

Eindhoven 24 - 5 - '13

Dear Francis,

It pleases us greatly that you, in particular, are the new Pope. Both the church and the world expect from you a new church which can lead to a new world. This is an immense divine task. We would like to support you continuously in this task, by means of prayer, so that you may receive strength, vitality and the Holy Spirit, so clearly and luminously, that you may meet the task.

This letter is written by a Dutch couple. We have lived and worked together as priests since 1965; at the same time, we consider ourselves romantically a couple too. Bishop Bekkers blessed us in 1964 and gave us his mission. He laid his hands on us. We began our task as worker-priests.

However, I (Jan) was subsequently suspended by the Bishop of 's-Hertogenbosch on 1 December 2011. This was prompted by the fact that we had published a number of brochures and had advocated the separation of office and celibacy. However, the reason given for the suspension was the fact of our living together for 46 years; this was labelled concubinage.

In the meantime we are both in our late eighties, but still working hard to save the church for the future. We feel that 'voluntary celibacy' for priests is essential to that future. That is why we now address ourselves to you.

I do not ask that you intervene to have my suspension lifted. The essence of my priesthood has been neither damaged nor discontinued by it. That is a matter for God. We feel, more than ever, that it is in the best interests of the church to stand up for the 'free celibate', as a true adornment of the church.

We are not asking you to intermeddle, even though the legal proceedings to have the suspension lifted, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are taking place at the Supremum Tribunal in Rome.

The reason for this letter and the attached 'Habemus Papam' text is to request that you raise the matter of celibacy in the future policy of the church. You could be the Pope who does away with the church's fundamental dualism.

You have the love of the people.

We too believe that you can bring the miracle of a new earth and a new heaven closer. God is surely working to achieve this.

We thank you, and offer our warmest friendship,

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Threes van Dijck

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Jan Peijnenburg

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HABEMUS PAPAM

The smoke was white, the red Cardinal turned white.
In that instant, he had to know how to give a Papal blessing.
He bowed his head and called: I would rather you bless me.
At that, everyone on St. Peter's Square prayed, and blessed him.
That was the moment he became the Pope. I will be called Francis, he said.

Breaking ground

Pope Francis has been called to do ground-breaking work in the church, to break the spell cast on humanity. The well-founded expectation that he is capable of that, and prepared to do that, is based on the fact that he himself is unaware of all that, humble as he is. He wishes only to do ordinary things, and that is extraordinary.

He lends his voice to human rights.

Given all that falls under human rights, it is fair to surmise that Pope Francis is embarking on a long journey. He has announced his intention to put his efforts into freedom and equality for all people. Without voicing an opinion on what this involves (in quiet moments, as he regards the world, he will be aware of it) he has already defined the direction: the route he knows must be taken, the route he knows he must take. He has an intuitive knowledge of the future in the present. This is why he feels clumsy and unaccustomed in the here and now. That which will come is already in him.

What does freedom mean? What is social and religious freedom? Can freedom be divided into sections where one or the other has or has not the right to exist, or cannot attain such?
Selective

Those who choose freedom choose freedom across the board. That means that anyone labouring for social freedom will have to work just as hard for spiritual freedom. For the church, this means that church laws may not restrict or disregard people's freedom.

World news

So if this new Pope advocates freedom, he must equally defend the free choice of priesthood to live a celibate life or not: because it is a basic human right that surpasses everything. He will have to discontinue the structure of restriction represented by the celibacy obligation, knowing that this is the divisive issue within the church. From there, not from any inevitable process within the church but from a profound, personal conviction, he will have to become a defender of married priesthood. He will have to separate religious life from compulsory pledges and do away with these preconditions to a religious life.

If this Pope acts on human equality, he will have to proclaim that equality not only in marriage, but also in a church function. This will result in opening up the way to female priesthood.

If this new Pope respects nature, as created by God, he must also respect human nature, and all the life values that entails. People choose their own forms of life and relation. The church can illuminate these with the love of God.

'Sensibile'

It is particularly remarkable that Pope Francis indicated a new spiritual route, in his very first speech: the sensitive route. He used the Italian word 'sensibile', immediately translated by the media (KRO - the Roman Catholic broadcaster in the Netherlands) with the safe translation 'tender', when the correct translation is 'sensitive'. Even given that he could not have predicted the scope of this distinct word, it is now out in the open. He even said: we must not be afraid of this. He actually distanced himself, with this word, from the rational way of reaching God: God cannot be found through an intellectual and theological quest. He indicated not the way of reason, but the way of emotion, and in particular: experiencing God with the senses, with your

