

Rev. Edward Dougherty, M.M., Superior General
And My Maryknoll Community
P.O. Box 303
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August 8, 2011

My Brothers,

I have been a Catholic priest for 39 years and Maryknoll has been my faith community, my family. So it was with great sadness that I received your letter of July 27, 2011 (Second Canonical Warning), stating I must recant my belief and public statements that support the ordination of women, or I will be dismissed from Maryknoll.

In my ministry over the years I have met many devout women in our Church who believe God is calling them to be priests. Why wouldn't they be called? God created men and women of equal dignity and, as we all know, the call to be a priest comes from God.

My brothers, who are we to reject God's call of women to the priesthood? The Holy Scriptures remind us in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither male nor female. In Christ Jesus you are one." How is it possible for us to say that our call from God, as men, is authentic, but God's call of women is not?

After much reflection, study, and prayer, I believe that our Church's teaching that excludes women from the priesthood defies both faith and reason and cannot stand up to scrutiny. This teaching has nothing to do with God, but with men, and is rooted in sexism. Sexism, like racism, is a sin. And no matter how hard we may try to justify discrimination against women, in the end, it is not the way of God, but of men who want to hold on to their power.

As people of faith we believe in the primacy of conscience. Our conscience connects us to the Divine. Our conscience gives us a sense of right and wrong and urges us to do what is right, what is just.

What you are asking me to do in your letter is not possible without betraying my conscience. In essence, you are telling me to lie and say I do not believe that God calls both men and women to the priesthood. This I cannot do, therefore I will not recant.

I firmly believe that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is a grave injustice against women, against our Church, and against our God.

As you know, I am not a lone voice crying out in the wilderness for the ordination of women. Polls show that the majority of Catholics support having women priests in the Church. Many fellow priests tell me they believe women should be ordained, but are afraid to break their silence because of the consequences.

Many years ago as a young man in the military in Vietnam, I felt God was calling me to be a priest. I entered Maryknoll and found the happiness, meaning and hope I was seeking in life by following my call. Why should we deny this call from God - this opportunity - to women?

My brothers, in God's eyes there is neither male or female. We are one. Just as you and I were called to be priests by our loving God, women are also being called to serve our Church as priests. Let us welcome them and give thanks to God.

Your Brother In Christ,

Roy Bourgeois, M.M.

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