

Yellow Journalism

Written by Fr. Stephen Sanchez, OCD

“Yellow journalism” used to be an exception and was looked-down upon by legitimate journalists. It is unfortunate that ‘yellow journalism’ – a journalism that goes for the sensationalist headlines, after all it’s about how many ‘hits’ you get and not about the truth of the article – has become the mainstay of the media. When you wed yellow journalism with ignorance of the Catholic faith, or an outright refusal to try to understand its premises, the situation leads to continuous misrepresentations of our Catholic Faith and culture.

A recent example of this was the ‘flash fire’ of the ‘news’ concerning the Sacred Congregation of Faith’s “Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious [LCWR].” The first misconception was ‘that Rome was picking on some poor nuns.’

First – there is a difference between a religious ‘Sister’ and a ‘Nun,’ nuns take solemn vows and live in monasteries, sisters take ‘simple or perpetual vows’ and may still inherit property.

Second – this ‘dialogue’ between the LCWR and the Sacred Congregation has been ongoing for years. The key issue being the ‘disobedience’ of the LCWR by taking public stances contrary to Catholic doctrine. In 1979, the president of the LCWR publicly asked for ‘women’s ordination’ during Pope John Paul II’s visit to the United States. Many members of the LCWR had been complaining to the Vatican of the content of the annual assemblies since 2001. In 2009 the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith announced it would ‘assess’ the situation. The assessment has been in progress since that time.

Third – the criticism of the Congregation was not of the entire body but of the leadership of that body. The LCWR was founded as an ‘umbrella’ of various religious congregations of sisters that joined together to better address issues facing the leaders of these various congregations and to further the mission of the Gospel. The LCWR is a canonically approved organization – guess who approves or disapproves a Catholic organization? There is a parallel group founded in 1995, The Council of Major Superior of Women Religious (CMSWR).

Fourth – the result of the ‘assessment’ was the appointment of Archbishop Sartain to oversee changes to the LCWR’s statutes, programs, and affiliations to be in conformity to the teachings of the Church.

Religious life is a ‘charism’ of the Holy Spirit given to the Catholic Church. The essential and defining vow of the religious is that of obedience, in fact, in early monastic traditions there was only one vow taken – that of obedience, with the understanding that poverty and chastity was part of the one vow. The role of the bishop is to ‘safeguard’ the gift to the Church that ‘religious life’ is meant to be. It is the duty of the bishop to oversee religious life and ensure that it is in conformity with the Tradition that has been handed on through the centuries. Please read the Second Vatican Council’s: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), to understand the role of bishops and the role of religious within the Church.

To further help you receive the truth we present to you the Sacred Congregation of Doctrine and Faith’s “Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.”