

Making Clear What Rome is Up To

Ken Briggs | Aug. 29, 2009 NCR Today

All sorts of people keep saying they have no idea why the Vatican is investigating nuns. It's conceivable, I suppose, that someone could have missed the last 40 years of strained relations between Rome and U.S. sisters, and it's true that the investigation wasn't accompanied by a large print set of objectives, but otherwise it's either disingenuous or an evasive strategy in some grander design. In any case, it's unnerving to hear people pretend the gorilla isn't in the room.

One thought about this with regard to Ted Kennedy. He was a lay person just like the nuns, of course, but the Vatican no longer has much direct control over the American laity so he, like his brothers and sisters, exercise their own judgment over moral and theological issues, with impunity. The one place where a modicum of control does exist, in theory at least, is over nuns (and priests) who are in some sense accountable to Rome. Naturally, therefore, the effort to recapture power takes place on that front. Dissent, which in itself can be worthy, permeates all of the laity who have been exposed to democratic and egalitarian ideals. But Rome can do little or nothing about the Kennedy type dissenters; nuns remain among the smaller, remaining targets.

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