

It looks as if Bob Kaiser & Bridget Mary's presence in Eire is timely and that they are being well recieved (by everone other than the hierarchy.)

Bill Schuch

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The Irish Times - Friday, August 20, 2010

Call to boycott Mass may be start of 'revolution in Catholic Church'

PATSY McGARRY Religious Affairs Correspondent

A REVOLUTION “may already have started” in the Catholic Church in Ireland, the Humbert Summer School was told in Castlebar, Co Mayo, last night.

US religion commentator **Robert Blair Kaiser** said in the keynote address that news reports last week of 80-year-old Jennifer Sleeman’s call for a boycott of Sunday Mass on September 26th in protest at the Vatican’s treatment of women suggested that “this grandmother from Cork” may “already have started a revolution”.

“She obviously believes what I believe, that you can have a voice and a vote in your own church, and still be Catholic and, at the same time, Irish,” he said.

Author of 13 books, many on Catholic Church reform, as correspondent for Time magazine, Kaiser was awarded an Overseas Press Club award for his coverage of the Second Vatican Council.

Speaking last night on the topic Catholic Church Reform: No More Thrones, he said that “**until the Copernican revolution, monarchs exercised absolute control over their subjects by divine right. But when the peoples of the world, informed by a new cosmology, put the divine right of kings into history’s dust bin, they forgot to toss the divine right of popes into the garbage, too.**

He emphasised: “**I am not attacking our Catholic faith. I am talking about the special and corrosive tyranny that popes have been exercising over Catholics everywhere . . .**”

Ireland’s first cardinal Paul Cullen in the 19th century and archbishop of Dublin John Charles McQuaid in the 20th century “established the clerical culture in Ireland that Judge Yvonne Murphy identified as the root cause of the Irish scandals that have sent you and your nation reeling”.

He said that “**for a thousand years, popes have promoted a clerical church instead of a Jesus church, that the fathers of Vatican II worked for four serious years to give the church back to the people, and that popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI spent the next 30 years repealing their labour, and allowing corruption to reign, a move that has left our church, which is Christ’s body on earth, broken**”.

“Can you help create a people’s church?” he asked. “Yes! You can if you want to. In this context, I like to quote Pope John Paul II. In 1978, he travelled to Warsaw and told millions of

Poles: 'You can take back your country if you demand it.' You could be saying the same thing: 'We can take back our church if we demand it.'

"The Poles were fighting against long odds – the military might of the Soviet Union itself. But they won their battle."

He said that "news over the past decade about our crumbling, abuse-of-authority church may tell us that change is already happening, happening faster than anyone thinks".

Responding, Irish Catholic deputy editor Michael Kelly said that clericalism in the church "was at the heart of the sex abuse scandal". By "clericalist" he meant "an elitist mind-set, together with structures and patterns of behaviour corresponding to it, that take it for granted that clerics are intrinsically superior to the other members of the church and deserve automatic deference. Passivity and dependency are the laity's lot."

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The Irish Times - Saturday, July 31, 2010

'Being a woman priest is what I feel I am called to do'

PATSY McGARRY Religious Affairs Correspondent

The Vatican's directive confirming its policy of excommunication for those involved in the ordination of women has been greeted with defiance by dissidents in the US and dismay by Irish campaigners

'SHOCKING.' "A travesty." "A slap in the face." "The action of a paranoid, scared, running-for-cover Vatican." Those are just some of the phrases used by **Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan** to describe the latest directive from Rome on the ordination of women.

The Vatican's *Normae de Gravioribus Delictis*, published two weeks ago, concerns sanctions in canon law for clerical child sex abuse, concelebration of the Eucharist with Protestant ministers, heresy, apostasy, schism – and the ordination of women. It reaffirmed the sanction of excommunication for anyone involved with the ordination of women in the Catholic Church.

Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan is a leader of an ever-growing band of dissidents from this policy. She is "happy to be excommunicated. If they keep going like this there'll soon be more 'out' than 'in'. We're at the heart of the church, renewing it. We're not going to put up with second-class membership any more. We are an empowered community of Catholics. Mysticism and social justice are in my DNA as an Irish Catholic. I love the faith, but this corrupt church has to be reformed. Where are the excommunicated paedophiles or bishops who covered up the abuse of children?"

Meehan is from Crosskerry, near Rathdowney, Co Laois, which the family left for the US in 1956. Crosskerry is one of those still centres of the universe.

"It hasn't changed since we left," she recalled. She visits regularly. "So many, many relatives. Every three or four years."

She will speak at the Humbert Summer School in Castlebar on Friday, August 20th.

Publication of *Normae de Gravioribus Delictis* has been “a watershed moment” for the Roman Catholic Women Priests (RCWP) group, to which she belongs. It has attracted huge media attention to the RCWP in the US.

Meehan is based in Florida, where, she says, “the publicity is unbelievable”. Members of the movement in Europe have said to her that if the group can make headway in the US, the Vatican will take heed.

