

Bishops Reaffirm 'Heritage of Faith in Mary'

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — A comprehensive 55-page pastoral letter issued by the American Catholic bishops here has reaffirmed the U.S. Catholic Church's "heritage of faith in Mary, the Mother of God," and strongly encouraged "authentic devotion to her."

Released during the general meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), the pastoral message is entitled "Behold Your Mother — Woman of Faith" and declares that "devotion to Mary, the joyful duty of all of us, has a special function in exalting the dignity of woman and fostering respect for her person."

"We believe in the power of Mary's intercession to bring us, as

individuals and as a community, under the influence of Christ's redeeming mercy," it added.

In a section on "Mary in Our Life," the pastoral said that the Church was suffering from "a malaise with respect to the commemoration of Mary," citing particularly the areas of devotion to the rosary, the miraculous medal and the scapular. It called for renewed devotion to such practices, primarily through the liturgy where it said the Catholic's "bond" with Mary has its "noblest expression."

Tracing the development of doctrine and devotion concerning the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ, the pastoral begins by noting that the "Holy Spirit led the Second Vatican

Council to describe our Lady's life on earth as a pilgrimage of faith."

The message goes on to treat the biblical approach to the Virgin Mary, the Church's understanding of the "mystery of Mary," her role as "mediatrix and spiritual Mother," the idea of "Mary in the life of Christians," and finally her role as "Mother of the Church."

In the introduction, the pastoral declared that the Gospels "summon us all to recognize the special place the Mother of Jesus has in God's plan for the salvation of mankind." (The Courier-Journal will print the introduction in its Dec. 5 edition.)

It noted that the teachings of

the Church, through Popes and councils, "lead us to an ever-clearer understanding of Mary's privileged position in the Church. Singular honor has been given her in piety, art, music and literature."

"In order to serve better the current needs of men," the pastoral pointed out, "the Church seeks to adapt herself to the widespread social and cultural changes of our time." It added that this adaptation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, "includes the special role of Mary in the mystery of salvation of the human race."

The pastoral pointed to Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, which it said contains a "clear and penetrating account of

Catholic teaching on the Blessed Mother of God." It also referred to Pope Paul's repeated affirmation of the Constitution's chapter on the Virgin Mary as "a vast synthesis of Catholic doctrine."

The pastoral, which contains an historical appendix on Mary's role in the U.S. Catholic Church, suggested readings, and a study guide, stated: "We hope and pray that our presentation will be the subject for serious study and loving reflection."

It went on to urge that the message be received into homes, rectories, seminaries, schools, institutions of higher learning, adult education groups, confraternity centers, campus ministries and religious communities.

Communion-in-Hand Is Rejected, 121-113

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — Following a spirited debate over both substance and procedure here, the U.S. Roman Catholic bishops rejected a proposal to permit the reception of Holy Communion in the hand.

Bishop Hogan reported, "Surprisingly to me, the bishops voted 121 to 113 against asking Rome for permission to give American Catholics that option."

Bishop Hogan explained that twice before, the question had won approval of a majority of bishops but not the two-thirds majority that is required for its submission to Rome for final approval.

"Its defeat a third time probably might mean that the question will not be raised again. In several countries including Canada, Catholics have had the choice of receiving Communion in the hand or in the traditional manner in which the priest places the host on the tongue of the communicant," he said.

Bishop Hogan added that the defeated motion would have sought permission for the practice from Rome but would

have "left its implementation up to individual dioceses."

Bishop Walter Curtis of Bridgeport, Conn., urged the bishops to adopt the proposal, arguing that Pope Paul had approved the practice in many countries.

He said, "It is not a theological question . . . not a question of reverence or irreverence . . . not a lessening of faith in the Blessed Sacrament."

Major opponent of the proposal was Cardinal John Carberry of St. Louis who declared that "optionality is extremely dangerous theologically and pastorally."

He added that such practices would lead to optional Mass on Sunday, optional celibacy and other such practices.

Cardinal Carberry charged that the practice would bring about "destruction of unity and harmony . . . at a time when unity and obedience to authority is being challenged."

He also said that the vote would entail a "very momentous decision — changing a practice of one thousand years."

Prison Reform Urged

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — The bishops approved a broad-based statement calling for penal reform and urged the U.S. Catholic Conference, state Catholic conferences and dioceses to take steps "to foster the concern of the clergy, religious and laity for the human rights of offenders."

The bishops' statement also called for the establishment of a national body to develop a "code of civil rights for the incarcerated and the development of a bill of rights clearly defining the extent of duties and limits of obligations of the incarcerated."

Containing 22 specific recommendations pertaining to the reform of prisons and penal systems, the bishops' statement was proposed by the U.S. Catholic Conference's Committee on Social Development and World Peace.

It was unanimously approved by the more than 230 bishops voting.

