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NCAN lauds LCWR's obedience stand

Thomas C. Fox | Aug. 16, 2012 NCR Today

The National Coalition of American Nuns board Tuesday isssued a statement applauding the Leadership Conference of Women Religious for its "obedience through a prayerful discernment process" in responding to the (Vatican) Doctrinal Assessment at its annual meeting in Saint Louis last week.

"The theology, ecclesiology, and spirituality of Vatican II helped women religious to understand that their commitment, and therefore their obedience, is to God, not to an institution," NCAN wrote. "To be faithful and obedient to God may, at times, mean taking a direction different from the one proposed by religious authorities."

"We affirm LCWR?s desire to use this opportunity to explain its mission and values in a dialogue with the three Vatican representatives," the Aug. 14 statement goes on. "We are pleased that LCWR will try to help Church leadership understand the need to create possibilities for the laity, particularly women, to have a voice in the church and that they will proceed with these discussions as long as the integrity of their mission is not compromised.
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The full NCAN statement follows:

Since April 18, 2012, Charles Dickens? opening lines in the Tales of Two Cities have been repeated often in the Church. ?It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.? In the interim, the Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) has brought much heartache and pain to U.S. sisters and sisters around the whole world. It has also given sisters an opportunity to explain to the CDF and the world the values that women religious hold dear.

One such value is obedience. The theology, ecclesiology, and spirituality of Vatican II helped women religious to understand that their commitment, and therefore their obedience, is to God, not to an institution. To be faithful and obedient to God may, at times, mean taking a direction different from the one proposed by religious authorities. Such a prophetic obedience requires boldness like that of Jesus of Nazareth who broke the religious law of his day by performing good works on the Sabbath. Such obedience requires courage because it does not feel comfortable to oppose one?s spiritual leaders. Like Jesus, a person or group who decides to sidestep a religious directive in favor of a life-giving alternative must be conscious that sanctions may ensue.

The presumption of how we should act lies on the side of duly constituted authority, but women religious?indeed all the faithful?should not follow authorities blindly. We need only meditate on the Holocaust to see the potential results of blind obedience. All directives need to be taken to heart and to prayer. Through discernment and the guidance of the Spirit, we decide if these directives are in the best interests of the human community.

Women religious have tried to live this kind of adult obedience since Vatican II. They have given attention to their community?s documents, the needs of the people, their own life experiences, the statements of religious leaders, and the promptings of the Spirit as sources of knowing the direction in which they are called to act, and they have tried to live obediently in the light of these sources.

The National Coalition of American Nuns applauds LCWR for its obedience through a prayerful discernment process in responding to the Doctrinal Assessment. We affirm LCWR?s desire to use this opportunity to explain its mission and values in a dialogue with the three Vatican representatives. We are pleased that LCWR will try to help Church leadership understand the need to create possibilities for the laity, particularly women, to have a voice in the church and that they will proceed with these discussions as long as the integrity of their mission is not compromised.

NCAN is an organization of U.S. women religious [1] who has been working, studying and speaking out on justice issues in church and society since 1969.

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