Rome just has to “get over the sexism and misogyny”, says Meehan. “To say women are not worthy is so over the top. It is very hateful to women. Very, very hostile to women.”

It has got to the stage, she claims, where people are now seeking out the RCWP as “the Catholic Church has become too toxic now”. Besides, “there were women deacons, priests, and bishops for the first 1,200 years of Christianity, in the Celtic Church too. There is a letter from Rome condemning women priests in the Irish church back then.”

Meehan was ordained bishop last year, having become a priest in 2006, and serves communities in Virginia and Florida.

The first women Catholic priests, the so-called “Danube Seven”, were ordained on that river in Germany in 2002. Five were German, one was Austrian and one was American. The following year saw the ordination of two women Catholic bishops, one German, one Austrian.

As explained on the RCWP website, the ordinations “are valid because of our unbroken line of apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic Church. The principal consecrating Roman Catholic male bishop who ordained our first women bishops is a bishop with a line of unbroken apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic Church in full communion with the Pope.”

The Vatican does not agree. On May 29th 2008 its Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) stated that the women priests and the bishops who ordained them would be excommunicated *latae sententiae* (automatically).

The website of Ireland’s Brothers and Sisters in Christ (Basic) movement for Catholic women priests in Ireland has not been updated since October 2007. According to Soline Humbert, this is because Basic, which was set up in 1993, has become something of an underground movement. Anticipating the May 2008 action of the CDF, articles and names were removed from the website to prevent people losing their jobs as theologians, chaplains, and so on.

“Fear is an awful thing, another form of institutional abuse,” she says. “People who believe one thing are being forced to do another. At heart it is a dysfunctional church, where people cannot speak about what they believe in conscience.”

This is all such a long way from the Basic seminar in 1995, when participants included the future President, Mary McAleese, and the retired professor of moral theology at St Patrick’s College Maynooth, Fr Enda McDonagh.

Soline Humbert believes she has a vocation for the priesthood and has celebrated the Eucharist in her home every day this past 14 years. “I am not the only one,” she says. “I know several. Some religious sisters do it as well. My first chalice and paten were given to me by a religious sister and another by a community of religious sisters.”

Originally from Versailles, Humbert fell in love with Ireland on a visit in the late 1960s. She attended Trinity College Dublin in the early 1970s and married here. She has two sons. One bishop said to her that “perhaps one of your sons will have your vocation to the priesthood”. She was not impressed. She has not had much luck with bishops.

Then Catholic primate Cardinal Cahal Daly refused even to accept from her a petition calling for women priests. It had 10,000 names. He wrote to her saying he could not do so, as the Pope had spoken on the matter. She wrote a letter to this newspaper so that the signatories could be informed. She quoted from the cardinal's letter. He wrote to her again, expressing his dismay that she would quote from their private correspondence and saying she could not be trusted.

For Humbert, "it was a moment of insight into the abuse of power. He did not want it known that he had refused to accept the petition". She tried to get a meeting with the cardinal, without success.

She sent him a Valentine's card one February. It asked: "What about a date?" The tactic worked. She was invited to Armagh. "It was the toughest meeting. The man was steel," she says.

She met Cardinal Desmond Connell when he was Archbishop of Dublin. He told her: "A woman wasn't on the cross and so couldn't represent Christ. There was not much meeting of minds."

Cardinal Seán Brady simply refused to discuss the issue with her at all. "He said no, he couldn't. Rome has spoken," Humbert says. "He came down like a guillotine."

Similarly with the late Cardinal Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster. He was visiting Dublin and was shaking her hand as she began talking about women priests. "He withdrew his hand. He left me absolutely . . . as if I had leprosy," she says.

She had a meeting with the current Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, about six years ago. "He did listen. He warned me, in conscience, that I was risking excommunication. It is not something I want."

Humbert feels a strong sense of vocation. "In conscience, it is what I feel so strongly I am called to do," she says. "I do love the church. I have received a lot from it and suffered a lot because of it. It is my church."

Fr Eamonn McCarthy has also suffered because of his belief that there should be women priests. Currently a curate at Dunlavin, Co Wicklow, he was without a job until 2004.

For four years he was in "a stand-off" with the then Archbishop, Cardinal Connell.

"I pointed out to him that there was quite a range of women with a decent calling to the priesthood. They were not mad. I said I would like it made known to Rome," he says. He doubts whether it was.

He was out of a job until Cardinal Connell retired and Archbishop Martin took over, when "a posting was made available". He is unlikely ever to be a parish priest or an office holder in the church. Such people must take an oath to uphold the faith, which includes an acceptance that women should not be priests. McCarthy would refuse to take that oath. There are "a fair few" priests who share his views on women's ordination but, like him, "they just get on with it".

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A SUPPORTIVE LETTER TO THE EDITOR IN THE IRISH TIMES

Madam, – Rev Joseph O'Leary would welcome the ordination of women in the Catholic Church but unless these ordinations are carried out according to existing canonical law they "are a crime against the sacraments" (July 24th). This category of crimes against sacraments is a new one for many of us and it shows how church authorities can reinforce injustice and prejudice against women by categorising their "illegal" ordination as an offence in canon law.

