforts to directly combat theological dissent from non-infallible teachings predate the pontificate of Pope John Paul II and his main monitor of theological orthodoxy, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The process against Father Haring included efforts by the Vatican to prevent his views from appearing in mass-circulation publications because, as one doctrinal congregation official said, they would be read by Catholics lacking "sufficient theological preparation" to distinguish between a

theological opinion and church teachings.

Throughout the investigation Father Haring argued that a plurality of views on non-infallible teachings is possible, even healthy for the life of the church.

No disciplinary action was taken against Father Haring. Instead, Vatican investigators dropped the case after asking him to take seriously their criticisms in future writings and cooperate more in promoting a better understanding of church doctrine.

The documents from the 1975-79 investigation were made public in April by Father Haring in the appendix of a book, "Faith, History and Morality," published in Rome. The body of the book is a lengthy interview in Italian between Father Haring and Italian journalist Gianni Licheri.

The investigation was begun by Cardinal Franjo Seper, head of the doctrinal congregation at the time, and approved by Pope Paul VI.

It prefigured the investigation conducted by Cardinal Ratzinger and approved by Pope John Paul of U.S. moral theologian Father Charles Curran, in which the ability to dissent from all church teachings became the focal point.

Father Curran was disciplined in 1986, having his permission to teach as a Catholic theologian removed. Father Haring was Father Curran's official defender in the case.

The documentation on Father Haring's case is a lengthy series of letters and position papers exchanged between him and congregation officials.

The initial Vatican criticism concerned Father Haring's book, "Medical Ethics." A December, 1975, letter from Cardinal Seper criticized Father Haring's methodology as flirting with "the danger of moral relativism." It added that sections of the book "despite the appearance of fidelity"

oppose *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul's 1968 encyclical reiterating church opposition to all artificial methods of birth control.

The investigation soon zeroed in on Father Haring's views on birth control and expanded to include his column in *Famiglia Cristiana*, a mass-circulation Italian Catholic magazine, and his public speeches.

From these, Cardinal Seper said, "surge a common sentiment against the magisterium," the church's teaching authority.

Specifically, the doctrinal congregation criticized Father Haring for saying that under specific circumstances Catholic couples could use contraceptives in good conscience.

Father Haring's defense was that the birth-control teachings did not come under infallibility. Fallible teachings demand "respect" but "reformable doctrine can 23

Theologian urges reform of doctrinal congregation

MILAN, Italy (NC) — The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith needs a massive reform that includes shutting it down for several years to break the "nightmare" of its historical connection to the Inquisition, said Father Bernard Haring, a well-known Catholic theologian who has been subject to congregation scrutiny.

The German Redemptorist said the reforms should include:

- limiting the terms of officials now appointed for life.
- naming officials who are "experts in evangelization."
- allowing those accused of doctrinal infractions to confront their accusers.
- allowing the accused to pick their own defenders.

Father Haring, author of numerous works on moral theology and one of the Catholic world's best-known theologians, made his criticisms in an interview appearing April 18 in *Corriere della Sera*, a Milan-based Italian daily. The interview was conducted in Munich, West Germany,

where Father Haring lives.

The interview appeared shortly before scheduled publication in Italy of a book-length interview with Father Haring in which he discusses the 1975-79 doctrinal congregation study of his views. The book, "Faith, History, Morality," also contains the previously unpublished documents of the Vatican process against Father Haring and marks the first time he has talked publicly at length about the process.

Vatican officials contacted April 19 said it was highly unlikely that the Vatican would comment on Father Haring's process or his suggestions for reforming the doctrinal congregation.

