

Charles Curran: 'Banned by the Pope'

Thomas C. Fox | Jun. 17, 2010 NCR Today

I've recently returned from the Catholic Theological Society of America's annual convention. On the final night, the CTSA [awarded its prestigious John Courtney Murray Award to the popular Fr. Peter Phan](#) [1], theologian at Georgetown University. Phan is the last on a list dating back to 1972 when the CTSA gave the award for the first time to Fr. Charles Curran, who now teaches at Southern Methodist University, having been forced out of Catholic University of America by an unfavorable judgment on his teachings by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and now Pope Benedict XVI.

Curran remains a popular and prominent Catholic theologian, esteemed by his colleagues, although Ratzinger said in 1986 that Curran was no longer eligible to teach in a Catholic setting.

Curran recently wrote an article entitled "[Banned by the Pope](#) [2]" which recalls some of that history and appears in the June 14th issue of *Newsweek*.

In the piece, Curran explains how he got into trouble with Rome: "I lectured and wrote about traditional church teachings. But I also pointed out areas where I believed Catholicism and modern life were misaligned, including Rome's opposition to birth control for married couples; its stance on homosexuality, divorce, and remarriage; and the status of women in the church."

Addressing the issue of mandatory celibacy, Curran writes that it could easily be changed.

"Lifting the ban might help address the pedophilia crisis?which, at least in the popular mind, was caused in part by the frustrations of celibacy. More important, it would reverse a damaging shortage of clergy. Between 1975 and today, the number of Catholic priests in the United States has slid from nearly 60,000 to about 40,000. Protestant churches, which allow their ministers to have families, have suffered no such struggles. I can only conclude that celibacy laws are to blame."

He goes on: "I'm not wholly at peace with would-be reformers placing all the emphasis on the celibacy issue. Women, whom the church treats as second-class citizens, are hurting most today; changing the laws that forbid male clergy from marrying will do nothing to speed women's path to the priesthood. We should treat rewriting the celibacy laws as an initial edit?a change on the way to redressing the multitude of other needed reforms. Even at the risk, I'd argue, of getting an unfriendly letter one day from Rome."

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Links:

[1] <http://ncronline.org/news/people/peter-c-phan-receives-john-courtney-murray-award>

[2] <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/06/04/banned-by-the-pope.html>