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Josef Freiherr von Beverfoerde KM - Statement on the following report

In the wake of the crisis in the Order of Malta at the end of 2016 / beginning of 2017, very much has been written, explained, and speculated about the reasons and the cause of this crisis both within the Order and worldwide in the media. From the beginning till today, speculations and allegations about the participation of our Cardinal Patron, Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, have been disseminated, partly in a very vicious manner, without Cardinal Burke ever even being questioned and heard by the Order. In order to remedy this one-sidedness and to learn the views of the Cardinal Patron, I attempted to obtain an audience with him a few weeks ago. At the beginning of March, my wife and I were received by Cardinal Burke. Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke is generally known as very straightforward and a bishop of integrity, who is deeply devoted to the Church and has courage. On our visit this impression was fully confirmed.

The following report, carefully prepared by us according to the records, gives only the account and presentation of Cardinal Burke, as he told us in the two-hour audience. Please note that this does not reflect my own opinion. Cardinal Burke said he did not want to comment on the proceedings in public. On the other hand, he was pleased that a member of the Order wanted to hear his view, and agreed that I should share this report with the Council of the German Association. The report is not intended for the public!

[Translators' Note: The original report is in German and has been translated into English by Carola Gräfin vom Hagen DM and Michael T. Medwig KM at the request of the author.]
The following report has been verified by Cardinal Burke himself.

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Annex to the minutes of the German Associations Council meeting of 26.3.2017

Report by Josef Freiherr von Beverfoerde KM from the records of his two-hour audience with Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke in early March 2017 - Account of the experiences reported by the Cardinal Patron in connection with the recent events in the Order of Malta and himself.

Background:

On September 9, 2014, Cardinal Burke had a private audience with the Holy Father, at which the latter announced to him his dismissal as Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura in order to appoint him as the Patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. As a reason for this the Holy Father named "the necessary cleansing of a secular spirit and, specifically, of Freemasonry from the Order of Malta." He said that for this work he wanted to appoint a younger cardinal and an American.

The Cardinal replied that he had no experience with the Freemasons and asked the Holy Father if he had any concrete information about who the Freemasons in the Order were. The Holy Father replied that he had by no means exact information, but was certain of their existence. The Pope explained that Cardinal Burke was to find out which persons were Freemasons and then ensure that they were expelled from the Order in order to stop the attempts to secularize the Order.

In the period between Cardinal Burke's first meeting with Pope Francis regarding the Order of Malta and his appointment as Cardinal Patron, the Asia-Pacific Conference of the Order took place in Hong Kong in October 2014. During this conference, the Secretary General of Malteser International, the worldwide aid organization of the Order, under the responsibility of the Grand Hospitaller, reported on the distribution of contraceptives - both condoms and pills, some of which were abortifacients, in various parts of the world. Several members of the Order immediately raised objections and lodged formal complaints with the Grand Master. The Grand Master, who had not known of it before, began to investigate these immoral practices. When Burke became Cardinal Patron, the Grand Master asked him for his advice on how to proceed. The Cardinal Patron told him that the whole thing must come to an immediate end and those responsible could no longer enjoy the Order's confidence. Finally, the Grand Master set up an investigative commission, which presented its first report in January 2016. That report presents the gravity and extent of the distribution of contraceptives by the Order.

The report of the investigation was submitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for examination. On 12 March 2016, its prefect, Cardinal Gerhard Müller, wrote a letter to the Grand Master in which he confirmed the investigation's report with the words: "The proposal of the above-mentioned report is consistent with the doctrine and practice of the Church." Among other conclusions, the report clearly shows that the Grand Chancellor, Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager, who had been Grand Hospitaller for the previous 25 years, had accepted the morally reprehensible practices and had deliberately avoided informing the Sovereign Council and Grand Master about them.

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This misconduct of Order officers was justified in the discussion by claiming that they had acted upon the advice of the spiritual adviser of Malteser International, the Bishop of Troyes in France, Bishop Marc Stenger, in this question. Notwithstanding this, those responsible for having permitted such practices are nevertheless bound to know the teaching of the Church on contraception and abortion, and to form their conscience in accordance therewith.

