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Will the real Pope Francis please stand up?

Maureen Fiedler | Oct. 1, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

I am delighted with most of what Pope Francis has been doing: his simple lifestyle; his emphasis on peace and justice; his open, warm and welcoming personality. But I have reserved overall judgment because of his statements about women in the church.

And two stories in the media recently give me pause. The first is the story of the excommunication of Fr. Gregory Reynolds of Melbourne, Australia [1]. It raises some serious questions about the governing style of Pope Francis and about the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Archbishop Gerhard Müller.

Müller apparently approved the excommunication and presented the case to Pope Francis for final approval, which, I assume, is a regular procedure in such cases. The cause is not totally clear, but according to Melbourne Archbishop Denis Hart, "The decision by Pope Francis to dismiss Fr. Reynolds from the clerical state and to declare his automatic excommunication has been made because of his public teaching on the ordination of women contrary to the teaching of the Church and his public celebration of the Eucharist when he did not hold faculties to act publicly as a priest."

Excommunication for advocating the ordination of women? Really? This is a step further than what happened to Fr. Roy Bourgeois, who was dismissed from the clerical state and Maryknoll when Pope Benedict was in office.

Add to this the LCWR doctrinal assessment and mandate, also initiated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. This was begun in April 2012 after Müller's appointment to the doctrinal congregation in July 2012. But Müller has not stopped it and, reportedly, Francis has said it can go forward.

Yet Pope Francis has reaffirmed Müller in his position at the doctrinal congregations. If he has any serious disagreements with him, I doubt he would do that.

Many articles in the media about Pope Francis have called him a "reformer," or even a "revolutionary." I think it is much too early for such characterizations. So far, it's a mixed message.

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