

‘Public correction’ to Marquette professor’s views

WASHINGTON - The “mistaken views” on contraception, abortion, same-sex marriage and other church teachings expressed in two 2006 pamphlets by Marquette University theology professor Daniel C. Maguire “should not be confused with the faith and moral teaching of the Catholic Church,” the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Doctrine said.

The doctrine committee’s “Statement Concerning Two Pamphlets Published by Professor Daniel Mr. Maguire” was approved for publication by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Administrative Committee during the latter’s March 20-21 meeting in Washington.

The pamphlets – titled “The Moderate Roman Catholic Position on Contraception and Abortion” and “A Catholic Defense of Same-Sex Marriage” – were sent by Mr. Maguire to all U.S. bishops June 19 last year, the doctrine committee said.

“Since it is apparent that considerable efforts have been made to give these views the widest possible distribution as if they were a valid alternative to the teaching of the Catholic Church,” the USCCB doctrine committee “considers it important to offer a public correction of the erroneous views proposed in these pamphlets,” the statement said.

Mr. Maguire, a theology professor at the Jesuit-run university in Milwaukee since the early 1970s, said the bishops “stuck to their obsession with sexual and reproductive matters” in the committee statement and ignored his call in a letter accompanying the pamphlets for greater episcopal attention to issues such as the war in Iraq, the environment, poverty, racism and sexism.

“I urged them to rise to prophecy and point out that an unjustified war is collective murder,” Mr. Maguire said in a March 23 statement. “Why are these bishops so obsessed with what I call ‘the pelvic issues’ and so mute as a group on the ongoing slaughter in Iraq?”

In November during their annual fall meeting, the U.S. bishops on a unanimous voice vote passed a statement on the Iraq War. In it they called on the Bush administration and the new Congress “to engage in a collaborative dialogue that honestly assesses the situation in Iraq” and “reaches agreement on concrete steps to address the serious challenges that lie ahead.”

Also, in a Feb 7 letter to Congress, the chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on International Policy, Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of Orlando, Fla., urged lawmakers to heed the warnings of a recent report on global warming, with priority given to how climate change will affect the poor.

In his pamphlet on abortion and contraception, Mr. Maguire said the Catholic Church “has a strong ‘pro-choice’ tradition and a conservative anti-choice tradition” and added, “Neither is official and neither is more Catholic than the other.”

Similarly, on same-sex marriage, he said, “Catholic teaching is in transition on this subject and Catholics are free to let their consciences decide either for or against same-sex marriages. ... Neither (view) can be called more orthodox or more official or more Catholic than the other.”

The doctrine committee said the pamphlets misrepresent the nature of church teaching, the relationship between bishops and theologians and the teaching authority of the bishops.

“It is a serious error ... to claim that the teaching of the pope and the bishops represents merely one voice among many legitimate voices within the Catholic Church, all of which are vying to be heard and accepted,” the committee said. “The bishops are the successors of the apostles, who were given the authority to proclaim the teaching of Jesus Christ.”

The bishops said Catholics should look to the Catechism of the Catholic Church for “correct and authentic teaching.”

“This readily available source of the faith and moral teaching of the Catholic Church clearly demonstrates the mistaken character of the positions found in the two pamphlets and their unreliability as a guide for Catholics seeking to know and live

their faith," the statement added.

Church teaching says that abortion and the use of artificial contraception are intrinsically wrong and that same-sex unions violate the authentic Christian understanding of marriage.

On the Web site of the Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Sexual Ethics, an interfaith group of which he is president, Mr. Maguire published his original June 19, 2006, letter to all the U.S. bishops and a subsequent exchange of letters with Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of Milwaukee.

In the first letter, Mr. Maguire said the pamphlets discussed "two topics on which hierarchical teaching has become impaled, abortion and same-sex marriage, to the neglect of the needs of the increasing militarism of our nation, our neglect of the poor of the world, racism, sexism and the wrecking of the earth's ecology through greed."

The letter quoted extensively from a 1976 speech by Cardinal Avery Dulles, who was among the signers of the statement on Mr. Maguire as a consultant to the doctrine committee.

In a response to Mr. Maguire, Archbishop Dolan said his views "are totally at odds with clear church teaching ... in opposition to abortion and so-called same-sex marriage."

"You speak of your duty to dissent. Well, at least call it such," the archbishop added. "To claim that support for abortion and same-sex 'marriage' is consonant with Catholic moral teaching is preposterous and disingenuous."

In a telephone interview with Catholic News Service from Milwaukee, Mr. Maguire said he sent the original letter because he believes there is "too much silence among theologians" on critical church issues.

He said he wanted to tell the bishops that they have "terrific power" to influence society on issues such as war, poverty and the environment instead of becoming bogged down in other more divisive issues.

Marquette University said in a brief statement that it agreed with the doctrine committee that the views in the pamphlets “do not represent the teachings of the Catholic Church” and said Mr. Maguire was “not in any way representing the views of the university.”

“As a citizen, Dr. Mr. Maguire has a right to express his views on the issues of the day,” the statement added. “As a tenured professor, he also has rights related to his academic discipline.”

Mr. Maguire said Marquette “has been defending my academic freedom for 35 years” and he did not expect the USCCB statement to have any effect on his work at the university.