

Vatican blocks degree for Milwaukee prelate

By Thomas J. Smith
Catholic News Service

MILWAUKEE — The Vatican has prevented the Catholic theology faculty at a Swiss university from giving Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee an honorary degree because of the prelate's statements on abortion.

The decision was made known to the archbishop by Father Damian Byrne, master of the Dominican order and grand chancellor of the theological faculty of the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. The degree was to have been awarded Nov. 15.

In a letter to the archbishop, Father Byrne said the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education told him that Archbishop Weakland "has recently taken positions relative to the question of abortion which are not without doctrinal importance and which are causing a great deal of confusion among the faithful in the United States."

In his letter Father Byrne quoted the congregation, headed by Archbishop Pio Laghi, former papal pro-nuncio to the United States, as saying that the awarding of an honorary degree to the Milwaukee prelate "would only add to the confusion."

In a Nov. 11 interview with Catholic News Service, Archbishop Weakland said the Vatican action and others like it "continue to make the institutional church less and less credible." He called for "more open communication" in the church.

Father Byrne also wrote in his letter to the archbishop that after the original rejection, three Swiss bishops and Dominican Father Roland Trauffer, secretary of the Swiss bishops' conference, met with Archbishop Laghi but failed to change his mind.

Because the theology faculty of the University of Fribourg operates under a papal charter, the Vatican had to grant its *nihil obstat* — Latin for "nothing stands in the way" — for the list of degree nominees.

Although the congregation provided no explanation for its action, Archbishop Weakland said Father Trauffer told him during a phone conversation Oct. 22 that Archbishop Laghi mentioned pressure from the pro-life movement in the United States as one of the reasons.

In May, after a series of meetings at which he listened to the views of Catholic

women on abortion, Archbishop Weakland said that the apparent "narrowness of so many in the pro-life movement" seems to turn away many Catholics who oppose abortion.

In a 5,000-word statement, Archbishop Weakland said the church's "unequivocal position (on abortion) does not have the full support of many Catholics, especially of many women, because it seems to be too simplistic an answer to a complicated and emotional question."

In a subsequent letter to the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Archbishop Weakland called abortion "the taking of human life and therefore morally wrong." He said, "I... strongly uphold Catholic teaching and that certainly includes the church's teaching on abortion."

After the Vatican decision on the honorary degree, Archbishop Weakland withdrew his name from consideration. Another proposed degree recipient, Dominican theologian Father Albert Nolan of South Africa, also withdrew his name from consideration because of Vatican objections.

In a letter to Father Byrne, Archbishop Weakland wrote, "I regret that this will cause a certain amount of bitterness among many here in the United States and it will continue to encourage some to believe that the decisions in Rome are made primarily under pressures from ultraconservative groups in the United States and that it does not seem to matter what injustices are done to human beings by leaving such clouds over their heads."

The citation prepared for Archbishop Weakland's degree said he was being honored as "one of the outstanding persons of Catholicism in North America, who stands for a just, humane and free society, as well as for a church that is believable." It specifically mentioned his work as chairman of the committee that drafted the U.S. bishops' 1986 pastoral letter on the economy.



AP/Wide World Photos
KAHANE FUNERAL — A supporter of slain Rabbi Meir Kahane waves the Kahane flag and gives a clenched-fist salute as a van carrying the rabbi's coffin passes by in the Shmuel Hanavi area of Jerusalem Nov. 7. The rabbi was assassinated by an Arab gunman in New York City Nov. 6.

Jesuits persevere in year since killings

By Mike Tangeman
Catholic News Service

MEXICO CITY — Telephoned death threats and bombings against Jesuits at Central American University in San Salvador have stopped in the year since six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter were murdered on the campus.

Army officials recognize the murders as the "greatest political error" committed by their side in the country's 11-year-old civil war, according to Jesuit Father Jon Sobrino, a colleague of the slain men and women.

"The political cost of the assassinations has been very great for the government,

and as a result it now has no intention of aggravating the situation with the Jesuits," Father Sobrino said. "That's not to say that they like the work we do, but... that's another question."

The Jesuits at the university remain undaunted in their commitment to "analyzing and telling the truth" about the roots of the violence in war-torn El Salvador, said Father Sobrino.

In Father Sobrino's case, that commitment almost surely would have cost him his life had he not been attending a conference abroad at the time of the murders.

One of Latin America's premier liberation theologians and director of the Ar-

chbishop Oscar A. Romero Pastoral Center on the university campus, Father Sobrino is especially detested by ultra-rightists in El Salvador. His detractors have been known to tell foreign journalists that the Spanish-born Jesuit is a "communist" in priest's clothing.

Army troops took special interest in his office in the pastoral center, just a few steps from where they killed his fellow Jesuits, taking with them a relic of the slain Archbishop Romero before they ignited a highly inflammable liquid in the office, which was gutted in the ensuing fire.

Back on the job after an extended

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