

# Editor of America magazine is forced out

Sean Hawkey

The editor of a leading Catholic magazine has been forced to resign for publishing articles on issues such as condoms and HIV/Aids, homosexuality and religious pluralism. Suppression of discussion and ideas imposed by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was quite common during the papacy of John Paul II, under Cardinal Ratzinger, with more than 100 theologians silenced in this time. This is the first censorship by the Vatican since Cardinal Ratzinger was appointed as Pope Benedict XIV.

The resignation of Fr Thomas Reese SJ comes after years of pressure from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Ratzinger's hard-line management or " five years of unremitting criticism from the Vatican" as Robert Mickens of the Tablet says. Fr Reese who was editor of the Jesuit magazine 'America' for nearly seven years was removed through chain of command. The prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, that is Cardinal Ratzinger who is now Pope Benedict XVI, came to an agreement with Jesuit Superior General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach and this was conveyed to the Jesuit Provincial in the US. When Reese returned to the US from covering the papal conclave in Rome he was presented with a fait accompli being told, according to National Catholic Reporter in the US, that the debate was "unwinnable".

What had he done to merit this? Fr Reese regularly published a wide spectrum of views including articles by powerful members of the Catholic hierarchy such as Ratzinger himself, but also articles critical of the official Vatican line on popular issues. The Tablet say that the offending work included:

- An essay exploring moral arguments for the approval of condoms in the context of HIV/Aids;
- Several critical analyses of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's September 2000 document Dominus Iesus, on religious pluralism;
- An editorial criticizing what America called a lack of due process in the congregation's procedures for the investigation of theologians;
- An essay about homosexual priests;
- An essay challenging suggestions that the Church should refuse Communion to Catholic politicians who do not vote as bishops believe they should.

Shortly before the papal conclave Fr Reese wrote that the Vatican should consider abandoning mandatory celibacy for priests and permit debate on the ordination of women priests. "A church that cannot openly discuss issues is a church retreating into an intellectual ghetto" he stated, adding that "there have been too many issues taken off the discussion table. This has been very unhealthy for the Church,"

Drew Christiansen SJ, Fr Reese's successor has written that "Fr. Reese greatly improved the magazine, adding news coverage, color and the Web edition. ? By inviting articles that covered different sides of disputed issues, Fr. Reese helped make America a forum for intelligent discussion of questions facing the church and the country today."

America Magazine:

<http://www.americamagazine.org/>