

U.S. bishops condemn Maguire's stance on abortion, gay marriage: Theologian claims Catholics can dissent

News in the [April 17, 2007](#) issue

The U.S. Catholic bishops have denounced as “irresponsible” and “false teaching” a Catholic theologian’s claim that Catholics are able to dissent from the hierarchy’s opposition to contraceptives, same-sex marriage and abortion. Daniel C. Maguire, a professor of moral theology at Marquette University, has written pamphlets that are “erroneous and incompatible with the church’s teaching,” the bishops said in a statement released March 22.

“We deplore as irresponsible his public advocacy of his views as authentic Catholic teaching,” the bishops said. Sister Mary Ann Walsh, a spokesperson for the bishops, said the denunciation carries the full weight of the U.S. bishops.

Such condemnations are “not unheard of, but they don’t happen every week,” Walsh said. The U.S. bishops supported the Vatican’s condemnation of Jesuit theologian Roger Haight in 2005 and “expressed concern” over priest-professor Richard McBrien’s book *Catholicism* in 1996, according to Walsh.

Maguire, 75, said in an interview that he’s been disputing the Catholic hierarchy’s views on sexuality since 1968, when Pope Paul VI issued his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which opposed artificial birth control.

The bishops practice “theology in a cocoon. They’re out of touch with mainstream theologians,” he said. A tenured professor at the Jesuit institution in Milwaukee, Maguire said he does not expect to be punished by the school.

“They’ve been defending my academic freedom for 35 years and I don’t think it’s going to stop now,” he said. Milwaukee archbishop Timothy Dolan has banned

Maguire from speaking on church property, Maguire said.

Last June, Maguire sent two pamphlets, "The Moderate Roman Catholic Position on Contraception and Abortion" and "A Catholic Defense of Same-Sex Marriage," to 270 U.S. bishops. Maguire said between 1,500 and 2,000 pamphlets were also distributed by the Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics, which he serves as president.

In the pamphlets, Maguire asserted that "there is no one position on contraception and abortion" that can be called "Catholic." The bishops are but one of three "sources of truth," he argued, insisting that the laity and theologians share a role in formulating doctrine.

The U.S. bishops sharply disagreed. "The bishops are the successors of the apostles, who are given the authority to proclaim the teaching of Jesus Christ," the bishops' doctrine committee wrote. "Laity and clergy embody and express the sense of the faith precisely when they conform their consciences to what the Church authentically professes and teaches," the bishops wrote. *-Religion News Service*