The responsibility of the Grand Chancellor was evident since the appearance of the investigation report. The Grand Master therefore informed Cardinal Burke that he had asked the Grand Chancellor to resign, but that he had refused. During the following months, the Grand Master told the Cardinal of his further attempts to convince the Grand Chancellor of his responsibility to resign. As he is the Cardinal Patron responsible for the spiritual constitution of the Order, Burke encouraged the Grand Master in this sense so that the scandal surrounding the distribution of contraceptives and abortifacients would not progress unimpeded, leading to further moral confusion and aberrations within the Order.

Cardinal Burke's audience with the Pope on 10 Nov. 2016:

The Holy Father received Cardinal Burke in private audience again on 10 November 2016. The Pope wanted to know what progress the Cardinal Patron had made in his mission. Burke explained to him his great concern at the growing secular spirit within the Order, but told him that he had not been able to find the names of the Freemasons in the order. In particular, he told the Holy Father of his deep sorrow over immoral activities -- that indeed over a long period, an important organ of the Order, Malteser International, had been distributing contraceptives, not only condoms, but also pills, including abortifacients.

It was clear to the Cardinal that, apart from the scandal of these events, dissent from the Church's teaching on contraception had prevailed for some time in parts of the Order. He had learned that, from the ranks of the highest officers, express orders were given to keep quiet about this immoral activity, which was justified by the so-called good results which were obtained for the poor therewith. In fact, the collaboration of the Order with national governments and the United Nations had led, above all for reasons of financial subsidies, to the acceptance of immoral practices which had always been uncompromisingly condemned by the Church.

Cardinal Burke verbatim:

"Pope Francis expressed profound concern and dismay about the practice of distributing contraceptives by any work of the Order. He urged me to collaborate diligently with the Grand Master to make certain that all such practices cease and that those in highest authority who had approved of them be appropriately disciplined."

In addition, the Pope told him to find the lists of Freemasons which had to exist. The Holy Father then said that he intended to confirm the mandate he had given the Cardinal Patron by a formal letter, in which he would specify the exact areas where it was necessary for Burke and the Grand

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Master to reform the Order in full harmony with its original noble mission, the Defence of the Faith and Care for the Poor.

The Holy Father wrote this promised letter on 1 December 2016, and Cardinal Burke received the letter, together with a copy for the Grand Master, on 5 December.

Immediately after Cardinal Burke had received the letter, he asked the Grand Master for an urgent meeting, knowing that he would take a 12-day trip in the United States beginning on 7 December. In the meantime, he forwarded the copy of the Holy Father's letter, which was intended for the Grand Master.

In the letter, the Holy Father asked the Cardinal Patron, in accordance with what he had said to him in the audience on 10 November 2016, to take action, together with the Grand Master, in three specific problem areas:

1. against signs of a secular spirit in the Order as well as against memberships of Knights and Dames in associations, movements and organizations which are contrary to the Catholic faith and are characterized by relativism;
2. in particular, to ensure that methods and means which are contrary to the moral law are not employed in initiatives and works of the Order; and
3. to more clearly emphasize the close relationship with the Roman Pontiff, which holds the Order together in its structure as well as in its mission.

Although in contrast to what the Pope had said to the Cardinal in past conversations on 9 September 2014 and 10 November 2016 the letter did not explicitly mention Freemasonry, Cardinal Burke understood that this was a principal concern of the Holy Father. This was also revealed on the occasion of the celebration of the Vigil of the Patron Saint of the Order, on June 23, 2016. Pope Francis had received the Grand Master and the high officers of the Order, including Grand Chancellor Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager, in audience. The Pope inquired about the progress made by Cardinal Burke in cleansing of the Order of Freemasons. The Cardinal Patron was not invited to this private audience. After the audience, the Grand Master shared his surprise with Cardinal Burke and asked him to explain the question of the Holy Father regarding Freemasonry within the Order.

Until then, the Cardinal Patron had regarded the conversation with Pope Francis of the 9th of September 2014 on Freemasonry in the Order as a subject of pontifical secrecy. However, after the Holy Father himself had discussed the subject with the Grand Master and the other officers, he informed the Grand Master about the concern expressed by the Pope from the first day of his appointment as Cardinal Patron.

