

A FORTNIGHT OF FREEDOM

Catholic Heroes of Religious Liberty

Joseph F. O'Callaghan

The American Catholic bishops, charging that religious liberty is under attack, have proposed that the two-week period from June 21 to July 4 be dedicated to a “Fortnight of Freedom,” emphasizing prayer, education and public action.

Their summons seems hypocritical, however, when it is evident that they ignore the “sensus fidei” or “sense of the faith” professed by the People of God (Lumen Gentium 35) and trample on the rights of conscience of those who disagree with them. When they speak of religious liberty one may well ask: “Religious liberty for whom? The bishops? Or all the Catholic people?”

In observance of the “Fortnight of Freedom” Catholics may wish to dedicate each day to those Catholic theologians and leaders who have been bullied, threatened, silenced, or wrongfully excommunicated by the pope, the Congregation for the Defense of the Faith (CDF), and the bishops. The following are worthy of being so honored:

1. Yves Congar, O.P., leading theologian at Vatican II. Forbidden to teach or publish in 1956 by the Holy Office (the successor of the Inquisition) for his writings on ecumenism. He explained: “What put me wrong [in their eyes] is not having said false things, but having said things they do not like to have said.”
2. John Courtney Murray, S.J., principal author of Vatican II’s Declaration on Religious Liberty. Silenced by the Holy Office and forbidden to publish because of his writings.
3. Hans Küng, theological expert at Vatican II. Deprived of official status as a Catholic theologian at the University of Tübingen by Pope John Paul II, because of his book “Infallible? An Inquiry.”
4. Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., another major voice at Vatican II. His books on ministry drew hostile attention from the Vatican and mistrust and suspicion from the Dutch bishops.
5. Leonardo Boff, O.F.M., proponent of liberation theology. Silenced in 1985 by the CDF because of his criticism of church leadership. Charged Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, with “religious terrorism.”
6. Charles Curran, moral theologian. Ousted from Catholic University in 1967 because of his teaching on contraception. Reinstated after a strike by faculty and students. Coordinated a dissent by 600 theologians from Pope Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae*. Under pressure from John Paul II, ousted again in 1986.
7. Joan Chittister, O.S.B., spiritual writer. In 2001 the Vatican Congregation on Consecrated Life forbade her to address a conference on the Ordination of Women in Dublin. Backed by her community, she ignored that admonition.
8. Roger Haight, S.J., author of “Jesus, Symbol of God.” Prohibited by the CDF in 2009 from writing and teaching.
9. Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J. The Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2011, without consulting her, charged that her “Quest for the Living

God” "differs from authentic Catholic teaching on essential points." She rejected that as a misinterpretation and misrepresentation of her views.

10. Louise Lears, S.C, removed from ministry in 2008 by Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis, and Louise Akers, S.C., removed from teaching in 2009 by Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, for supporting women’s ordination. Sister Akers stated that to deny women’s right to ordination would violate her conscience.
11. Margaret McBride, R.S.M., excommunicated in 2009 by Bishop Thomas Olmstead of Phoenix, because she voted, as a member of the Ethics Committee at St. Joseph’s Hospital, to save the life of a mother rather than that of a fetus.
12. Geoffrey Robinson, retired auxiliary bishop of Sydney. The Vatican Congregation for Bishops, prompted by American bishops, asked him to cancel his American tour in 2008 because he called for a review of Church teaching on sexuality.
13. Margaret Farley, R.S.M., author of the book, “Just Love,” which the CDF declared is not a valid expression of Catholic teaching. She explained that it was not intended to do so, but rather to help people think through questions of human sexuality.
14. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, accused by the CDF of expressing “radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith” and daring to “challenge positions taken by the Bishops, who are the Church’s authentic teachers of faith and morals.”

Nearly four hundred years ago, the astronomer, Galileo, was condemned by the Inquisition because he asserted that the earth moves around the sun. In 2000 John Paul II issued an apology. Let us hope that four hundred years will not elapse before the Church acknowledges these modern heroes of religious liberty, who dared to say “things [the bishops] do not like to have said.”

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