

# U.S. Bishops Defend Marriage Tribunals

By Thomas J. Reese, SJ  
Religious News Service

Vatican City — The American bishops at the World Synod of Bishops have defended the practices of their marriage tribunals against criticism that the tribunals were granting annulments too lightly.

The issue arose after Cardinal Pericle Felici, the Vatican's chief judicial officer, said in a report to the synod that the number of marriage annulments made by certain tribunals in the last 10 years had shown a "5,000-fold increase."

"This is of concern," said the prefect of the Apostolic Signatura, the church's supreme court, "not so much because of the number, but because of the levity with which cases are often proposed and resolved."

An annulment in the view of the Catholic Church is not a divorce, but a declaration that a valid marriage never existed in the first place because of some essential defect or impediment, for example, "antecedent and perpetual sexual impotency."

Some observers took Cardinal Felici's comments as a rebuke of marriage tribunals in the United States, which have granted more annulments in recent years than tribunals elsewhere in the world.

In the U.S., the number of annulments granted increased from 338 in 1968 to

27,670 in 1978. Most of these 1978 annulments were granted principally on psychological grounds, for example, "the radical incapacity to assume responsibility in married life, especially in interpersonal relations" or "psychological immaturity."

Cardinal Felici, in his report, conceded that such factors could be grounds for annulments, but he said, "the way in which these causes are formulated and applied can lead to declarations of nullity for marriages which are certainly valid."

Queried about the matter at a press conference, Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin of Cincinnati, a member of the five-man U.S. delegation, distinguished between tribunal procedures and jurisprudence.

He referred to a special indult, or concession, granted 10 years ago by the Holy See to U.S. bishops, relating to a streamlining of marriage procedures.

"As a result of the indult," Archbishop Bernardin said, "we have been able to process (marriage) cases more quickly."

But, he said, the jurisprudence, or grounds for annulment, being used in the U.S. is the same as that being used in Rome and around the world. He said that the tribunal in his archdiocese was operating correctly and that he is

convinced that this is true of most tribunals in the U.S.

"If there are cases of abuse," he said, "the local bishop and the Holy See should deal with them."

The discussion of marriage tribunals took place against the background of the synod's concern about Catholics who are divorced and remarried.

Almost all of the bishops who spoke on this issue stressed the indissolubility of marriage but they also asked for a compassionate and pastoral attitude toward remarried couples. Some bishops appeared to want more as they noted that many of these second marriages are stable, with the couples living otherwise good Christian lives.

"Often such persons," said Archbishop Derek Worlock of Liverpool, England, "especially in their desire to help their children, long for the restoration of full Eucharistic communion with the Church and its Lord."

He asked the synod, "Is the spirit of repentance and desire for sacramental strength to be forever frustrated? Can they be told only that they must reject their new responsibilities as a necessary condition of forgiveness and restoration to sacramental life?"

# American Bishops Report: Men, Women Equal . . . But

Vatican City (RNS) — American Roman Catholic bishops, in a paper presented at the World Synod of Bishops, said that men and women are equal in the eyes of God and the Church but stopped short of recommending that women be ordained priests.

"We do recognize the need to study, in the light of the doctrine of the faith, the role of women in the Church itself," said the paper submitted on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Bishops.

The paper, "The Changing Roles of Men and Women," said that changes in women's roles in contemporary society were due basically to the spread of technology, increased urbanization, the "penetrating" influence of the mass media, and the growth of consumerism, "which demands a second paycheck within the home."

Observing that "many of the documents of Vatican II

articulate the principle of equality," the paper said, "Pope John Paul II has frequently referred to the absolute equality between the sexes."

Stressing the point, the American bishops asserted that "no reputable theologian today" would deny that the "equality of man and woman is constituted by God and confirmed by Christian teaching."

Without making any implication regarding the principle of equality as it might affect the issue of women priests, the bishops did, however, call for a study "of the role of women in the Church."

## Pope Names Five Bishops

Washington (RNS) — Pope John Paul II has named three priests of the Brooklyn Diocese — Msgr. Anthony J. Bevilacqua, Father Joseph M. Sullivan and Father René Valero — to be auxiliary bishops there.

In addition, Father Kenneth E. Untener was named bishop of Saginaw, Mich., and Bishop Richard J. Ham as auxiliary in the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis.

Bishop Ham was been episcopal vicar for Hispanics in the St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocese.

## Friends Brunch

Friends, Inc., the singles group sponsored by St. Charles Borromeo, will hold a Sunday Brunch, beginning at 11 a.m. on Sunday, Oct. 26 at the Royal Scot, on East Ridge Road. The group invites single people between the ages of 18 and 35 to the event. Reservations are required by Oct. 23 and are made by calling Dorothy at 328-8539.

## Festival Choir Sets Rehearsals

Rehearsals for the fall liturgy performances of the Diocesan Festival Choir are now under way each Sunday, according to Sister Virginia Hogan, director.

Past members are invited to the rehearsals as well as many others interested in joining the choir. The rehearsals will be at St. John Fisher chapel at East Avenue and Fairport Road. The choir will perform two or three liturgies at different parishes.

Sister Virginia said that rehearsals will begin Jan. 18 for the annual festival Easter

program, scheduled for April 5 next year. She said liturgies are planned not to interfere with parish choirs.

Sister Virginia also said that the annual program this year will consist of contemporary Church music that may also be used by parish choirs.

Further information is available from her at 223-9906.

The deadline for submitting news to the Courier-Journal is noon on Thursday preceding the following Wednesday's publication.

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