

Government Officials and Support

A Statement by the Catholic Bishops of New York State

Those willing to shoulder responsibility in government and public service work under heavy pressures and face great difficulties in the conduct of their public lives. Often they are subjected to abuse, scrutiny and criticism, especially if they hold positions of public office. As they come their way and their lives may be threatened to be... (text continues)

We the Bishops of New York State... acknowledge with praise the service of those who hold local, state or national office and whose many efforts... (text continues)

We particularly wish to encourage them in their efforts to enhance the lives of those they represent. The... (text continues)

In pursuing their careers public officials face a whole variety of issues which contain a moral component. Our first president laid down a sound principle when he said in his farewell address that morality and politics cannot be separated. Disarmament, capital punishment, crime and the treatment of those who commit it, the economy, the environment, the plight of the Third World, welfare, housing... (text continues)

...private citizen... (text continues)

...moral... (text continues)

...to that of a human being... (text continues)

...Admittedly this is difficult to do... (text continues)

...We point out the... (text continues)

...the... (text continues)

...the... (text continues)

...the... (text continues)

...the... (text continues)

...the... (text continues)

Delegates Hear Authorities on Reconciliation

By John Dash

In the course of their deliberations, delegates to the state Catholic bishops' conference heard two presentations, one on the history of the World Synod of Bishops and particularly on the most recent synod which discussed the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the other on theological considerations of the sacrament.

The first was given by Auxiliary Bishop Austin B. Vaughan of New York, one of the U.S. delegates to last fall's gathering in Rome.

There have been seven such meetings since Pope Paul announced his intention to establish a world synod in 1965.

Bishop Vaughan said that the synods "are not decision making;" rather, he said, they are an "exercise of collective collegiality on the international and national level," gathering data and reactions to topics from one's constituency, and airing that information in an international forum.

The synod's deliberations, he said, are ultimately handed over to the pontiff for his consideration.

How well does the system work? "Pretty well," Bishop Vaughan said, "in expressing problems;" and "very well" in providing a forum for raising cultural issues.

Nevertheless, he said, "We've got a long way to go on consultation."

But, synods allow for "direct interchange between the pope and the national (bishops') conferences," he said.

And they provide "a good way to get the whole Church to focus on a single topic."

He said synods place the collegiality of the bishops alongside the primacy of the pontiff, thus demonstrating at once the catholicity and the unity of the Church.

Preliminary documents for the most recent synod offered four topics, Bishop Vaughan said: the Church's role in reconciliation in the world, its function as a peacemaker; reconciliation within the Church; the Sacrament of



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Penance; and penitential practices.

Responses to those topics narrowed the field to a "major focus on the Sacrament of Penance. It was an easier topic," he said.

The delegates were allowed eight-minute "interventions" during which they would promote their concerns. Among the concerns raised, Bishop Vaughan said, were the enormous shortage of priests in Africa and Asia; African archbishops' persecution by Moslems; the prophetic role of the Church in such countries as India, where the Catholic population is less than two percent; a need for more inculturation; criticism of the West for consumerism and materialism; and, from Latin America, several points.

Bishop Vaughan said the Latin Americans were divided between "mildly pro liberation theology," and those who were "vehemently against" it. However, he said, they were united on their concerns over North-South tensions.

Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Penance, "is the last critical item on John Paul II's agenda," he said,

characterizing it as an "area of crisis in the West." He cited the "enormous falloff" in confessions as "unexpected and unplanned." And said the question of that development was whether it was good or bad.

He said the feeling among U.S. bishops was somewhat mixed. A few felt it was good, more said it marked a period of transition; and the majority sees the falloff as a bad thing, Bishop Vaughan said.

He brought out the point that there is "a significant decline in the use of confession by priests, seminarians and religious. And that has ripple effects" on the laity.

The synod fathers also brought out the points that often for the devout, the sacrament is a significant element in spiritual development; that the sacrament is a key element in the introduction of children into Catholic life; that in some ways, the sacrament corresponds to problems of our age.

The synod agreed, the bishop said, that the decline in the use of confession is not good, and that it corresponds

to a loss of the sense of sin, God and the transcendent.

In conclusion, Bishop Vaughan opined that a document, based on the synod's deliberations, and scheduled for publication by the pope in late summer or early fall, will call for a new catechesis on confession for different age levels, and, overall, a new apologetic for the sacrament and for confessions.

Father Giles Pater, a Cincinnati liturgist and pastor, addressed the state gathering on "Penance/Reconciliation: Stages on the Journey of a People."

Father Pater seconded Bishop Vaughn's remarks on the need for a new apologetic for the sacrament, and said that such an apologetic could arise from a coherent study of the Second Vatican Council's concept of the Church. He said there was also a need to make evident the interrelation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the other sacraments.

And he characterized parish clergy in this respect as "perplexed."

The reformed rite of penance was the last of the changes to be effected after the council, Father Pater said. With its establishment, two experimental reforms were curtailed or done away with: the postponing of first confession for children and the use of general absolution.

The reversals, he said, "may account for frustration on the part of the parish clergy."

The priest, whose doctoral thesis was on the late Karl Rahner's view of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, offered the conference several of his mentor's ideas, in particular that "the Church is the sacrament of the word of forgiveness."

He called for the integration of the sacrament in the broader ministry of the Church. "Forgiveness is a community ministry," Father Pater said, "a broader thing."

He said there are already in place such integrating devices and cited the Rite of Chris-

tian Initiation of Adults and the "Homecoming" programs in use here.

He further called for a greater stress on confession, telling an anecdote from his days teaching seminarians.

At one point, he said, seminarians seemed resentful that his courses covered the sacrament. He said he was told by one that confession

was about to be abolished anyway.

He asked his students to go out and to do 10 interviews with people from every walk of life on what confession meant to them.

Father Pater said that to a man, the seminarians returned with a changed perception of confession, convinced of its worth.



J. Alan Davitt, executive director of the State Catholic Conference, chats with Father Michael Conboy, center, pastor of St. Patrick's in Seneca Falls, and Rochester Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey.

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