

Vatican dismisses Archbishop Milingo from the priesthood

VATICAN CITY - Three years after excommunicating Zambian Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo, the Vatican has imposed the additional penalty of dismissal from the priesthood.

In a statement issued Dec. 17, the Vatican said it was forced to take the step after Archbishop Milingo continued to commit “new crimes against the unity of the holy church,” specifically by ordaining bishops against papal orders.

It said the archbishop had also caused “serious upset and scandal among the faithful” by heading groups that call for the abolition of priestly celibacy in the church. Pope Benedict XVI authorized and approved the dismissal, Vatican sources said.

The archbishop in 2001 married Korean acupuncturist Maria Sung in a mass ceremony arranged by the Rev. Sun Ming Moon, founder of the Unification Church, which is now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

He subsequently separated from Sung at the personal urging of Pope John Paul II, but then reunited with her and founded the U.S.-based Married Priests Now! movement, which advocates that the Catholic Church allow married priests in active ministry.

In 2006, the Vatican announced that Archbishop Milingo had incurred automatic excommunication for illicitly ordaining four married men as bishops in Washington.

Since that time, the Vatican said in its new statement, the archbishop has “shown no sign of the desired repentance” that would lead to a return to communion in the church. On the contrary, it said, he has demonstrated persistent disobedience by presiding over several other episcopal ordinations, which it termed “grave crimes.”

The Vatican noted that the dismissal of a bishop from the priesthood was highly unusual, but said it felt obligated to act out of potential damage to church unity.

“Nevertheless, the church hopes that Archbishop Milingo will see the error of his ways,” it said.

It said the consequences of the dismissal from the clerical state include the loss of the priesthood’s rights and duties, except for the obligation of celibacy; a ban on the exercise of any priestly ministry, except in cases of danger of death; the loss of all offices and functions of delegated power; and the prohibition on the use of clerical attire.

The Vatican reiterated previous statements that those illicitly ordained as bishops by Archbishop Milingo were automatically excommunicated. It added that the church “does not recognize these ordinations, nor does she intend to recognize them, or any subsequent ordinations based on them, in the future.”

The Vatican added that the participation of Catholics in any future celebration organized by Archbishop Milingo “is to be considered unlawful.”

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, told reporters that the Vatican nuncio to Zambia, Archbishop Nicola Girasoli, had met with Archbishop Milingo in Zambia in recent days and informed him of Pope Benedict’s decision.

The Vatican statement emphasized that throughout the long off-again, on-again dialogue with Archbishop Milingo, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI had taken a personal and “paternal” interest in working out a reconciliation, but to no avail.

Archbishop Milingo was archbishop of Lusaka, Zambia, from 1969 until 1983, when the Vatican asked him to resign because he refused to stop using healing and exorcism rituals that were judged to be inconsistent with Catholic teaching.