

Pope lauds St. Augustine's fidelity as model for today's theologians

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — St. Augustine's fidelity to Church doctrine in the fourth century is a model for 20th-century theologians, Pope John Paul II said.

The North African saint left a theological method of study based on "full adherence to the authority of the faith," the pope said in a letter to the world's bishops dated Aug. 28, the saint's feast day.

St. Augustine's theological method, which the pope said is particularly valid today, included "the convinced certainty that Christian doctrine comes from God."

"We know that this method included the full adherence to the authority of the faith, which, in its origin — the authority of Christ — is manifested through scripture, tradition and the Church," the pope said.

The text of the 21-page apostolic letter, "Augustine of Hippo," was made public by the Vatican Aug. 26, eight days after Father Charles Curran was barred from teaching theology because of his views on dissent and some medical and sexual issues.

The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith told Father Curran, a tenured professor of moral theology at The Catholic University of America, Washington, that he was "not suitable nor eligible" to teach Catholic theology. The pope approved the decision.

Pope John Paul said the fact that St. Augustine lost his faith before struggling to rediscover it makes his life an even more valuable lesson to people today.

In the letter, the pope traced the saint's progress from early "errors," including his belief that in order to be fully committed to Christ one must abandon the Church. Eventually St. Augustine became one of the

Church's greatest defenders on that and other points.

Pope John Paul said St. Augustine demonstrated that "the faith is never without reason" and that the two "must cooperate."

Eventually, the saint developed an idea of "Christian freedom" founded on "social love," justice and peace, the pope said. His life was an example of the combination of prayer and action, the pope added.

He said St. Augustine knew that doctrine must be preserved as a whole, so that it can be used to judge whether philosophies conform to the Christian faith.

At the same time, the saint's life exemplified for modern Catholics how reason and faith can be brought together in a common philosophy, the pope said.

"He teaches those seeking the truth not to despair of finding it," the pope said.

For modern scientists, the pope said, St. Augustine's thought illustrates how God can be understood through created things.

"To the men who have in their hands the fate of populations, he implores them to love peace above all and to promote it not with war but with the methods of peace," the pope said.

He also praised the saint's work as bishop in Africa among native peoples. He said St. Augustine's "City of God" deserves rereading today because it exemplifies how Christianity ought to encounter native cultures — without destroying or suppressing local customs.

St. Augustine, born in Tagaste, in what is now Algeria, in 354 and later bishop of ancient Hippo there, is considered a doctor and father of the Church. His writings had tremendous influence on the development of Western thought. He died in 430 at age 76.

Salvadoran theologian defends right to dissent

San Salvador, El Salvador (NC) — Dissent from non-infallible church teachings is a "right and even a duty" for Catholics, said the Jesuit rector of Central American University in San Salvador.

However, making that dissent public is a sensitive issue, since that "could put one on a collision course" with the teaching authority of the Church, said Jesuit Father Ignacio Ellacuria.

Father Ellacuria, who also is a theologian, gave written responses to questions by National Catholic News Service on dissent and the effect of the Vatican's recent decision to ban Father Charles Curran from teaching as a Catholic theologian.

"For any faithful Christian, and for the theologian in particular, dissent from non-infallible Church teachings can be a right and even a duty," said Father Ellacuria.

Once a person has done everything possible to form his conscience correctly, he cannot act against his conscience, the priest said.

"The Church naturally has the right to make it clear that the position advocated by the dissenter is different from the teaching of the ordinary magisterium, and the dissenter himself or herself should be very honest about this," Father Ellacuria said.

He said that "as has happened in the past," sometimes non-infallible Church teachings have "erroneous aspects or can fail

to completely reflect the truth.

"Because it has been in error, the Church has had to change its positions on many important issues — on biblical interpretations, on issues relating to evolution, and on the issue of the rightness or wrongness of lending money at interest," the rector said.

He said that although Catholic universities are dependent on Church authorities in "a real and legal way," they are also "places in which teaching, and especially research, should be carried out with the greatest possible freedom."

Church authorities tend to limit research and teaching authority when they think the freedoms endanger the Church, Father Ellacuria said.

"This position is not without its dangers," he said. "One of these, and not a small one, is that in totalitarian countries, when the Church behaves in this way it sets a precedent which justifies totalitarian practices by governments, which act as the Church does when they see their own orthodoxy endangered."

He said the Church's position can also limit research, which causes it to lose credibility in the intellectual world and makes it more difficult to search for the truth.

"The Church has the right and duty to defend orthodoxy and the value of the magisterium, but it has a greater obligation to seek the truth," he said.

internal procedures. He noted that the procedures available are "basically the same" as those used in dismissing a tenured faculty member "for cause."

Father Curran's statement also noted reports that Vatican officials had been quoted as saying he could face further punishment, "including the suspension of my priestly duties."

He said he was told by Archbishop Hickey that no such actions are contemplated. "I note that Vatican officials subsequently denied that any further action against me is being considered," he said.

Curran states

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practical dissent from some non-infallible Church teachings and for the importance of academic freedom for Catholic institutions and for Catholic theology."

He said that other university officials — the dean of the school of religious studies, the executive council of the school, and the school's committee on academic freedom and procedures — had asked him to pursue the

Parent support group formed in West Irondequoit district

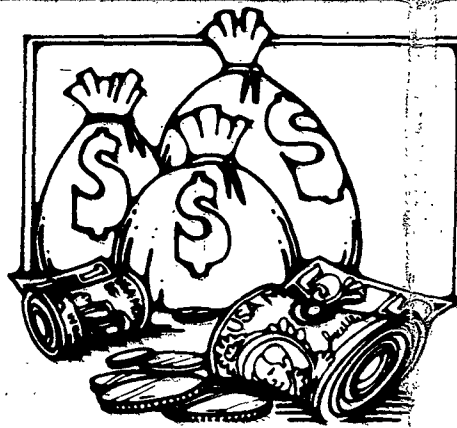
West Irondequoit has a new support group for parents of children receiving special services. The service, called West Irondequoit for Special Education (WISE), developed because of a continuing need to improve communication among parents, school and community.

Objectives of WISE include serving as advocates of all children, promoting understanding between handicapped and non-handicapped people, informing parents of facilitative programs, providing educational programs with guest speakers, and representing the interest of parents and children before policy-making groups. A preschool support group is

also being formed and a parent handbook will be published.

WISE will be holding steering committee meetings on the following dates: September 16, October 21, November 18, January 20, February 24, March 17, April 7 and May 19. These meetings will be open to the public and provide opportunity for discussion. Meetings will be held in the faculty cafeteria of Irondequoit High School at 7:30 p.m.

Anyone interested in WISE may contact Rita Dowling at (716) 544-6927 or Ann Rife at 342-6088.



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