

New Concordat Reduces Church Power in Italy

Rome (NC) -- The Vatican and Italy signed a revised Concordat Feb. 18 that reduces some of the church's privileges in Italy and declares church and state to be "independent and sovereign."

The new treaty removes Catholicism as the state religion, makes Catholic re-

ligious instruction in state schools optional and gives civil authorities the authority to review church marriage annulments.

Many areas covered by the previous treaty are omitted in the revised Concordat, with responsibility left to the Italian Bishops' Conference to work out agreements with

state authorities.

The new Concordat also drops the reference to "the sacred character of the eternal city" of Rome. Instead, it notes the "particular significance of Rome for Catholicism."

The revisions reduce the Concordat from 45 articles to 14.

The treaty replaces the Concordat signed by the Vatican and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in 1929.

The new, shorter version is the result of 15 years of difficult negotiations, and reflects changes in the way Italy and the church view religious freedom.

Pope John Paul II noted the "historic importance" of the Concordat Feb. 19, the day after it was signed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli and Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi.

"This was a treaty that Paul VI had foreseen and encouraged, as a sign of renewed agreement between the church and the Italian state," the pope said during his Sunday Angelus blessing in St. Peter's Square.

The treaty, he said, is a significant legal basis for relations with the state. It is "an ideal inspiration for the

generous and creative contribution that the church community is called to give toward the moral good and civic progress of the nation," the pope added.

The treaty will take effect after it is ratified by the Italian Parliament. Little opposition to the accord is expected in Parliament, which in January voted overwhelmingly to support the government's negotiating position.

Before the ratification vote, however, the treaty stipulates that a joint commission of Italian bishops and civil authorities must agree on the thorny issue of the tax status of church organizations in Italy.

The Italian bishops were advised of the treaty's contents before the signing, but did not take part in the negotiations.

The Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, had earlier given a reserved endorsement of the new treaty.

During the negotiations to revise the treaty, Italian law began reflecting the growing secular nature of society. Italy legalized divorce and abortion despite strong opposition from the Vatican and the Italian bishops. Church-backed referendums to repeal the divorce and the

abortion laws failed.

Priests, deacons and members of religious orders continue to be exempt from military service, but will be required to perform a civil service instead.

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Catholic Women Set March Events

Members of the Catholic Womens Club of Rochester and Monroe County are looking forward to a series of events to take place in March.

First Friday Masses are now being held in Hedges Memorial Chapel on East Main Street at noon during the winter months. Coffee hours follow in the club house on East Avenue.

Mrs. Sylvester Murphy is chairperson of the day of recollection starting at 9

a.m., March 7 at the Cenacle. Father Benedict Ehmann will moderate the program.

The club's annual luncheon and fashion show will open 11:30 a.m., March 17 at Brook-Lea Country Club. Sharon Brongo and Mary Fran Gruendike are chairpersons for the scholarship benefit.

The literary, antiques, bridge marathon, travel and Christian service committees are seeking new members. Information is available from the club office, 275-9173.

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

The Church In Africa

Fathers Heisel, Wohrab and myself, with Mario and Ann DiMasi, left Rome at 3:30 a.m. and arrived at Nairobi, Kenya, 5000 miles away, at noon. We were exhausted, but we revived on seeing our welcoming hosts, Bishop Raphael Ndingi and Father Maurice Lwanga awaiting us. We had written: "We would like to see the work of the Church." The bishop responded full measure and overflowing. We visited churches. We visited schools; pre-schools for four-year-olds; (Kenya's population has doubled the past 10 years) technical schools; sewing schools using Singer sewing machines. We visited an academic high school of some prestige, presided over by an efficient, energetic Sister of Mercy from Ireland. Fifty percent of the students are Catholics. The buildings are practical with no frills.

Near the school is the novitiate of the Little Sisters of St. Francis, an Order of native Kenyan Sisters. In 12 years, out of 49 candidates, only one novice and one professed sister have left. There are 30 novices and postulants in formation from many tribes. "Tribes" are like our nationalities, e.g., Lithuanians, Germans, Ukrainians, and tribalism is a great problem in Africa. However, the novices get along well. Their common language is English. Their bond is Our Lord and his mother. All wear a neat white habit with veil. The superior is about 45 years old. Bishop Raphael said: "I sent her to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters in Pennsylvania to study religious formation." The IHMs have conducted religious vacation schools in our diocese. In

Trumansburg, Nunda, and Groveland. There are 2,400 in the order, and they form an influential section of the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis, a federation of 25,000 American Sisters who have preserved traditional religious life, with a strong sense of community, fidelity to the pope and to the magisterium.

Like chicks around a mother-hen, the novices accompanied the reverend mother as we toured the novitiate. It is austere by American standards but practical for indigenous formation training. The Sisters raise their own food. I inquired: "Aren't some of the novices missing?" "Yes. Six. They are milking the cows." I thought: "Dr. Tom Dooley was criticized in 'Life' magazine for the rudeness of his clinic, and medical care in Viet Nam. His critics were comparing his rude care and equipment with rich American hospitals, ignoring the economic, historic and cultural differences. I suppose the critics of the Kenyan sisterhoods will compare our relatively posh, democratic sisterhoods with the matriarchal, limited Kenyan sisterhoods, ignoring the economic, historic and cultural difference and the present needs." We were escorted to a small hall and seated in a semicircle, with Bishop Ndingi and the superior in the center, like a press conference. The novices sat smiling, attentive and shy.

As we were leaving, I asked the superior: "have you ever heard any of Archbishop Sheen's cassette conferences?" She beamed: "Oh, yes. Bishop Ndingi gave us many, and our novices listen to one each week as part of their spiritual formation. Our favorite is 'Simon Peter.'" The name and memory of Archbishop Sheen is much alive and honored in Africa.

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