

World & Nation

Pro-choice nuns quit order that refused to oust them

By Sister Mary Ann Walsh
 Washington (NC) — Sisters Barbara Ferraro and Patricia Hussey have announced their resignations from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, which had refused a Vatican request to oust them for their views on abortion.

The two women, who publicly opposed official Church teaching by arguing for a woman's right to abortion, announced their resignations July 13 in a letter to their order's Boston and Connecticut provinces, to which they belong respectively.

They took the move, they said, to reach "equality with" other women and because their own treatment by the order created "insur-

mountable barriers to the reconstruction of a positive covenant relationship."

The move came six weeks after the order's top superiors in Rome said that for the good of the Church and the order they would not follow through on threats they had made to dismiss the two women for disobeying superiors' directives to consult with province leadership before speaking publicly on abortion.

At that time, Sisters Ferraro and Hussey had said they were "elated" with the superior's decision and said it had made the pain they had felt during the controversy "all worthwhile."

A member of the order's Connecticut province leadership team confirmed receipt of the

letter in a July 18 telephone interview.

The resignation by the two women, who head a Charleston, W.Va. day shelter for the homeless, followed four years of controversy sparked by their signing an advertisement in *The New York Times*, stating that more than one legitimate Catholic position exists on abortion.

After the ad's publication, during the 1984 presidential campaign, the Vatican demanded that the more than 20 men and women religious who signed the ad clarify their position on abortion or be dismissed from their orders. All but Sisters Ferraro and Hussey did so.

In their letter of resignation, the two former nuns said they had to "renounce differences, privileges, and even limitations that are part of membership in a religious community in a patriarchal church."

But they said the order's decision not to dismiss them affirmed the "right to be a member and hold public positions on non-infallible teachings that differ from official Church teachings."

Sister Catherine Hughes, head of the Rome-based order, said in a July 21 statement that

Sisters Ferraro and Hussey "have done what the situation and their own integrity demanded."

"The prayers of the Sisters of Notre Dame will follow them into the future," she added.

Sister Hughes also said that the Vatican Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes had a copy of the resignation letter, but that she could not comment on the likelihood that the two nuns would formally appeal to the Vatican to be dispensed from their vows.

Church law requires that religious who have taken perpetual vows submit requests for dispensation to their top superiors, who are to submit the requests and their recommendations to the Vatican.

Sister Hughes also said that neither the Vatican nor the order has pressed for the nuns to resign after the announcement that the order would not dismiss them.

Frances Kissling, director of Catholics for a Free Choice, said her organization was saddened that the two nuns' "community relationship was destroyed by this struggle." But she said the controversy ended "with a strengthened right to dissent" in the Church.

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Bishop finds film flawed in theology, art

By Sister Mary Ann Walsh
 Washington (NC) — "The Last Temptation of Christ," directed by Martin Scorsese, is "flawed as theology and cinema," according to Bishop Anthony G. Bosco of Greensburg, Pa.

Bishop Bosco, who saw a rough version of the unfinished film on July 12, heads the U.S. bishops' Communications Committee. He made what he called "strictly personal observations" about the controversial movie in a letter to fellow bishops.

The text of the letter was not made public, but the U.S. Catholic Conference issued a news release July 20, summarizing its contents.

The movie, due for release this fall, is based on a novel by the same name by Nikos Kazantzakis.

Bishop Bosco said an excellent film might have been made from a dramatic treatment of a last attempt by the devil to win Christ away from his redemptive act on the cross.

But "Scorsese failed to treat the topic well because he lacked good theological advice and cinematic restraint" in interpreting the work, the bishop said.

Bishop Bosco said he did not personally believe that Scorsese intended blasphemy, but said he felt that many others would find the filmmaker's concepts irreconcilable with their idea of Christ. He also said the film contains much blood and violence, as well as sexual scenes.

Local bishops may respond as they wish to the film, Bishop Bosco noted, but added that "to picket or issue statements condemning the film would result in giving free publicity to the distributors," Universal Pictures.

According to the USCC, the title of the novel and the movie refer to "an artistically created — not scripturally based — temptation which Christ experiences ... to come down from the cross and live the life of an ordinary man."

Pope praises Mandela's sacrifices for his people

Lorenzago, Italy (NC) — Pope John Paul II praised imprisoned South African anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela for the "greatness" of his character and said he hoped one day to visit South Africa.

In an interview, the pontiff described the 70-year-old Mandela as suffering "so much for the rights of his people."

"With this suffering he offers a testimony to his people, even to the South African government, and to the entire world," Pope John Paul II is reported to have said.

"This testimony, naturally, has a high price," the pope continued, "which rouses appreciation from all who are concerned about the rights of man, about problems of race."

"All men are equal, regardless of their race. In this way one can see the greatness of the testimony of (Mandela's) personality," the pope said. "These days I have thought of him in a special way."

The pope is scheduled to visit five southern African nations in September, but will not stop in South Africa because the nation's bishops believe such a visit would not be appropriate at this time.