

December 26, 1995

PERSONAL/CONFIDENTIAL

Most Reverend Leon A. Tharmaraj  
Diocese of Kottar  
Bishop's House  
P.B. No. 17  
NAGERCOIL-629 001  
INDIA

Your Excellency:

I write to you in reference to Father A. M. Hilary. As you know, he has been looking for ministry in the Diocese of Manchester for a period of several months. Since he was unable to locate any suitable ministry, it is my understanding that he has now returned to India and to his own diocese.

I have the unpleasant duty of notifying you that shortly prior to his departure from the Diocese of Manchester a serious complaint was lodged against him in regard to his behavior with a woman. That woman, [REDACTED] has written a detailed account of this problem, a copy of which I enclose for your information. [REDACTED] is a very sincere and dedicated Catholic whose allegation, I believe, must be taken very seriously. She is an honest woman, happily married, with a good family, and would have no reason not to tell the truth in such a matter.

While [REDACTED] statement speaks in detail about the incident, I feel I should highlight several points of concern. First, it appears that when hearing confessions Father Hilary often stood outside the confessional so that he knew who the people were who came in to go to confession. Even if they chose to confess behind the screen he had previously seen them. Given [REDACTED] allegation, I would wonder whether he did this in order to highlight certain people for improper advances.

Secondly, it is clear from previous times when [REDACTED] had gone to confession to him that after hearing her confession he would come around the screen to engage her in conversation and in inappropriate signs of affection. Since she believed this was an Indian custom, she raised no objections to these previous situations.

-2-

Thirdly, in the case at hand, it is clear that Father Hilary attempted intimacies with her that are totally inappropriate for a priest, and are compounded by the fact that he did this immediately after hearing her confession.

You will certainly get a better understanding of the situation from [REDACTED] statement, and I know that you will treat this matter with all the seriousness that it deserves.

After this complaint was made known to the Diocese, Msgr. Francis J. Christian, the Chancellor, attempted to meet with Father Hilary to discuss the matter. Father Hilary, however, was away from Manchester and returned only a day before he departed for India, so such a meeting proved to be impossible.

In closing, I thank your Excellency in advance for dealing with this matter in an appropriate fashion. [REDACTED] because of her love for the Church and the priesthood, is content in knowing that I am writing to you about this matter and that you will give it your every consideration.

Assuring you of my prayerful best wishes, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

Leo E. O'Neil  
Bishop of Manchester

Enclosure

cc: [REDACTED]