30.1.2012 - Daily Mail

Frenchman, 71, takes Catholic Church to court in landmark case after it refuses to nullify his baptism

By Daily Mail Reporter

An elderly French man is fighting to make a formal break with the Catholic Church, in a case that could have far-reaching effects.

Rene LeBouvier, 71, has taken the church to court over its refusal to let him nullify his baptism after losing his faith in the religion.

Though he was raised in a community where Catholicism dominated every walk of life, Rene changed his views in the 1970s after spending time with 'free thinkers'.

Fight: Frenchman Rene LeBouvier is taking the Catholic church to court in a bid to reverse his baptism

As he didn't believe in God anymore, the pensioner thought it would be more honest to leave the church and wrote to his diocese and asked to be un-baptised in 2000.

Ten years later, LeBouvier wanted to go further.

Paedophile scandals and the pope preaching against condoms in AIDS-racked Africa, helped strengthen LeBouvier's opposition to the religion.

He called the pope's position on Africa "criminal."

'Criminal': The 71-year-old was outraged by Pope Benedict XVI's comments regarding the use of condoms in Africa

Again, he asked the church to strike him from baptism records, but when the priest told him it wasn't possible, he took the church to court.

French law states that citizens have the right to leave organisations if they wish and, last October, a judge in Normandy ruled in his favour.

However, the diocese has since appealed and the case is pending.

Scandal: Bishops listen to reporters' questions at the end of a press conference at Vatican Radio office, in Rome

Loup Desmond, who has followed the case for the French Catholic newspaper La Croix, says he thinks it could set a legal precedent and open the way for more demands for de-baptism.

Up to now, observers say the de-baptism trend has been marginal, but it's on the rise thanks to scandals within the church and its refusal to keep up with the times.

In neighboring Belgium, the Brussels Federation of Friends of Secular Morality reports that 2,000 people asked to be de-baptized in 2010.

Opposition: Human rights campaigner, Peter Tatchell (front right) leads thousands of people ready to march through central London to protest against the State visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Britain in 2010

The newspaper Le Monde estimated that about 1,000 French people a year ask to have their baptisms

annulled.

Christian Weisner, who is with the German branch of the grassroots movement We Are Church, explained that people across Europe still want religion, and they want to believe, but it has become very difficult within the Catholic Church.

He said: 'It's the way that the Roman Catholic Church has not followed the new approach of democracy, the new approach of the women's issue and there is really a big gap between the Roman Catholic Church and modern times.'

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Zuletzt geändert am 01.02.2012