

Religious Who signed Abortion Statement Instructed to Retract

Origins, January 17, 1985

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Religious superiors of the members of religious orders who signed a statement on pluralism and abortion that was published Oct. 7, (1984) in the New York Times...received letters from the Vatican Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes calling for them to direct members who signed the statement to publicly retract it or to risk expulsion from their religious orders. At least 26 religious priests, nuns and brothers were among some 80 signers of the statement issued by the Catholic Committee on Pluralism and Abortion. A copy of a letter from the congregation obtained by NC News Service states that the attitude expressed in the advertisement "is in contradiction to the teaching of the church. The signers of the ad are, therefore, seriously lacking in 'religious submission of will and mind' to the magisterium." The letter was signed by Archbishop Jerome Hamer, OP, prefect of the congregation and Archbishop Vincenzo Fagiolo, secretary. It was dated Nov. 30. (1984)

In the Sunday, Oct. 7, 1984 edition of The New York Times there appeared on page E7 a full-page advertisement titled "A Diversity of Opinion Regarding Abortion Exists Among Committed Catholics." Among the misleading and erroneous statements of the ad is the following: "Statements of recent popes and of the Catholic hierarchy have condemned the direct termination of prenatal life as morally wrong in all circumstances. There is the mistaken belief in American society that this is the only legitimate Catholic position."

This attitude in respect to the magisterium is in contradiction to the teaching of the church (cf. Dogmatic constitution on the Church, 25). The signers of the ad are, therefore, seriously lacking in 'religious submission of will and mind' to the magisterium.

Moreover, the Second Vatican Council, recalling to mind the constant teaching of the church, affirmed that abortion is "an unspeakable crime" (cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 51). The revised code of Canon Law punished abortion as "an offense against human life" and declares that "a person who procures a successful abortion incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication" (Canon 1398).

On the basis of what has just been said, you well understand that "the pernicious upholding or spreading of doctrines condemned by the magisterium of the church," especially on an issue of such gravity, is a flagrant scandal and is sufficient cause for the dismissal of a religious guilty of such conduct (cf. Canon 698, 1).

I request you, therefore, to direct members of your institute who undersigned the declaration in the above mentioned newspaper to make a public retraction. A

notification of the retraction shall be sent to this Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

In the event that the religious refuse and in fact do not make a public retraction you are to proceed in accordance with Canon 696, 1, and as direction by Canon 697 to warn the religious with an explicit threat of dismissal from the institute. It will be necessary to arrive at this step – even though to our mutual regret – if the religious remain obstinately disobedient to the church and to you, the superior.

With sentiments of deep concern for the well-being of religious life and of gratitude for your cooperation in this serious and sensitive matter, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Archbishop Jerome Hamer, OP

Archbishop Vincenzo Fagiolo