However, the reality is that the continued exclusion of women from the priesthood in the Catholic church is a crime against the dignity of women and their God-given right to be full members of the church of Christ.

The Pope is guilty of a failure to recognise and indeed promote this right of women's ordination. In the civil sphere, women in the past had to disobey unjust laws of the state to gain their emancipation. **Equally in the church women should exercise "holy disobedience" and not be put off by being legally categorised as "criminals against the sacraments".**

When we have enough 'illegally' ordained women then the Vatican will have to negotiate with them to integrate them into their rightful place in the church.

In the meantime, I am looking forward to listening to the American Bishop Mary Meehan who will address the forthcoming Humbert Summer School and who knows, while here she might help the emancipation of women in the Catholic church by ordaining women into the church of God. – Yours, etc,

BRENDAN BUTLER, BD,
The Moorings,
Malahide,
Co Dublin.

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Thanks Bill for Bob Kaiser's revolutionary words. We recently here in Boston lost a fine leader of the Boston VOTF Affiliate who would exult in Kaiser's message; I'm sure John Hynes is smiling as these words grace his Irish Heritage Fields of Green.

I hope all who see and/or hear Bob's words will in their minds ask, Why Not? there are some people who see things as they are and ask WHY? Others see things as they might be and ask, WHY NOT.

If we are ever to breach the chasm that exists between the two-tiered clericalist system that exists in our Church, we must collectively adopt the WHY NOT course. As Kaiser reveals in his "autochthonous church" definition, the model for our future church does exist, is faring well and, does not require some magisterial authority to determine our Catholic faith, religion or structure. WHY NOT.....with the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must move forward and take control and restore our Church to the model that Christ endowed to us.

Thanks again for the copy and please extend my appreciation to Bob for this and all his efforts.

Best wishes,

Ed Wade

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Church's sexual theology in 'deep crisis'

ÉIBHIR MULQUEEN in Ennis

THE SEXUAL theology of the Catholic Church is in deep crisis, Fr Kevin Hegarty, a former editor of the church magazine *Intercom*, said at the Merriman Summer School yesterday.

The majority of Catholic couples were ignoring its teaching on contraception, while its teaching on homosexuality had, rightly he thought, attracted much criticism.

He also said the sexual scandals had dealt the church its worst blow in Ireland in living memory. "The Ferns, Ryan and Murphy reports . . . highlight the acute level of dysfunction in the church. The church's leadership is now divided and, consequently, rudderless. Not since the 19th century has there been such public disagreement between bishops," he said.

Fr Hegarty, who was ordained in 1981 and has ministered in the parish of Kilmore-Erris on the Mullet Peninsula, Co Mayo, for the past 15 years, said he had spent three years as editor of *Intercom* "before the priests found me out". It was his greatest experience of disillusionment with the institutional church. For someone shaped by the influences of democracy, free speech and academic dialogue, the church had been a cold house in the past 30 years, he said.

"Since the 1980s the church has been in the grip of a restorationist mentality. The 'glad, confident morning' that followed the Vatican Council has long faded into the distance. Reform has stalled, and some liberal theologians have been silenced.

"In appointments, passive docility to papal teaching in all its aspects is valued way above creative fidelity to the work of ministry in today's complex world."

It seemed to him that there were two kinds of Catholic Church in Ireland: the parish, where he found a kind of fulfilment, and the institutional structure, from which he often felt alienated. He was part of the greater number of clerics going about their work quietly, and was happy to live in a community where he felt valued.

"We are still welcomed as participants in local events. We are the ones who share the joy of couples at weddings and baptisms. We are central to the excitement of First Communion and Confirmation day. At times of death, we are the ones who, in the words of the poet Thomas Kinsella, seek to give ecclesiastical discipline to shapeless sorrow."

With the decline in priest numbers, Fr Hegarty wondered how long all this would last.

Compulsory celibacy compelled priests to live a lonely existence, he said, and while they were told celibacy was good for them, they were never asked about their experience.

He added he would like to see a church that was prepared to engage seriously in dialogue with the modern world; willing to learn from secular insights, for example in democracy; willing to open its doors to married and women priests; and that would develop a healthy and holistic theology of sexuality. He did not believe he would live to see any of this.

"It seems to me that the Vatican's main concern is to preserve the male hierarchical character of the Catholic Church in its present form. Its procedures are archaic, cumbersome and precious, utterly out of sync with the ways of the democratic world."

Also speaking at the school yesterday was barrister Michael McNamara, who said the move from a Christianity-based natural law had not brought Ireland closer to the legal certainty required for such sensitive areas as reproductive rights.

Even when the courts had defined the constitutionally permissible indications for abortion, as in the X case, the government had failed to realise these rights through legislation.

He said that despite the large number of TDs for a state of such size, the legislature was “unfit for purpose”. “It fails to legislate in a number of complex areas that it is required to legislate in, particularly those areas that are sensitive.”