

NARW Objects to Vatican Probe of Religious

By Mary Claire Gart
Chicago (NC)—
Resolving to "stand together" and "not be broken," the National Assembly of Religious Women adopted a statement objecting to "the call of the bishops for an investigation

of religious life in the United States." The new papally appointed commission of U.S. bishops to study religious life was not the topic of any of the NARW meeting's major addresses, but it, along with questions of due process in

the Church, came up often during the Aug. 11-14 convention in Chicago.

The statement dealing with the commission said, "Our sense of betrayal is profound as we consider the recent actions of our Church against women Religious."

In establishing the commission, the Vatican said its purpose was to help the bishops work better with Religious and try to reverse a decline in vocations to religious life.

Sister of Charity Roseann Mazzeo, chairwoman of the NARW national board, said there was a great deal of concern among convention participants over the commission, headed by Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco.

"People aren't sure what it means and there's a sense of urgency to talk about it," she said.

Some 200 nuns and lay women attended the four-day meeting, whose theme was "The Spirituality of Politics: A Women's Concern."

NARW, originally an organization of nuns, now has a growing number of lay women who make up about a third of its 2,000 members. The total number of nuns in the United States is about 120,000.

Religious Life

Sessions at the convention dealt with issues such as the effects of poverty on women, the oppression of women in the Church and in society, feminist spirituality and theology, the use of the political process, and the plight of Central America.

Concerning Central America, a delegation from the convention hand-delivered a letter to Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago Aug. 13 urging him to make a public pastoral statement decrying the presence of U.S. warships in the Gulf of Fonseca and demanding an end to military activity on the borders and within Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

(On Aug. 16, a Defense Department spokesman said that two U.S. warships were off the Pacific coast of Central America, but he added that it was against policy to give the exact location. The Gulf of Fonseca is a strategic body of water separating El Salvador and Nicaragua. The U.S. and Salvadoran governments have said that Nicaragua has

used the gulf to transport arms to Salvadoran guerrillas.)

They asked the cardinal to urge the U.S. military to refuse to participate in any aggression in Central America.

Cardinal Bernardin personally accepted the letter and told the group that the situation in Central America "is a matter of concern." Both he and the bishops' conference have spoken out on the issues and would continue monitoring them, he said.

At a general session devoted to global politics, Marta Benavides, a Baptist minister who had worked with Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador, called upon the women to develop a non-intervention movement.

The women received another challenge from U.S. Rep. Mary Rose Okar (D-Ohio), who told them, "Women ought to be the ones to identify with the poor, the elderly, the disadvantaged." Noting that 15 percent of Americans live in

poverty, she called for better distribution of surplus food and for support of women's legislation.

The only male speaker on the program was Bishop Michael McAuliffe of Jefferson City, Mo., who chaired the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Women in the Church and in Society from 1974 to 1982.

"It's important for you to know that the bishops are undoubtedly for the equality of women and men. Vatican II has made that very clear," he said. "Increasingly the bishops will implement this principle as they strive to make equality more a reality in the life of the Church."

Speaking of women's place in the world, the bishop said his committee had pointed out the "feminization of poverty"—the fact that because of social structures

poverty affects women more severely and in greater numbers than it does men. He called this something "we must bring to the attention of our people and a matter upon which we must focus more of our efforts."

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Spreading The Word Of God

Seven years ago Father John Woloch of Shortsville-Manchester, near Clifton Springs, engaged me to care for St. Dominic's parish for a month. Father William Cosgrove, who succeeded Father Donovan as pastor, engaged me for two weeks this August.

I recall especially the cordiality of the people and the family spirit which pervades the villages. The crown of my visitation was this; I had brought 1,000 copies of "Treasury of Prayers" with me, and sold 500 copies at the Mass, and the remaining 500 at Canisteo-Rexville the following Sunday. Deo gratias!

Before the eight o'clock Mass on Monday, I stopped to meet the dozen who were there: Julia Drost who opens the church; Neil Harkenrider, retired principal of the high school; Alice Murphy, vigorous mother of Cornig Father Richard Murphy; Alice Bordman, still organist after 50 years of service, and her husband. Also Mrs. DeMay who had the folk group in Father Woloch's time, and others.

In the front seat was Mrs. Commissio who had a "Treasury of Prayers" booklet in her hand, so tattered from wear it looked as if a dog had chewed it. "I got this from you when you were here years ago." Just think... a spiritual fruit tree still bearing fruit after seven years!

Two days later at Mass she told me sadly, "My nephew, John Volpe, died suddenly in Albany last night." He was the local postmaster, and his wake and funeral indicated both the esteem of the community and the strong family ties.

At the funeral, Father Augie DeAsio celebrated with Father Cosgrove. I knew Father DeAsio from my Clyde days 20 years ago when he used to visit his aunt Emily Catal there. Later he became a priest of the Byzantine Rite.

