

Bishops' meeting

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It was in response to Archbishop Quinn's address that Pope John Paul denounced dissent and a "selective" approach to Church moral teachings.

Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee, third speaker for the bishops, said the Church in the United States "can boast of having the largest number of educated faithful in the world."

Speaking about the laity, Archbishop Weakland described changes in the social, professional and educational level of U.S. Catholics to argue that "this demands a new kind of collaboration and a wider range of consultation on the part of the teaching office of the Church... An authoritarian style is counterproductive," he said.

He also stressed the desire of U.S. Catholics "to contribute their skills and knowledge to the life and growth of the Church."

This is particularly true of women, he said. "There are no words to explain so much pain on the part of so many competent women today who feel they are second-class citizens in a Church they love."

In discussing "the advancement of women" in his response, Pope John Paul said that "the aim of all the Church's efforts on behalf of women" is "to promote their human dignity," but he reaffirmed the Catholic Church's position that "women are not called to the priesthood."

While acknowledging that U.S. Catholics are among the most educated laity in the world, he asked whether they are using their ability "to exercise great influence upon American culture" and make it "clearly reflect Christian inspiration."

Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, NCCB vice president and the last of the bishops to speak, said, "The ministry of the Church in the United States is in a state of turmoil and crisis... but it is not the turmoil and crisis of death and decay, but of development and of life."

Archbishop Pilarczyk said the bishops were concerned about statistics showing a decline in religious vocations and a drop in the ratio of priests to Catholics over the past

quarter century.

But there are many hopeful signs as well, such as expanded lay ministries, the growth of the permanent diaconate, new appreciation of religious life, growing awareness of the need for evangelization and the growth of spiritual renewal programs throughout the Church, he said.

Pope John Paul said the "more active participation of the laity in the mission of the Church" was "encouraging," but he warned Catholics to see lay ministry and priestly ministry as complementary, not in opposition to one another.

The pope stressed the need to pray for priestly and religious vocations and actively recruit them.

The pope's long prayer-and-dialogue session with about 300 of the almost 400 U.S. bishops was held at Our Lady Queen of the Angels high school seminary in San Fernando, a small city within the city of Los

Angeles.

While the meeting was closed to the press and the public, all the texts from it were released.

At the start of their meeting, Pope John Paul and the bishops recited morning prayer together at Mission San Fernando, one of the original California mission Churches, adjacent to the seminary. It was the first time that a reigning pope had visited a mission founded by Father Junipero Serra.

After the closed-door meeting, which ran about 45 minutes past its scheduled time, the pope joined the bishops for a picnic luncheon.

At a packed press conference afterward, Archbishop Pilarczyk told journalists that the atmosphere was "very cordial" and the pope gave "great encouragement" to the bishops.

Responding to several questions about the pope's reference to dissent as an obstacle to

receiving the sacraments, the archbishop said Pope John Paul "is not saying that those who do not accept all the teaching are out of the Church."

Traditional pastoral theology would still have to be applied to discern the spiritual state of individuals involved in dissent, he said, and what the pope was doing was rejecting views that say there is simply nothing wrong with dissent.

"The Holy Father, I think, wants to be very careful to underline the fact that Catholic teaching is not a kind of grocery store where Catholics are free to take what they want and not take what they want," he said.

The NCCB official said the Church has always preached hard teachings, and it should not change them simply because they are challenged. "The status of Church teaching is the same this afternoon as it was this morning (before the pope spoke)," he said.

Papal dialogue

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direct input by the bishops that the previous one," he explained. "And I think the advance in the exchange that took place in this one over the last one was the fruit of that."

The atmosphere of Wednesday's meeting with the pope, which Bishop Clark described as "very, very warm and cordial," might also be the product of preliminary discussions. The meeting's cordial spirit contrasted with reports of tension between the bishops and the pope over such issues as the Vatican's disciplinary action against Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle, sanctions employed against U.S. theologians, and divisions between liberal and conservative American Catholics regarding the Church's moral teachings.

While acknowledging that those tensions still exist, Bishop Clark termed them "a healthy sign of life in the Church."

"I think it's important to keep repeating that there have always been such tensions in the Church through all ages and in all parts of the Church," he said. "You can't read a chapter in the Church's history that's in any way realistic without bumping into such things."

People may be more aware of contemporary divisions within the Church, the bishop explained, because of the "enormous capacity to

communicate"

contributing to the impression of heightened tensions between Rome and American Catholics were a variety of polls and surveys that depicted the latter as "cafeteria Catholics" who reject this and that Church teaching at will.

"My principal fault with (those surveys) is this — that they put all truth at the same level," Bishop Clark said. "They set everything the Church teaches forth in a manner that suggests that every piece of it is of exactly the same importance. Right away, for me, that makes those surveys not of very much value."

While Bishop Clark speculated that the papal visit will have an impact on the views of the pope as well as those of bishops and American Catholics, he does not believe that this impact can be isolated from the flow of other events. "I think that when any people of good will... gather to hear the truth that one another speak, good things will happen," he said. "But I don't think people change radically on the head of one meeting. That's why I keep talking about this papal visit as a very significant moment, but just one moment in an unfolding story of the Church's life."

If it is only for a moment in the continuum of the Church's life, the pope's trip is certainly a focal moment that "collects a lot of things that have happened before and launches us into what will happen in the future," Bishop Clark

observed. "All of the back and forth of these days I think will influence what follows," he said. "For example, the synod on the laity next month, I'm sure, will not happen apart from an awareness of this exchange."

The pope's observations on the Church in the United States are also likely to be raised next year, when he is scheduled to meet privately with each of the U.S. bishops during their ad limina visits to Rome.

Above and beyond the focus on issues and tensions surrounding the pope's most recent visit to the United States, Bishop Clark found himself most powerfully affected by a spiritual theme the pontiff repeated again and again — the need for a personal "conversion of heart" rooted in the love of Christ.

The bishop likewise observed that, with hindsight, the papal visit will probably have been most effective not as a platform from which to try and change people's views on particular issues, but as a sign of the Lord's presence, the expression of a "common wellspring of hope" that touched the yearning of people to be part of something that transcended their own limitations.

"Some of those things are even hard to talk about within oneself, let alone communicate in an article," Bishop Clark acknowledged. "But it's that kind of thing, I think, that moves people even more than speeches."

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