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Bishop attacking Wisdom's Well could use some interfaith dialogue

Maureen Fiedler | Dec. 13, 2012 NCR Today

When I read stories like the following, I wonder if bishops like Robert Morlino of Madison, Wis., have enough to do.

This bishop has banned [1] two nuns, Srs. Maureen McDonnell and Lynn Lisbeth -- who are well-known in Madison -- from holding workshops or providing spiritual direction or guidance at any Catholic churches in this diocese. Both are Sinsinawa Dominicans who run a spirituality center called Wisdom's Well Interfaith Spirituality Center. Two other women connected to Wisdom's Well have also been banned. Moreover, no publicity materials from Wisdom's Well are to be allowed inside parishes.

An official communication, or memo, from Morlino to the priests of the diocese on Nov. 27 says he has "grave concerns" about the women's teachings, specifically that they "espouse certain views" flowing from "New Ageism" and "indifferentism." The latter, according to the memo, is "the belief that no one religion or philosophy is superior to another."

It went on to say that these women "may not share an authentic view of the Catholic Church's approach to interreligious dialogue." It quotes statements on the center's website, including the fact that the work of Wisdom Well embraces "the wisdom found in other religious traditions."

As someone who is involved in interfaith work every day with the radio show "Interfaith Voices," I am shocked. What planet is this bishop living on? Does he think other religious traditions offer no wisdom? Does he think we can't learn from Buddhists or Muslims or Jews or Christians of other denominations? Has he ever heard of Vatican II?

He might re-read *Nostra Aetate*, which says in part: "... other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people." Sounds to me like "wisdom" comes from other faith traditions.

Just out of curiosity, I went to the website for Wisdom's Well [2]. There, you will find advertised such "dangerous" presentations as these:

- Just Peace Initiative: The Challenge and Promise of Nonviolence for Our Time (Maybe Bishop Molino thinks his people will learn something from Quakers or Mennonites?)
- Bridges to Contemplative Living
- Contemplative dialogue series based on the Interspiritual Wisdom of Thomas Merton (He did have connections with Buddhists.)
- Centering Prayer I & II: Christian Meditation as Transformative Practice (How this one could be subversive is beyond me.)

And the website's home page includes this "dangerous" quote:

"In practice, when people from different faiths come together to be at prayer together, it isn't to engage in a formal and communal act, but to listen and to learn as each delegation prays in its own way. It is an act of dialogue in which people of faith bring their forms of prayer, their scriptures and their most valued spiritual traditions together in an act of faithful common witness. It is precisely as the word "interfaith" implies, a meeting between people of faith**."** -- **Thomas Ryan** in *Prayer of Heart & Body.*

Like I said: Bishop Morlino needs something worthwhile to occupy his time. Might I recommend some serious interfaith conversations?

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Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/node/40976
[2] http://www.wisdomswell.org/