He is home convalescing from a bad bout of hepatitis, and in Christian concern, I noticed at the funeral Mass he did not drink from the common chalice.

Father George Norton of Canandaigua phoned, "Come for supper after Saturday evening Mass." It's only five miles south,

so I did and found Father Gerald Kelly and Father Frank Pegnam who had assisted at the Mass. Pastor Father James Burke was away. Father Pegnam, retired from St. Thomas More, has bought a small house on Canandaigua Lake.

The congregation was flowing out into the parking lot, and I met Mercy Sisters Valerian, Brian, Emard and one other. They enthused, "Father Pegnam gave a BEAUTIFUL homily!"

Before supper Father Pegnam evinced a strong interest in the early Church in Maryland and the east coast. I asked, "Have you heard Father Bernard Basset's cassette talks on the Church in Maryland? They are superb." "No. Where can I get a set?" "From me. I keep a supply in stock."

Now he is reveling in an inspirational history of men devoted to Christ, the Church, Indians and colonists; of Bishop Carroll, Father Andrew White, Elizabeth Seton, Lord Baltimore. I wish high school students would be introduced to these great men. These are the inspiration to bring vocations.

The secretary, Yvonne Clark, introduced me to Greg Gersbach, just graduated from Paul Smith's College in hotel management. He has charge of St. Dominic's properties for the summer. He comes from a strong Catholic family, and his aunt is Sister Martha Gersbach, SSJ, administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira.

I said, "Greg, do you know about your patron, Pope Gregory the Great?" He did not, so I told him some things, then added, "Have you thought of becoming a priest?" He grinned and said, "Next week the Geneva Times will have the announcement of my engagement to a beautiful girl."

Well, that was that! However, Fathers Wohlrab, Heisel, Kelly and Norton came one noon and Greg prepared lunch: a remarkable Reuben sandwich, tossed salad and a fluffy peach dessert.

The next day I gave him a set of Father Basset's tapes, 12 conferences which I consider his best: "Every Man is an Island," saying, "Greg, this is a 'thank you' for the fine lunch. Listen to these talks and you will be a theologian."

A few days later he said, "My mother listened to the first talk and likes it very much." So the Word of God keeps spreading.

Archbishop Quinn Defends Probe

By Robert L. Johnston
Baltimore (NC)—
Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco, head of the Vatican-mandated commission to study religious life in the United States, defended the commission before the women religious superiors of the United States Aug. 16.

"What the Holy See is asking for is an extension of dialogue" of men and women Religious with the bishops and Church as a whole, he said.

Archbishop Quinn led a special session midway through the Aug. 14-18 national assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the national organization of superiors of women's religious orders, to address their concerns about the Vatican study, which was announced in June.

Although some Religious have publicly complained that the study appears to signal papal disapproval of U.S. Religious or a Vatican effort to impose stricter, more uniform rules on all religious communities, Archbishop Quinn portrayed the Vatican action in a much more positive light.

U.S. Religious have benefited from intensive renewal and dialogue among themselves since the Second Vatican Council, he said. Rejecting negative views of that renewal, he described it as a participation in Christ's passion and said its maturation now is a sharing in Christ's resurrection.

The study's intent to extend the dialogue among Religious to the bishops and Church at large, he said, is crucial for Religious "both to explain the achievements of the past 20 years (and) to receive serious, supportive and critical challenge."

The archbishop, after speaking to the major superiors, fielded questions and listened to comments and criticisms for an hour and a half, twice the time scheduled for the floor discussion.

The session was closed to the press, but Archbishop Quinn and the outgoing

LCWR president, Sister Helen Flaherty of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, held a news conference afterward.

In his talk, which was released to the press, the archbishop said he had appointed a committee of Religious to work with the commission of bishops "in a collaborative effort to foster and encourage religious life in any way that is open to us."

He said communication is the key to the study.

"It is only in this context that we can ask ourselves the genuinely hard questions which bear upon the future of religious life in the United States.

"One of the key questions, which the pope singles out as of immense concern," said the archbishop, is the reason for the drastic numerical decline in vocations to the religious life. He called this one of the "profound issues on which we must communicate."

Archbishop Quinn admitted that "it would be unrealistic to expect of this renewed effort at communication that all disagreements would cease and all misunderstandings be erased."

But, he said, stronger than the differences existing in the Church is "what we share together. For if members of the Church cannot work

together to reconcile our histories and our differences, how can we possibly preach forgiveness and reconciliation to a world whose checkered histories and differences beggar those in the Church by comparison."

During the news conference, Archbishop Quinn said his exchange with the major superiors "was for me a very positive experience...and quite encouraging."

Asked what major concerns surfaced during the closed session, the archbishop said he sensed real anxiety on the part of the sisters whether the Vatican's directives will be interpreted "blindly or with flexibility."



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