

Theologian

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ing. This would allow the church "to begin again with people expert in evangelization, men and women who live in historical reality," he added.

The 76-year-old priest said his honor was offended more when the doctrinal congregation was examining his works than during the four times he was brought to court during Nazi rule in Germany. At the urging of Pope John Paul II, the doctrinal congregation took no action against him, Father Haring said in the interview.

Inquiry

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not require an act of faith or absolute adhesion," he said.

"The very magisterium has reformed doctrine which before was proposed with great emphasis," he said.

Cardinal Seper asked Father Haring to show "greater prudence, avoiding in every way the spreading of arguable and subjective views, especially in large-circulation magazines such as *Famiglia Cristiana*."

The cardinal said the request sprang from the doctrinal congregation's concern for "those who would not have of themselves the capacity nor the sufficient theological preparation to distinguish from among various writings that which belongs to the inalienable patrimony of the Catholic faith from that which is instead only a more or less acceptable theological opinion."

In one instance, he asked Father Haring to print a "rectification" — a doctrinal

Maverick

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justification for unjust conditions," he recounts.

As a priest, Father Haring has fought his religious battles inside the church, and often from positions of influence. Before the beginning of Vatican II he was one of the experts picked to help write the draft documents for study by the world's bishops.

In 1964, Pope Paul VI named him to a special commission to study birth control. Although the majority of commission members favored changes in church teachings, Pope Paul reaffirmed the immorality of using contraceptives.

Also in 1964, the pope chose him to preach the weeklong Lenten retreat for Vatican officials. For 40 years, Father Haring taught moral theology at pontifical universities in Rome.

In returning to Rome from his home in West Germany for the presentation of the new book, Father Haring violated one of the church's unwritten rules — that a dissenting theologian does not talk about his dissent in Rome, the pope's back yard.

At the news conference, though, Father Haring said his dissent is not with the pope and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal congregation, but with inadequate clerical institutions and attitudes inherited from the past.

"My book is above all a warning not to look for a scapegoat," he said.

"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," he said.

At the time, the congregation was headed by Cardinal Franjo Seper.

Father Haring said he decided to publish the documents even though "it could embitter the last few months or years of my life."

"I love the church and I do not want it to continue in this inquisitional way, which is against the Gospel," he said. "The processes of Hitler were more dangerous, but they were not an offense to my honor, while those of the Holy Office were a grave offense," he said.

The Holy Office is the previous name of the doctrinal congregation, which frequently is called by that name to this date.

correction — on one of his *Famiglia Cristiana* columns.

Father Haring refused unless the rectification made clear that it was the work of the doctrinal congregation, explaining "with clarity that it is an act of external obedience and is in no way a changing of my personal convictions if this rectification should go against my convictions."

Father Haring consistently insisted that his views were shared by several bishops' conferences and by numerous "moderate" theologians.

"The faithful already know — and have the right to know — that there is a pluralism in the church on this question which does not lead to any danger of chaos or laxity," he said.

On Feb. 27, 1979, Father Haring had an oral hearing at the doctrinal congregation. No transcript of the hearing is provided among the documents, and Father Haring does not say if one was made.

Father Haring said he was never told who his accusers were, only that two "great moralists" had judged his work. The Vatican process also came at a personally trying time for him, when he had to undergo several operations for throat cancer. "The most terrible thing was this, that they did not stop persecuting me even when I was near death. I believe this to be shameful," he said.

Father Haring said the doctrinal congregation's criticisms centered on his views of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI's encyclical reaffirming church opposition to chemical and artificial means of contraception. "They accused me of showing fidelity to

the magisterium without really following it," said Father Haring. The magisterium is the church's teaching authority.

Father Haring said he also was accused of "moral relativism," meaning, he said, "to subordinate morals to historical situations." The theologian added that he also was asked to end his public criticisms of the Vatican and of the doctrinal congregation.


Father Haring said he refused to make this commitment because "that which goes against conscience is a sin." At the end of the process, Father Haring said he was "physically exhausted, but happy to not have fallen into the sin of being servile."

In the interview section of the book, Father Haring said the hearing lasted two hours, during which he refused to accept the idea that no theological dissent was possible. He also said congregation officials equated congregation documents with the church's magisterium, a formula he rejected.

On April 2, 1979, Cardinal Seper sent

Father Haring a short letter referring to the meeting and asking the theologian "to take into account the invitation of this congregation to collaborate with the magisterium for a better and more exact understanding of the doctrine proposed by the church."

The letter also asked Father Haring to seriously consider congregation criticisms in his future writings.



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