

Leader considered God above His own law

# Ex-members say homosexuality part of group rites

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Homosexual acts were practiced ritually by an elect group within the leadership of a Catholic lay organization in Somers in its worship of Jesus Christ, despite the church's prohibitions against such behavior.

Two former members, including one who says he participated in the homosexual acts, say they went to Norwich Catholic Bishop Daniel P. Reilly two years ago, warned him about the practices of the organization, the Apostolic Formation Center, and begged him to denounce it. But the bishop did not take any action.

The Norwich diocese had endorsed the organization but now refuses to comment on it. Nor will diocesan officials clarify whether Bishop Reilly stands by the endorsements he gave the organization as recently as this spring — including one in January in which he said he was "collaborating closely" with its leaders.

The two former members who went to the bishop ask not to be identified publicly for fear of retribution. They and other former members say the homosexual acts came to be known in the organization as the "Divine Intimacy of the Holy Seed," apparently a perversion of the Catholic belief that a Christian can attain "divine intimacy" with his savior.

The former member who acknowledges participating says the organization's founder, J. Roy Legere, convinced members that engaging in such acts was the ultimate sacrifice in submitting to God.

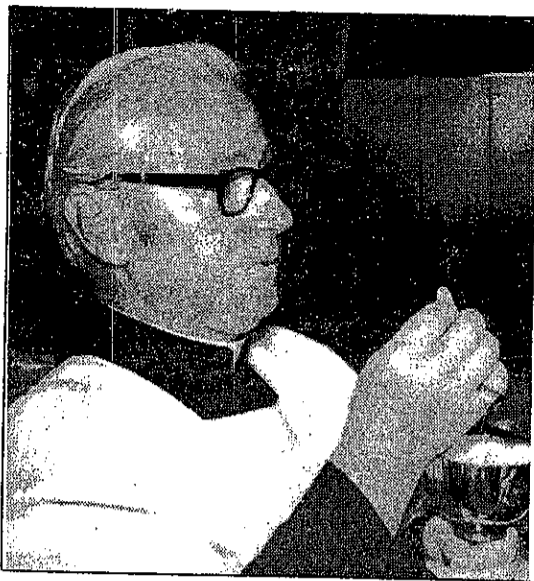
The acknowledged participant says the homosexual activity was just one of several distortions of Catholic teaching advocated by Legere, who died in 1978, and by a select group of his followers, whom Legere called the "fellow sufferers" and "emissaries." The participant also says it illustrates how Legere brainwashed certain members.

Two priests and more than a half-dozen former members of the organization say they were told personally by practicing members and by other priests associated with the group that participating in the homosexual act was the ultimate sacrifice. Those who balked were told to "pray for light," they add.

The former members and one priest say they also informed the Norwich diocese about the homosexual "divine intimacy" but that their warnings were almost completely ignored.

Reilly is understood to have given the organization another chance after being told in 1983 of the homosexual "divine intimacy" and other doctrinal distortions. Reilly apparently is keeping silent now to spare the group's members and his diocese the embarrassment of admitting they were misled and to try and salvage whatever good the organization produced.

But when Reilly learned this spring that at least some of Legere's teachings had continued, the bishop informed the organization's president, Charles A. Shattuck Jr., that



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Legere distributes communion at the <sup>Somers</sup> Apostolic Formation Center.

the diocese no longer would collaborate with it, according to those familiar with the center.

### Founder saw role for laity

Legere started the organization in 1968, with the motto "Obedience and Peace," as a place where people could pray and discuss the Bible and where "apostolic activities" could be coordinated.

As the organization's basis, Legere invoked the Second Vatican Council's declarations on the "apostolate of the laity," which held that Catholic laymen have a role in their church's work just as important as that carried out by priests, bishops and members of religious orders.

But former members charge that the organization degenerated into a destructive cult centered around Legere, a former mill worker and delicatessen clerk. They say the organization's leaders came to attribute divinity to Legere, and used the mystical aspects of Catholicism to brainwash followers.

The group's current president, Shattuck, insisted this week that his organization is different from Legere's. He said former members are confusing Legere's group, incorporated as the Apostolic Formation Center for Christian Renew-All, with the apostolate Shattuck says he founded in August 1983, which is now called the Our Lady of Grace Formation Center Inc.

