

# Catholic Sentinel

Friday, April 10, 2015

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## Catholic journalist known for Vatican II reporting, activism dies at 84

Catholic News Service

PHOENIX — Robert Blair Kaiser, whose award-winning coverage of the Second Vatican Council for Time magazine played a significant role in informing Americans about the council, died April 2 in hospice care in Phoenix. He was 84.

His funeral Mass was to be celebrated April 10 at St. Francis Xavier Church in Phoenix.

Kaiser spent 10 years as a Jesuit seminarian and scholastic, from 1949 to 1959, before leaving the order and turning to journalism.

He was one of those who broke the official secrecy during Vatican II, using his Jesuit ties to cultivate sources who regularly informed him about daily proceedings in the council.

For his coverage, he received the Overseas Press Club's Ed Cunningham Award in 1963 for the "best magazine reporting from abroad." His book "Pope, Council and World: The Story of Vatican II" was a No. 1 best-seller in London and Dublin.

Kaiser later covered religion for The New York Times and CBS-TV News; he covered the election of Pope Francis for Newsweek. He became an internationally recognized commentator and lecturer on the meaning of Vatican II.

An activist with regard to church politics, he pushed for reforms through several organizations, some of which he co-founded, including Catholic Church Reform International and a web community of U.S. Catholics called takebackourchurch.org. He was a board member of Accelerating Catholic Church Reform.

He was the editor of Just Good Company, an online journal of religion and culture. He wrote at least 15 books, several of which were about church reform.

He proposed that the American church "become an autochthonous church, modeled on the ancient churches of the Middle East. ... Catholics united with Rome, with their own patriarchs, their own liturgies, and their own mostly married clergy."

In a Catholic News Service review of his 2006 book, "A Church in Search of Itself: Benedict XVI and the Battle for the Future," Rachele Linner described Kaiser as "an engaging writer with an admirable ability to make complex situations and ideas understandable without facile simplification." She called the book "a work of both journalism and activism."

This book is about the institutional church, the Vatican and the 2005 conclave and, "at the same time, it is about 'the people of God church' that Kaiser discovered on his worldwide travels," Linner wrote.

In the book, Kaiser discussed issues such as clericalism and priesthood, enculturation, liberation theology and the challenges of religious pluralism by providing profiles several cardinals, women religious, theologians and bishops.

"One does not have to agree with Kaiser's call for a 'people's church' to recognize the concern that motivated the long years of research and travel that resulted in this book," said the reviewer.

One of his last books was "Inside the Jesuits: How Pope Francis is Changing the Church and the World,"

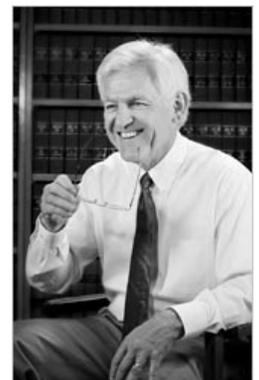
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published in 2014, and an obituary in the National Catholic Reporter said in his final months, Kaiser continued to write, with "a computer on his chest" while he was "hooked up to oxygen."

NCR's Thomas Fox said he was writing an epilogue for a book by Kaiser to be published in June: "Whistle: Tom Doyle's Steadfast Witness for Victims of Clerical Sexual Abuse," about a Dominican priest who for 40 years, Fox said, has been one of the church's most outspoken critics of clergy sex abuse.

Kaiser is survived by a daughter, a son and grandchildren.

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