

New Church Law

Salvation Is Highest Law

(Pope John Paul II is expected to issue the new Code of Canon Law within a few months. It will replace the current code, or general law governing Latin-rite Catholics, which was issued in 1917. This is one in a series of articles by National Catholic News Service to give an overview of the new code and what it will mean to Catholics.)

By Jerry Filteau

There is an old church saying, "Suprema lex salus animarum" — The highest law is the salvation of souls.

In the nearly completed reform of the Code of Canon Law, the general law governing the Western church, that principle has been brought to the fore.

One would be hard pressed to find a single canon lawyer who agrees with every aspect of the new code. But it would be far more difficult to find one who does not agree that the new code is less legalistic, more flexible, more pastoral and far more solidly based on good theology than the 1917 code that it will replace.

When Pope Paul VI asked the 1967 world Synod of Bishops to recommend norms for the revision of the code, the gathered representatives of the world's bishops set out 10 principles that should be followed. The new law, the synod said, should:

- Be not just a set of broad moral principles, but juridical in character;
- Aim chiefly at the external forum, the realm of

determinable fact as opposed to the internal forum, or area of private conscience or intention;

- Have a clearly pastoral spirit;
- Reflect subsidiarity or decentralization;
- Incorporate most of the faculties that bishops need in their work;
- Be sensitive to human rights;
- Have clear procedures for church courts and administrative processes;
- Be based on the principle of territoriality, in line with the Second Vatican Council's renewed theology of the local church;
- Have fewer penalties;
- Be restructured so that the very organization of the new code reflects renewed understandings of the church.

During his 15-year reign, 1963-79, Pope Paul VI was the chief architect of the new law.

He not only oversaw most of the code revision process and instituted most of the church reforms that the new law was intended to codify, but he also played a major role in guiding the underlying theology of the new code.

In May 1978, just three months before Pope Paul died, his vision of the role of law in the church, as reflected in more than 40 addresses he gave on the topic during his pontificate, was synthesized by a noted Canadian canon lawyer, Oblate Father Francis Morrisey.

That already succinct synthesis took about 4,000 words, but here are some highlights of Pope Paul's views that Father Morrisey summarized:

The very reason for being of church authority is (in Pope Paul's words) "service ... or the guidance and salvation of the people of God." The juridically founded church "is the very church of Christ, the church of charity."

Legalism is to be avoided. Law and its administration and adjudication must scrupulously observe "the standards of truth and justice," but with a sense of charity that avoids rigidity, that protects and promotes the rights of all and the communion of the people of God.

Under the renewed code, "the juridical will no longer appear to dominate every area of the church's life. It will appear rather as but one facet of that life."

Canon law is a hierarchical law, a missionary law, a bond of communion, an instrument of grace and a law of the church.

It has four basic roles in its service to the community: It defines institutions, it provides for the necessities of life by means of laws and decrees, it completes the essential features of juridical relations between church members, pastors and laity, and it defends the human person and forms the Christian so that he may participate in a community way in Catholic life.

Thus the new code "must have a more evident spiritual character ... The purpose of the entire array of laws is to help the faithful in their spiritual life, which must be inspired by personal conscience and a sense of responsibility rather than by precepts."

Such a brief summary of Pope Paul's views can only hint at the theological groundwork that he wanted to see embodied in the new code.

How well his vision and the norms spelled out by the Synod of Bishops are actually carried out in the new code has been and will continue to be a matter of extensive debate among scholars. Of necessity the product of 20 years of study, consultation and revision is a compromise that will not totally satisfy anyone.

Yet it is considered important for the life of the church that Catholics at large not only understand the thrust of the new law, but that they welcome it, individually and as a community.

This is important not only practically, but theologically, as a well-known American canonist, Jesuit Father Ladislav Orsy, himself a critic of many aspects of the new code, wrote in America magazine last year:

"It is not enough to make good laws, they must also be well received. If people do not understand them, the exhilaration of free observance will not be there; the laws will not become a vital part of their life. We have that ancient and venerable tradition, still alive in the celebration of the Eucharist; that when a great event takes place there should be a response by the people: 'Amen, amen.' Those little words are not juridical approval; they are more. They mean that the mind and heart of the people is with the event."



Three Parishes Join For Religion Classes

Ss. Peter and Paul Parish will join the religious education classes of St. Michael's and Holy Redeemer Churches 11 a.m. to noon on Saturdays, at St. Michael's.

The classes for the primary students are held in Spanish or English, depending on the pupil's facility in the language.

A staff of 20 teachers, aides, and office workers was commissioned Oct. 2, the opening day of the program. Classes and offices are in the church and transportation for the program is provided by staff and parents of participants.

Two pre-confirmation classes, one for junior high school students and one for

high school students, are being taught this year. There are more than 100 children in the program.

Parents are invited to monthly meetings, in Spanish or English, to discuss ways to help their children understand and live their religion.

The parents' meetings have been held in Spanish for the past two years, and because of their success, an English group was formed this year.

In addition, a group of Spanish parents meets in the church during the classes to pray for the children.

Arts and Crafts

The School of the Holy Childhood will hold its annual Arts and Crafts Sale, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 23, and noon to 4 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 24, in the school gym, 1150

Buffalo Road. The large variety of items on display includes Christmas decorations and gifts, baked goods, plants, and crafts made by the students of the school.

Jubilarians Honored

Some 78 religious marking jubilees this year were honored at a celebration of the Eucharist Saturday, Oct. 9, at Sacred Heart Cathedral. Bishop Matthew H. Clark was the principal celebrant at the service that feted women religious as well as four area order priests and brothers.



Alumae Meeting Scheduled

The Alumnae Association of St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing has scheduled its annual Fall dinner meeting for Tuesday, Nov. 9.

The evening begins with a Mass for deceased alumnae celebrated by Father John Rosse, hospital chaplain, at 5:30 p.m. at St. Mary's chapel. Those interested in attending

are asked to use the Ardmore Street employe parking lot and enter through the rear door of the hospital. The Mass will be followed by dinner and a brief business meeting at The Party House, 677 Beahan Road. Social hour will be at 6:30 p.m., followed by dinner at 7:15 p.m.

Sister Molly-Brown, RSM, developmental psychologist and director of Spirit House, will speak on "Loneliness and Affiliation."

Reservations must be made by Oct. 29 by calling Jean Whelehan Ring, 663-0321, or Ruth Friday Courtney, 274-2963.

ABORTION?

LEWIS LEHRMAN

Candidate for Governor

IS AGAINST ABORTION

and against Medicaid financing to pay for it.

FLORENCE SULLIVAN

Candidate for U.S. Senator

IS AGAINST ABORTION

and against Medicaid financing to pay for it.

Paid for by FRIENDS of the UNBORN
Mrs. Arlene Ryan, Auburn, Chairman