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Group gathers signatures in support of pope on dissenting theologians, academic freedom

New York (NC) — Some 1,400 Catholics in the U.S. academic community have signed a statement supporting the Vatican "in its recent efforts to restore sanity to Catholic theology."

The statement was circulated by the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars.

Monsignor George A. Kelly of St. John's University in Jamaica, N.Y., founder and president of the fellowship, said July 29 that he circulated the statement, along with a cover letter, in May and June to the fellowship's nearly 700 members.

Monsignor Kelly estimated that there are approximately 30,000 Catholic college teachers.

The signature campaign, he said, was sparked by similar drives initiated last spring in support of Catholic University of America moral theologian Father Charles Curran in his conflict with the Vatican over church moral teachings. Monsignor Kelly said he was also prompted by criticisms from U.S. Catholic academic leaders of proposed Vatican norms for Catholic colleges and universities.

He said the fellowship "became involved

reluctantly in this head count by the barrage of press releases from the Charles Curran, the Theodore Hesburghs and Co. suggesting that the Holy See lacked academic support in the U.S."

Holy Cross Father Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame, was a leader among the critics of the Vatican's proposed higher education norms.

Monsignor Kelly said that in response to his letter some fellowship members canvassed colleagues as well, resulting by mid-July in signatures from more than 670 fellowship members and 723 of their associates in the academic world.

In his letter Monsignor Kelly disclaimed any linkage with specific controversies, saying he had "nothing special in mind" but "thought we might find out how many members of the Catholic higher education system really do support the Holy See in its recent efforts to restore sanity to Catholic theology and to reclaim self-proclaimed Catholic colleges-universities for service to the intellectual and religious mission of the church."

Rome's 'doctrinal watchdog' denies allegations

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — The Vatican's chief doctrinal watchdog has denied criticisms that his agency is "excessively influenced" by Catholic extremists.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said the Congregation's "reliable sources of information are the bishops the nunciatures and published works."

"If other information is deemed worthy of attention, it is clearly requested from the nuncios and the bishops," the cardinal said in a July 22 talk to Peruvian bishops.

"Often it is said that the Congregation lets itself be excessively influenced by anonymous denunciations or by groups which are more or less extremist," he said. "The Congregation never takes an initiative based solely on unconfirmed private information."

Congregation procedures are geared toward "sufficient control so as to eliminate everything which is purely subjective and

private, and so that partisan tendencies of one side or the other are not favored," Cardinal Ratzinger said.

"It is our desire that, when possible, problems be resolved in the local church," he added.

The Vatican becomes involved when issues "go beyond the limit of a determined geographic or cultural area and as a result cannot be treated solely by a bishop or by a single bishops' conference," the cardinal said.

The Congregation is working on a document on bioethics and another on the fundamentals of moral theology, he said. The cardinal said there were no deadlines for publication of these documents.

Bioethics is a theme which "is urgently calling for treatment," he said. "We have already been busy for quite a while on this, and we are confident that you will not have to wait very long for a declaration in this regard," he said.

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