



Today's Martyrs - Rene Stockman

In September 2017 a story exploded in the Catholic media: “Murderous Monks”, “Monks to Pope: Nah, We're Gonna Keep Killing People” were just a sample of the headlines seen. One columnist wrote “I remember laughing and guffawing over a character in one of those ridiculous Dan Brown novels that featured an albino monk assassin. An albino monk assassin?! Can you imagine? Oh, how I mocked this terrible slander of Catholics...Ahem. My guffawing has met an abrupt end as I can only still say, ‘Dan Brown, there are no albino monk assassins. They're Belgian’”.

Anyone who had followed the details of this story on the internet knew that these articles were only barely true, and inadvertently defamed innocent Christians, including a monk named Rene Stockman. Here are the facts in more detail:

1. The religious community of monks in question is the Brothers of Charity, which two centuries ago founded a now-worldwide chain of hospitals for the mentally ill. Their motto is *Deus Caritas Est* – God is Love.
2. The Belgian hospitals are not operated directly by the Brothers, but by a corporation called the Brothers of Charity Group. Only three monks sat on the corporate board: the majority were laypeople including the chairman and former economics professor Raf De Rycke, and former European Union President Herman van Rompuy – although their identities were not reported in the secular media. It is this board that approved a pro-euthanasia policy before the end of April 2017; the language of this policy text was carefully couched in a parody of the language of Christian charity.
3. The Superior General of the Brothers of Charity, Br. Rene Stockman, publicly denounced this policy in April, and hinted that at least one monk did support the new pro-death policy: “[secularization is] poisoning the congregation”. After the hospital board refused to revoke its decision Br. Rene called upon the Belgian bishops to intervene; after the appeal of the Belgian bishops to the board was ignored he asked for Vatican intervention.
4. Br. Rene published a document in May 2017 stating the position of his community’s leadership. The document attacked the policy text with an eloquent Christian defense of the dignity of the mentally ill and their right to life.
5. In August 2017 the Vatican issued an order to the Brothers of Charity: repeal the new policy or else all monks must sign a document denouncing the new policy. Pope Francis later stated his support of the Vatican order, as did the Belgian bishops. No such order was given to the lay Catholics on the board.
6. Br. Rene and the Brothers of Charity leadership responded to the Vatican order with a supporting document. In it Br. Rene wrote that hospital staff members – certainly including monks - had reported to him that patients had expressed fear that they will be killed, which confirmed the monks’ collective opposition to the new policy.
7. As an aside, about this time former EU President Herman van Rompuy was outed as a board member in a tweet by Belgian citizen and Catholic University of America canon law professor Kurt Martens. Hours later van Rompuy replied with a tweet that read “The time of ‘*Rome has spoken, the matter is settled*’ is long past”. This gratuitous attack on the Catholic Church by one of its leading albeit nominal members was quite an illumination of the situation and showed where the real responsibility for the conflict had lain.
8. As the Vatican deadline neared Br. Rene stated that if the hospital board did not reverse the policy then they would be sued to force them to declare they are not Catholic and deny them the use of the ‘Brothers

of Charity' name. He also stated if any of the brothers refused to sign the letter upholding Catholic teaching against euthanasia, "then also we will start the correct procedure foreseen in canon law", most likely their removal from their religious state. Any such renegades would be monks no longer.

9. After the deadline passed two monks resigned from the corporate board, and Br. Rene was re-elected Superior General by his fellow monks.

Does this sound like real "Murderous Monks"? Hardly. It would appear that the major Catholic media outlets had missed the facts regarding the composition of the hospital board and its longtime legal separation from the actual Brothers of Charity religious community. It had not helped that Br. Rene appeared to be a kind man, and so the media seemed to prefer to quote his more conciliatory words regarding "talks" and "dialog" to wrongfully infer he might tolerate the policy, and less so those words that demonstrated his true determination. At worst there were up to three monks who voted for this un-Christian conformance to the modern world, and the large majority appeared to oppose it and were in full accord with their church's corrective mechanisms.

The worldwide imposition of euthanasia on more and more people is not a small story: it has been a major concern in the Christian media for decades. The massive "Murdering Monks" reaction proved this is not a small story. So why were these details missed?

- It should be expected that today's Christian writers understand the basics of modern corporate structures, governance, and their use by church agents such as dioceses and religious communities. Many if not most reporters are employed under such structures. It is perplexing to think about how the correct details of this dimension of the story could have been missed.
- It appeared that the slow dribble of the facts of the story into the public view was a factor. Weeks passed between articles. Later articles often omitted facts that had been disclosed in earlier articles. Continuity was lacking.
- The board and the secular media may have encouraged the confusion regarding the status between the board and the religious community so as to deflect accountability and to weaken the monks' community in the eye of the public. Why were the lay members [i.e., those who were not monks] not disclosed, especially a former EU President? Most Belgian articles that quoted chairman of the board De Rycke's defense of the new policy never identified him by name, and often not even his title. Why? This trend went unnoticed by the Christian media. There is something very dark in this dimension of the story, something almost as dark as euthanasia itself.
- The apparently less-than-optimal translations into English were a factor.

But, it also appears that there has been a certain lack of incredulity with many Christian reporters, which raises an interesting possibility: it may be that the obvious increase of anti-Christian pressures in recent years has started to exact a mental toll on us. Perhaps we have become too willing to believe in the powers that are arrayed against us and their demonstrated ability to seduce and co-opt Christians and Christian institutions, and so we tend to not clearly see those who still fight for us with truth and Christian forbearance, such as Br. Rene Stockman. Perhaps we need to renew, in every sense of the word, our trust in God.

Today's Martyrs

2490 Black Rock Turnpike #455 Fairfield CT 06825-2400

<https://todaysmartyrs.org/index.php/people/>

Permission is granted to copy, disseminate and forward this document without charge or fee, provided no changes are made and full attribution is made to Today's Martyrs