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Cardinal Rode and His American Surrogates

Ken Briggs | Feb. 6, 2010 NCR Today

Nearly 20 years ago, the Vatican put its official stamp of approval on the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious.

It thus became the visible and formal proxy in Rome's offensive against the "modernism" of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. As such, it is the favored wedge group in Rome's campaign to replace renewal with reaction.

Accordingly, the head of the investigation of American sisters is allied with CMSWR.

Circumstantial evidence suggests much more coordination between the Vatican and CMSWR to undermine the general direction of renewal among LCWR communities. For one thing, a publicity campaign has gained momentum on the premise that CMSWR communities are flourishing becasue they are doing it "right" while those related to LCWR are failing because they have disobeyed church authority and succumbed to worldly ways.

By coincident or not, Ave Maria Press has issued a book that promotes "orthodox" practices among sisters and repudiates the basic direction of renewal.

As noted by Maureen Fiedler, Cardinal Rode's talk on Feb. 3 was another clear signal that the investigation was never intended as a fair hearing. His censure of sisters who had, in his view, become waywardly secular was broad and unmistakably aimed at LCWR communities.

Rode's blast further underscores the likelihood that the Vatican teamed up with conservative allies in the U.S. long before the announcement of the investigation as part of a plan that's been in the works for a long time.

Possibly dating to that occasion in 1992 when CMSWR received its blessing to pursue its mission on behalf of the Vatican.

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