Entitled "The Reform of Correctional Institutions," the 25-page document pointed out that Americans in recent years have experienced "deepening concern" over conditions in penal institutions.

"Crime and punishment are pre-eminently moral issues," it stressed.

The statement also recognized that prisons are "largely filled with the poor, the disadvantaged minorities, and the 'losers' of our society," and called for a close look at whether the U.S. penal system is a "poor man's system of criminal justice."

"We insist that punishment in order to fulfill its proper purpose must fit the nature of the crime; it must be considerate of the offenders human dignity; and, it must be tempered by mercy and constantly aimed at reconciliation," the statement declared.

The bishops stressed that "urgent priority" be given to additional analyses and funding to reorganize the criminal justice system and the compensation of "innocent victims" of crime.

Concerning rights of prisoners, the statement affirmed the Christian position that all men share the dignity of a "child of God redeemed by Christ" and deplored "any form of punishment which is degrading and otherwise corrodes the human personality." It added that abuses cannot be justified on the bases of their deterrent effect on crime.

Stressing that the bishops have no intention of coddling or harassing administrators of penal institutions, the statement listed some 22 recommendations concerning reform of correctional institutions in the U.S.



The nation's bishops gather for the opening of the meeting. The more than 250 prelates heard Cardinal Krol score the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on abortion and non-public school aid, lament "political corruption" and "immorality" in the nation, and call for a "return to the principles of morality which must undergird any society." [RNS]

Pro-Life Bills Backed

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — U.S. Roman Catholic bishops unanimously adopted a resolution reaffirming their "endorsement of and support for a constitutional amendment that would protect the life of the unborn."

In a separate resolution unanimously adopted, the bishops urged a "positive attitude" toward the 1974 United Nations Population Year, which will include a "recognition of moral and ethical principles, convictions about human rights and the good of society, and a determination to preserve the true values of marriage and human life."

Both resolutions were proposed by the ad hoc committee for population and pro-life activities of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) meeting here Nov. 12-16. The committee is headed by Cardinal John Cody of Chicago.

The resolution calling for a constitutional amendment cited recent condemnations by the Catholic bishops of the January 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling on abortion and reasserted that abortion is "the destruction of a living human being" that is "morally wrong."

It urged Congress to conduct hearings and move with great haste to pass a pro-life amendment.

"At the same time," the resolution said, "we remind our people that the passage of the amendment will require concerted efforts on their part to convince the Congress, and the American people of its absolute necessity. Specifically, we urge public information programs and petitions to state legislatures to memorialize Congress in behalf of a pro-life amendment."

Complying on 1st Penance

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — U.S. Catholic dioceses are complying with the controversial Vatican order to end the experimental practice of giving children First Communion before First Confession, according to a report to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting here.

Bishop William Borders of Orlando, Fla., who presented the report, said all of the 85 dioceses contacted stated that the directive would be implemented. But he said most of the dioceses responding indicated they would move slowly in reverting to the former practice.

"I must say I am surprised and pleased to note that his presentation was well received," Bishop Joseph L. Hogan stated in a taped message to the Courier-Journal.

The Vatican declaration, the bishop observed, was a "reaffirmation of an earlier law," and U.S. dioceses that have been following the experimental practice must now return to the practice outlined by Pope Pius X in 1910.

Bishop Borders said, however, that even under the old law the

obligation for a child to receive the sacrament of Penance before First Communion was not absolute.

In his report as head of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Education, the bishop called for a "pastoral approach" to the problem of changing back to a former practice. He added that "we should reap the benefits of the experimentation."

Among the steps he recommended were the development of a new catechesis on Penance and Communion, additional involvement of parents in that teaching and continued freedom of the child to accept or postpone confession.

Essentially, Bishop Borders called for a "flexible interpretation" geared to the pastoral needs of the Church.

Although no action by the bishops was required, and the bishops as a body voiced strong approval of Bishop Borders' report, several spoke of anticipated difficulties in changing back to the practice of Confession before First Communion.

Farah Strike Discussed

A report on the Farah strike, described by Bishop Joseph L. Hogan as "the social problem that I have spent much time searching through because of Rochester's involvement," was greeted by the longest round of applause heard since the meetings began, according to the Bishop in a taped message received from Washington.

Bishop Sidney Metzger of El Paso, Texas, who delivered the report, stated that workers at Farah, a leading manufacturer of men's and boys' slacks, have been deprived of job security, were

unable to negotiate a wage scale and were in need of a humane production quota.

These points, Bishop Metzger continued, "should be accomplished through collective bargaining which they have not been able to accomplish in the past."

The El Paso firm has come under fire from several Church organizations for alleged unfair labor practices. Bishop Hogan explained that Rochester's involvement is rooted in the fact that "we have retailers who are selling products from Farah."