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Irish priest association supports Bourgeois

Dennis Coday | Dec. 7, 2012
Roy Bourgeois

The church reform group that represents about a quarter of Ireland?s Catholic priests issued a statement of support Friday for Roy Bourgeois, the U.S. Maryknoll priest that the Vatican laicized and dismissed [1] from his order because of his support of women?s ordination.

The Association of Catholic Priests (Ireland) called on the Vatican?s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ?to cease this type of abuse, to restore Fr. Bourgeois to the full exercise of his ministry and to allow for open and honest discussion on issues that are of crucial importance for the future of the Church.?

?We believe that this type of action, ordered by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and implemented by the Maryknoll Order, is unjust, and ultimately counter-productive,? reads the statement from the association.

?Dismissing people because they have sincerely held views that are contrary to those of the Vatican, but which are widely shared by the Catholic faithful, will not end discussion and debate on these topics,? it says.

The Association of Catholic Priests, which was founded by eight priests two years ago, has grown to represent about 1,000 of Ireland?s some 4,000 priests. The association aims at the ?full implementation of the vision and teaching of the Second Vatican Council? and a ?re-structuring of the governing system of the Church,? according to the group?s constitution [2].

The association has also called for an end to mandatory celibacy and for the ordination of women [3].

As an example of the widespread support for women priests among the Catholic Faithful, the statement from the association cited a year-long ?listening process? in the diocese of Killaloe, a mainly rural diocese in Ireland, in which participants ?expressed the opinion that the ordination of women should be openly discussed, particularly in view of the projected shortage of priests in the next few years.?

The leadership team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, one of the largest groups of Catholic sisters in the western hemisphere, issued a similar statement of support for Bourgeois on Nov. 28 [4].

One of the Irish priests? association?s cofounders, Redemptorist Fr. Tony Flannery , a popular author and retreat director, is himself under Vatican scrutiny [5] according to press reports from earlier this year.

Flannery was ordered to stop writing and speaking and to go to a monastery for a period where he would ?pray and reflect? on his situation [6].

Following is the complete statement from Ireland?s Association of Catholic Priests.

Statement of Support for Fr. Roy Bourgeois

The Association of Catholic Priests (Ireland) is saddened and disappointed by the dismissal of Maryknoll priest Fr. Roy Bourgeois from the priesthood and from his religious congregation, and his excommunication from the Church that he has served for almost half a century.

We believe that this type of action, ordered by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and implemented by the Maryknoll Order, is unjust, and ultimately counter-productive. Dismissing people because they have sincerely held views that are contrary to those of the Vatican, but which are widely shared by the Catholic faithful, will not end discussion and debate on these topics.

In fact it will only serve to highlight the urgent need to face the problems around ministry in the Church. Participants in a year long ?listening process? in the diocese of Killaloe, a mainly rural diocese in Ireland, expressed the opinion that the ordination of women should be openly discussed, particularly in view of the projected shortage of priests in the next few years.

Surely this is yet another of many examples of the sensus fidelium calling for change so that, in future, the Eucharist can be available to the Church community.

We call on the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to cease this type of abuse, to restore Fr. Bourgeois to the full exercise of his ministry and to allow for open and honest discussion on issues that are of crucial importance for the future of the Church.

On behalf of the Leadership of the ACP:

Fr. P.J. Madden; Fr. Sean McDonagh; Fr. Brendan Hoban; Fr. Tony Flannery

[Dennis Coday is *NCR* editor.]

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