

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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FEAR

To be honest, I didn't know who Father Tony Flannery was until last week. I know now that he is a 65 year old Redemptorist who writes a column for his Order's monthly magazine *Reality*. Or, at least, he used to write one.

The Vatican silenced him and apparently sent him to six weeks of prayer and meditation at a monastery. I guess he has to get his mind right which means he needs Vaticanization. He keeps oozing out of the cookie cutter.

He was shut down because he supports a married priesthood, women's ordination, and other progressive Catholic issues, including criticizing the Irish hierarchy for their handling of the sex abuse scandal. To get more information on this story go to <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/04/11/vatican-silences-father-flannery.html>

Just when you think the Inquisition is an embarrassing tragedy of the Middle Ages, it shows up again in our post-modern 21st century. Surely, they won't dust off those old racks they used to force suspected "heretics" to recant their wayward ideas, will they? Surely, they can't go that far! On the other hand, what monastery was he sent to?

I suspect that this story will have some legs. For now, I have two general comments:

1. Fr. Flannery received immediate and strong support from at least two priests' organizations – the 800 member *Association of Catholic Priests* in Ireland and Austria's *We are the Church* group which counts thousands of priests throughout Europe as members. Where is a similar response and support from the USA?

There is no response from the USA because there is no comparable priest organization here. With the obvious attack on Vatican II over the past three decades and the increasingly bold, direct assault on priests like Fr. Flannery, why haven't a sizable number of priests nationwide banded together to be able to respond to issues like this?

It is frustratingly clear that the USA hierarchy, as a body, bishops and priests, simply don't have the courage to defend Vatican II and to champion issues like optional celibacy and women's ordination. Presumably, some bishops privately are at least willing to discuss these issues, and there are certainly some priests who not only believe in the liberal agenda, but who speak about it publicly. But there is no courage

or willingness to get organized so there could be a clear, forceful, multi-toned voice representing a progressive wing of the hierarchy, including priests.

The bishops are afraid of the Vatican, and the priests are afraid of the bishops. Fear is not a worthy emotion for leaders of our Church. Will all those who are not afraid please stand up?

It looks like priests in Ireland and Austria are standing up. There were some priests in Milwaukee some years ago, some others in Boston and a handful in Southern Illinois who have taken some courageous stands but there still isn't a nationwide, coordinated voice representing priests who articulate a progressive Catholic agenda based on the gospel and utilizing the teachings of Vatican II and liberal theology of the past 50 years.

Come on, guys, get it together. I know you're out there. We all need you – as individuals and as a body. They can't send all of you to Fr. Flannery's monastery.

2. On the lay side of the Church coin, there are some organizations that push this envelope. *Call to Action*, *Voice of the Faithful*, and the *Faithful of Southern Illinois* are a few that come to mind. These groups, and others I don't know about, need more members and supporters. Not everyone has to picket Cathedrals and chancery offices but there should be many more people publicly declaring what they are against and what they are for. The conservatives are high jacking our Church, and it's time we balance things out.

It's not a hard case to make: just quote the gospel. Service to the poor, justice to the victims, and love for all trumps power to the hierarchy, ritual exactness, and priorities established by (presumed) celibates regarding sexual issues.

More laity need to speak up. We have less to lose than our priest friends. The Vatican can't send us to Fr. Flannery's monastery. Join a group, send letters to the editors, invite progressive speakers to your area, create and/or sign petitions, speak up to your friends and neighbors, get beyond your parish, take an interest in your diocese and the universal church.

And most of all, reject fear.