But Shattuck would not explain why his center has continued to use the same building, the same incorporation papers — and for more than a year — the same name as Legere's. And as late as April 1984 Shattuck was publicly defending Legere against criticism.

Shattuck admitted he heard of the homosexual "divine intimacy" but didn't know whether it occurred. He also said there was no evidence that it continued after he became the center's president in 1983.

He said the center he founded "is working hand-in-hand with Bishop Reilly" and is in keeping with the church's teachings. He also said Reilly is an adviser to the center.

But Monsignor Thomas R. Bride, who as the Norwich diocese's chancellor is the bishop's assistant, refused this week to discuss the center, saying it is "an issue that is not available to the press."

"It's an internal, private matter," Bride said. "It's not a coverup or a great mystery. It looks like we're angry or have things to hide."

Bride added he would "never" speak about the center.

### An edict from God

The homosexual activity at the center was not at first called the "Divine Intimacy of the Holy Seed," according to the former participant. It began without a name, he recalls, because participants were told it was part of an unprecedented edict from God.

He says the practice was based on the belief that Legere was the "twin" of Jesus, who had ordered the center's founder to spread Christ's "seed."

"It wasn't just an abstract twinship with Christ," the former participant says. "It was the claim that even Roy's 'humanity' — his body — was infused with divinity."

Legere's followers were taught that "all that was left at the end of Roy's life was his name, rank and serial number," the former participant says. "Christ was so complete in Roy, it was impossible to say how much was left of Roy."

Legere revealed the homosexual practices to only a few men, most of whom were among an elite group of 24 members chosen as "emissaries" and "fellow sufferers," according to several former members.

They say Legere based the structure of the inner group, known as "Our Lord's Emissary Council to Restore All Things in Christ," on a passage in the New Testament book of Revelation, in which St. John the Divine prophesied that a group of 24 elders would sit beside God at the end of the world.

The former member says that at first he had trouble with the idea of "divine intimacy" and expressed concerns to Sister Marie Louis Bertrand, a cloistered Dominican nun in North Guilford who then was the center's "spiritual director" and an enthusiastic supporter of Legere.

He said the nun told him to "pray to the holy spirit for light."

Most members of the organization were instructed not to come to the house at certain hours of the day, the former members say. But several former members recall seeing several of the "emissaries" undressed together at the house, a three-story mansion with several bedrooms at 87 Main St., Somers.

Although several former members say the

homosexual activity continued after Legere's death, the former participant says he has no knowledge of that.

He also emphasizes that he is not homosexual, adding that he — as were most of the other men who participated — is married and has a family. He says he thinks he and the others submitted because Legere had mesmerized them.

Priests familiar with the center give a similar account. If one accepts the premise that Legere is divine and speaks for God, they say, anything is possible.

"Roy was like a God," one former member says. "We used to think, 'Geez, if we could only touch this guy ....'"

Although Catholic doctrine does not condemn people of homosexual inclination, it strictly forbids such acts and considers them gravely sinful.

### Uproar over 'divine intimacy'

When Legere died his son Paul became the center's president. And the dozens of cars parked in front of the center each weekend — many of them with out-of-state license plates — suggested that the apostolate was thriving.

But when word leaked out in the spring and summer of 1983 that leading members had participated in the homosexual "divine intimacy," there was an uproar among the members, estimated then to have numbered about 5,000 in 30 chapters along the East Coast.

One woman recalls listening to a priest at the center defending the homosexual acts while Paul Legere was answering a series of telephone calls in an adjacent room from people withdrawing from the group.

At least six former members say the center's priests and one participant met with them to explain the homosexual act. The explanation was the same in every case: God, who is above his own law, had asked Legere to share this holy act. They were told that the Bible records God requesting stranger things — like asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac — and the homosexual "divine intimacy" was one of the Lord's mysterious ways.

A priest from another state who says he heard rumors about the ritualized homosexual act came to Somers to investigate. He recalls one of the center's priests justifying the act. He says he left the center shaking his head. And when he returned home, he says, the members in his area agreed with him that they should end their association with the center.

The priest also says he wrote to Bishop Reilly about what he had been told at the center. He says the only response he received was a form letter saying the matter was being investigated.

The priest surmises that he never heard from the diocese again because "everyone has egg on their faces."

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