Meeting on 6 Dec. 2016 - dismissal of the Grand Chancellor:

As regards the second concern of Pope Francis, the elimination of all methods and means in the initiatives and works of the Order, which oppose moral doctrine, the Grand Master urged Cardinal Burke to attend the meeting of 6 December 2016. At this meeting, the Grand Master ordered Albrecht Boeselager, in accordance with his Promise of Obedience, to resign from the office of Grand Chancellor on the basis of his approval of the distribution of contraceptives by

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the Order's works both during his time as Grand Hospitaller and during his time as Grand Chancellor.

In the following, Cardinal Burke verbatim:

"During the meeting of December 6, 2016, I never claimed to have a mandate from Pope Francis to demand the resignation of the Grand Chancellor and, therefore, I, in my capacity as Cardinal Patronus, never asked him to resign, nor did I do so, claiming that I was speaking for the Holy Father. I made two statements, in the light of the letter of Pope Francis: 1) that it was completely unacceptable to me that an organization, of the high historical and present-day Catholic profile of the Order of Malta, could be engaged in such a scandalous practice over a number of years and yet not hold responsible the senior official who condoned the practice; and 2) that, if the First Report of the Commission of Inquiry is false, as the Grand Chancellor claims that it is, why had he not made a formal correction of the document, especially because it points to his specific responsibility for the scandalous practice."

The Grand Chancellor gave no answer. This did not surprise Cardinal Burke, however, because on at least two occasions, since he had been informed as Cardinal Patron in December 2014 that Malteser International distributed contraceptives and he had insisted on immediately terminating this activity, the Grand Chancellor in the Grand Chancellor, in open conversation with him at the Magistral Palace, had insistently declared to him: "We have to give contraceptives to these poor women, or they will die." Burke's last statement at the meeting of the 6th of December was that he saw it as his duty in connection with the Pope's letter to say that the Holy Father expected the Order to deal with this serious problem. The Holy See should not be compelled to intervene further.

In the following, Cardinal Burke once more verbatim:

"Since the Cardinal Patronus has no governance over the Order, I had no authority whatsoever to tell the Grand Master how to proceed, and I did not do so. But, as I have stated above, I made it clear, as was my duty, that the senior official responsible for such gravely immoral practices should be held responsible. I then left the meeting and went home. The Grand Master, without any involvement on my part, then proceeded to dismiss the Grand Chancellor who had refused to resign in obedience."

After the dismissal of Albrecht von Boeselager, the Cardinal Patron learned during his stay in the United States that the Cardinal Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, had written a letter to the Grand Master. This letter stated that Cardinal Burke told the Grand Chancellor on December 6 that the Pope had demanded his [i.e. the Grand Chancellor's] resignation, which is wholly untrue. Before the letter was written, there had been no consultation with Cardinal Burke. He immediately called the Cardinal Secretary of State to refute this content. The only answer he received was that it was an emergency situation.

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In the entire period up to this day, no one has been able to give the Cardinal an accurate account of the bequest to the Order of Malta, either of its nature, or of the exact size and type of investment, or of the beneficiaries of the last three or four years. The fact that three persons of the commission appointed by Pope Francis to investigate the crisis in the Order were or are still involved in this legacy matter leads to the strong suspicion that there is a link between these assets and the reinstatement of the Grand Chancellor upon the recommendation of the Papal Commission. In the opinion of the Cardinal, an independent audit of the situation is essential for the well-being of the Order and the Church in order to resolve all the serious questions on the subject.

At the end of his remarks, the Cardinal stated verbatim:

"I find it profoundly saddening that the grave scandal of the distribution of contraceptives and the advancing secularization of the Order which this immoral action represents are now minimized and, effectively, forgotten. All of the many press conferences, interviews and other interventions through the media on the part of the Order, in the time since the reinstatement of the Grand Chancellor, make no reference to the grave scandal and acknowledge no responsibility on the part of the Grand Chancellor for such scandal. From my view, I fear that the obscuring of this scandalous situation at the root of the recent difficulties in the Order is not a good augury for the renewal of the Order, according to its long, noble, and thoroughly Catholic tradition."