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Brother Fitzpatrick's Jan. 28 letter to Cardinal Rode

by Peter Fitzpatrick

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January 28, 2010

Franc Cardinal Rode, CM

Prefect of the congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of

Apostolic Life

Piazza Pio XII, 3

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ITALY

Dear Cardinal Rode:

I write to you again about your "apostolic visitation" of the women religious in the United States.

It is now public news that many US women religious have not complied with Phase II of your visitation, and that you have asked them to rethink their positions, return to your questionnaires and complete them as you desired.

It is clear, I think, that the apostolic religious sisters of the U.S. have treated your imposition of an apostolic visitation most seriously. They have taken the whole matter to prayer from the very beginning a year ago. They have sought the advice of theologians and canonists. They have consulted knowledgeable persons experienced in religious life and known for their prudence and wisdom. And they have come to their decisions according to their own charisms and concluded that they cannot in good conscience do as you request.

Their procedure in this entire matter has been according to the lights and guidance of the great spiritual masters: Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross, Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, and their own sainted founders. Continued prayer and reflection have simply confirmed them in their decision.

You have undoubtedly noticed that the sisters have not taken part in attacks upon you and your assistants. They have not engaged in any arguments or disputes. They have not responded to the many attacks upon themselves occasioned by your proposals. Quite simply, in the spirit of the Lord Himself and of their founders, they have quietly refused to participate in any degrading and demeaning processes imposed upon them.

They know who they are, what their missions are, and how they are to be lived. I do not see them wavering from that position.

I submit to you that come April, when you plan to begin Phase III of this visitation, with Phase II uncompleted, you will find yourself at an impasse. What do you propose to do?

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I want to make a suggestion ? one by which, I think, you may bring this unhappy situation to a peaceful resolution.

I suggest that before the end of February you communicate to all the U.S. apostolic religious women the following points:

First, that after carefully studying their responses to Phase II and reflecting on them, you can see that there is now no real need for an apostolic visitation and that you thereby designate it as officially closed.

Secondly, that you sincerely want to thank all the U.S. sisters for their great honesty in their responses to your requests.

Finally, that you would like the leadership of the LCWR to arrange and prepare at their convenience a meeting of their entire membership whereby you could come as an invited and willing participant to hear about their hopes and fears, to listen to them most sincerely, and to engage with them in dialogue to devise the best ways in which you may be of true service to them in your role as Prefect of the Congregation.

I am convinced that if you use this approach, you will find the U.S. sisters most cooperative. And you may, despite any misgivings, find yourself truly enlightened and your vision both broadened and deepened.

I appeal to you in the spirit of your own Founder, so ready to meet the changes of his own time. Meet these sisters in their own right as full, free adult persons, chosen and dedicated followers and servants of the Lord, filled with His spirit, and most willing to offer His wisdom and love.

Sincerely yours,

Peter A. Fitzpatrick, CFX
Xaverian Brothers

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cc.: Archbishop Pietro Sambi, Apostolic Nuncio
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