

The Palm Beach Post

Exorcist priest exits public spotlight, mystifying many



By [Lona O'Connor](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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It was a classic cable-TV shouting match.

After criticizing Fox Television commentator Sean Hannity for being soft on the abortion issue, Rev. Thomas Euteneuer said he would deny Hannity communion because of his views.

"Wow," said Hannity, a Catholic and former seminary student, rendered temporarily speechless by the rebuke.

That was three years ago. Euteneuer was the president and the very public face of Human Life International, a worldwide anti-abortion organization. Friend and foe alike knew him as blunt-spoken when it came to defending his Church. He was a captivating public speaker, comfortable in the role.

His fierce and highly publicized 1999 campaign against a Fort Pierce abortion clinic became the subject of an HBO documentary, "12th and Delaware."

He was also an exorcist. HLI, his publisher as well as his employer, was promoting his new book on its website.

But this summer, without warning, Euteneuer, 48, left his HLI post, saying he had been called back to the Palm Beach Diocese by Bishop Gerald Barbarito. His book on exorcism disappeared.

The Catholic blogosphere lit up like a Christmas tree, as supporters speculated on where he was, why he left an organization he seemed destined to lead and what his professional future might be.

The person who could answer those questions is Barbarito, Euteneuer's superior. And Barbarito is not talking.

A diocesan spokeswoman said only, "This is a matter dealing with priestly personnel, and we are not going to participate in this story."

Euteneuer did not respond to an interview request.

Euteneuer's supporters are still questioning the reasons for his departure.

"What really happened to exorcist Euteneuer?" wrote Catholic blogger Matt C. Abbott in December on RenewAmerica.com, a Catholic website.

Trained in exorcism ritual

Before he dropped out of public life, Euteneuer was a frequent interviewee on Abbott's blog. Abbott contacted the Diocese of Palm Beach regarding Euteneuer, but received no response.

A small number of modern-day priests, like Euteneuer, are trained in a specific Catholic exorcism ritual, in which the priest orders demons to leave a possessed person or place.

Exorcism has been a part of Catholic Church practice since its earliest days. There are references in the New Testament to Jesus casting out devils.

In a speech he would give titled "An Evening with an Exorcist," Euteneuer attempted to demystify one of the least understood of Catholic rituals. He also recounted his bizarre experiences.

In another interview, Euteneuer said one demon offered to help him with his Latin if he would let him stay put. Asked by the interviewer if that might be an example of demonic humor, Euteneuer retorted that demons have no sense of humor.

He condemned the Harry Potter books and movies, the Twilight vampire books and movies and the television sitcom Sabrina the Teenaged Witch as vehicles for the devil to enter weaker natures. He also advocated that exorcisms be performed outside abortion clinics, which he described as "temples of a demonic religion."

Euteneuer harshly criticized the public funeral for Sen. Edward Kennedy:

"Senator Kennedy will not be missed by the unborn who he betrayed time and time again, nor by the rest of us who are laboring to undo the scandalous example of Catholicism that he gave to three generations of Americans," wrote Euteneuer in an official HLI statement in 2009.

Whatever happened to Euteneuer, it happened swiftly.

In June, HLI was promoting his new book, Exorcism and the Church Militant. In July, Euteneuer was back in his home diocese, in Jensen Beach, giving his "An Evening with an Exorcist" presentation.

On Aug. 27, Human Life International issued a brief press release saying Euteneuer had "stepped down" at the request of Barbarito.

All references to the exorcism book disappeared from the HLI website.

His scheduled September talk on Catholicism in a Chicago suburb was canceled.

By September, it was nearly impossible to buy a copy of his book, Exorcism and the Church Militant, just published in June. One online bookseller was offering it for \$975.

"Rumors that the book was 'pulled' or 'recalled' are not true," said Stephen Phelan, Human Life International spokesman. "We released Father Euteneuer's Exorcism and the Church Militant in June, and sold out of it some time after his departure from HLI, so it was on sale for over three months. It was decided not to reprint it as we no longer had Father Euteneuer on hand to explain the connection between exorcism and our pro-life mission, and we wanted to focus completely on our mission going forward."

Book value skyrockets

Euteneuer became a hero to Christy Larker after she met him several years ago at a Catholic radio conference in Alabama, where she lives. She was then pregnant with her seventh child.

"Within that first trimester, I was experiencing something of a demonic nature," Larker said. "Something was not right. He was the keynote speaker and afterward, I went up to talk to him about the things I was struggling with. He laid his hands on me and started praying. By the end

of the week I was set free from whatever it was. People noticed that I had a greater sense of peace. Several months later, I was told that he was an exorcist. God is so good."

A few people have heard from Euteneuer in the past few months, but even to those he did not offer details.

"He just told us he was no longer going to be speaking," said Larker, manager of client relations at Third Millennium Media, which booked speeches for Euteneuer and sells his CD, "An Evening With an Exorcist."

"We just figured he's taking a sabbatical, and doing whatever his bishop has asked him to do."

Larker had a number of speaking engagements lined up for Euteneuer during the summer, but became curious when she did not get confirmation that he would attend. Then Phelan called to say that Euteneuer was recalled to the Palm Beach Diocese.

"It was totally out of the blue," Larker said. "Then the news spread like wildfire."

Since the exorcism book became scarce, its value has shot up. Royal Oak, a used-book seller in Virginia, this month sold its only copy of Exorcism and the Church Militant for \$500. Royal Oak priced the book at \$500 after seeing the \$975 price online.

Royal Oak also sold one copy of Euteneuer's second book, Demonic Abortion, for \$60.

"We wish we had more," said a clerk.

Blogger Matt Abbott already misses Euteneuer.

"For the last few years, Father Euteneuer was one of my favorite priests to quote in my online column," Abbott said. "He wasn't afraid to speak out on controversial matters. I'm very saddened by these developments, but I hope Human Life International will continue to be on the forefront of fighting the culture of death."

Staff researcher Niels Heimericks contributed to this story.

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