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John Dear and the Jesuits

Maureen Fiedler | Jan. 31, 2014 NCR Today

This blog is a bit belated, but I was truly distressed to hear that the Jesuits dismissed another one of their prophets: John Dear. I met John Dear only a couple times, mostly at Call to Action conferences. He was always warm and funny and utterly dedicated to justice and peace.

So in this age when that best-known of all Jesuits -- Pope Francis -- is preaching a strong message of justice and peace, why in the world would the Jesuits dismiss someone like John Dear? Why would they not celebrate him? Join him in his work? Yet Dear himself says his superiors tried to stop his work for peace!

I'm doubly distressed because I watched the Jesuits dismiss another prophet several years ago -- my longtime friend Bill Callahan, who died in July 2010. He too was a strong advocate for justice and peace, and he understood that that message also must apply to the church. Thus, he advocated the ordination of women -- an issue that got him in hot water with the Jesuits.

I can recall Bill's talking about a Jesuit document making justice and peace the center of their ministry: "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice," which dates from their 32nd congregation in 1974-75. Where is that message today?

It lived inside Bill Callahan, and it lives inside John Dear today (whether he is a Jesuit or not). But does it live among the Jesuit leadership? That is an open question.

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