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Roy Bourgeois: a man of conscience

Maureen Fiedler | Nov. 20, 2012 NCR Today

Last night, I was stunned -- but not totally surprised -- to hear the news that the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had dismissed [1] Fr. Roy Bourgeois from the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.

My first reaction was a prayer of solidarity with Roy, whom I have long admired as a man of conscience and whom I count as a friend.

But I also exhaled a loud sigh of dismay. This is the latest sign that the Catholic church is moving backward into the 19th century with all deliberate speed. It is another move by the Vatican that puts its actions at odds with the core message of the Gospel and with the document on the Church in the Modern World from Vatican II: "Every type of discrimination ... based on sex ... is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent" (No. 29).

It is a sign that Vatican officials refuse to read or understand the extensive scholarship on the question of women's ordination, scholarship that has so thoroughly refuted their arguments that any intelligent opponent of women's ordination would have given up long ago.

It is yet another action that suggests that Rome's desire to shore up its all-male power structure comes before anything else. The Vatican's fear of women, women's gifts and women's powers is on display yet again for all to see.

My real sadness in all this: The Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers cooperated in the process. I don't know if, in the end, their leadership voted to dismiss Roy (the press release is unclear on that), but they did ask Roy to recant his stand. To Roy's credit, he refused. He refused to give in to the medieval and oppressive process that asked recantations and threatened dismissal for his stand of conscience. That process -- in this instance and in other settings -- flies in the face of all that is good and holy and respectful of persons. It is not Catholic in the deepest sense of that word. True Catholicism respects conscience.

One day, when the Catholic church finally decides to ordain women, Roy will be recognized as a prophet and a saint. In many quarters of the church, he already is.

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