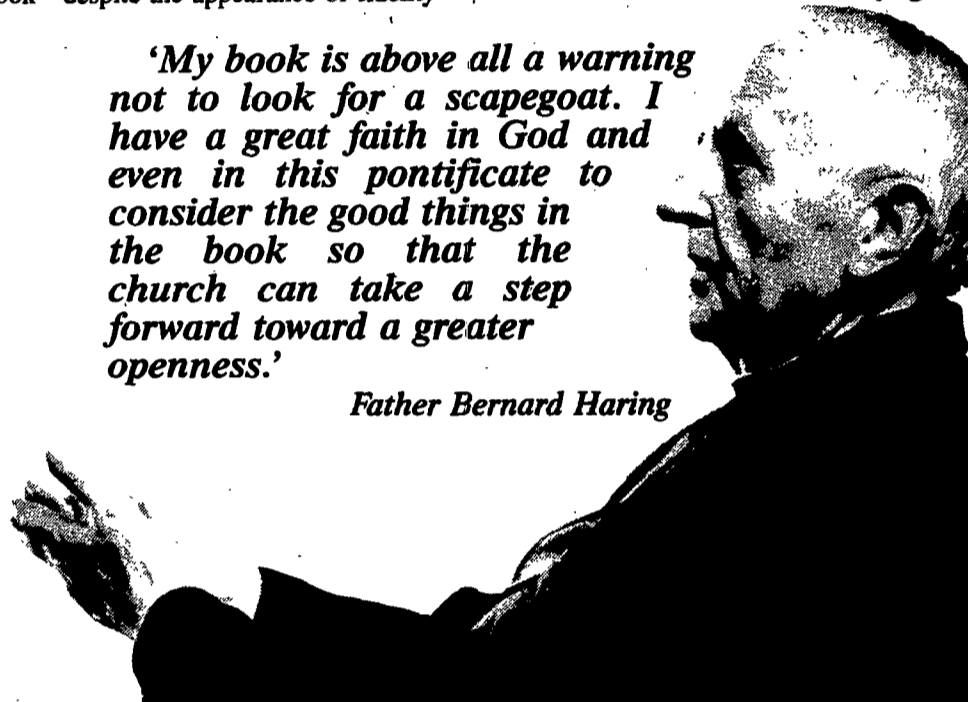
As normal policy, the doctrinal congregation does not comment on individual cases with which it has dealt.

The congregation's "maximum reform" would consist in "interrupting the historical ties which go back to the old Inquisition and letting the church live for a few years without this nightmare," said Father Haring.

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'My book is above all a warning not to look for a scapegoat. I have a great faith in God and even in this pontificate to consider the good things in the book so that the church can take a step forward toward a greater openness.'

Father Bernard Haring



Maverick theologian continues fight against doctrinal rigidity

By Agostino Bono
NC News

ROME — The thin, angular priest with the polka-dot silk scarf tucked neatly around his neck smiles as he enters the room where 150 people are waiting to hear him talk.

The scarf hides the signs of his battle with throat cancer, which nearly cost him his life and which forces him to talk slowly, through his esophagus by swallowing gulps of air first. Although apologetic for his raspy speech, he is proud that the cancer has not silenced him.

The priest is Redemptorist Father Bernard Haring, a 76-year-old "young Turk" still fighting for church reforms and for greater openness by church officials. The well-known and widely published moral theologian was in Rome for an April news conference to mark publication of a book-length interview with him by the Italian publishing house Borla. The book, "Faith, History, Morality," is his intellectual biography in question-and-answer form.

Father Haring has his fights with current Vatican policies on theological investigation, but he said that in his view there have been "even worse processes" in the past.

The back of the book contains 67 pages of previously unpublished documents relating to the 1975-79 scrutiny of his views by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, especially his criticisms of church teachings on birth control. The congregation eventually dropped the case without taking action, and Father Haring continues questioning the hard-and-fast nature of doctrine on artificial contraception.

He is also an advocate of more sweeping reforms of the Roman Curia, the church's central administrative offices, than those undertaken in the post-Vatican II era. He recently reiterated a suggestion he made

more than 25 years ago during the council, that the doctrinal congregation close down for a few years and take a sabbatical in order to break its historical connection to the Inquisition. Father Haring also wants an organization like Amnesty International to work within the church to protect the rights of its members.

The theologian's attitudes of fighting authority predate his attack of church institutional structures. As a young German priest and pacifist, Father Haring served in the German medical corps during World War II because conscientious objection was not allowed. His advocacy of non-violence to troops caused him to be brought before military courts four times.

"Luckily there were some intelligent generals, and nothing happened to me," he recounts.

Father Haring also tells how in 1940, in a German-occupied Ukrainian town, he and other priests went door to door one night in the Jewish neighborhood, urging people not to obey a German order to report to a central roundup point for relocation because it would probably mean their death.

"When, the following night, I met a soldier from my unit who was beside himself, almost mad, I understood that he had participated in the mass execution of Jews, who were obliged first to dig their own graves," he recalls.

Before deciding to become a priest, Father Haring flirted with Marxism and attending Communist Party meetings. Although he quickly lost interest in Marxism as a theory, studying it had a lasting effect on him.

"It developed in me an understanding, which accompanied me all my life, about the cause which pushed Marx to write 'Das Kapital,' especially those regarding the instrumentalization of religion as support and

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