

U.S. Jesuit forbidden by Vatican to teach as Catholic theologian: "Serious doctrinal error"

News in the [March 8, 2005](#) issue

Following a five-year inquiry, the Vatican has forbidden an American Jesuit priest from teaching as a Catholic theologian because of what were called "serious doctrinal errors" in his work.

The investigation by the Vatican's doctrinal agency centered on a 1999 book by Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God*, which interprets traditional doctrines about Christ, the Trinity and salvation, among other topics.

Haight had been teaching at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, when he was notified in 2000 of an investigation into his book by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. The Vatican said his responses that year to questions "neither clarified nor corrected the errors that had been pointed out," according to Catholic News Service (CNS).

Another response in 2004 was likewise deemed unsatisfactory, and Haight submitted his resignation at Weston last October. He is currently a lecturer at nondenominational Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Neither Haight nor his Jesuit superiors in New York commented to Catholic news organizations in the days following the announcement February 7-8 in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. The notification of the penalty, subject to change only if Haight brings his views "into full conformity" with Catholic doctrine, was signed in December by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal office, according to CNS.

Haight's *Jesus: Symbol of God*, published by Orbis Books, was honored in 2000 as the best book on theology by the Catholic Press Association, and it was also a selection of the Catholic Book Club. The priest did his doctoral dissertation at the

Divinity School of the University of Chicago under theologian David Tracy. Continuum, a publisher with offices in London and New York, is publishing Haight's *Christian Community in History*, with the second volume due this month.

Published reports about the recent Vatican notification said that Haight "subordinates the contents of the faith to their plausibility and intelligibility in postmodern culture" in his 1999 book. On the divinity of Jesus, the Vatican contended that his book presents Jesus as a human who "symbolized" or "mediated" the saving presence of God, and says that belief in the empty tomb and postresurrection appearances by Jesus are not essential.

In *Jesus: Symbol of God*, Haight endorses a positive view of religious pluralism in the world: "The normative revelation of Jesus posits that God's grace is operative in other religions. And affirming the normativity of Jesus Christ, not simply for Christians but for all human beings, does not undermine the validity and truth contained in other religions."