

World & Nation

Archbishop welcomes prospect of papal 'summit'

By Greg Erlanson

Rome (NC) — U.S. bishops welcome the opportunity to meet with Pope John Paul II in a special session next year to discuss "the future of the Church in the United States," the president of the U.S. bishops' conference said.

Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis said such a meeting could last "about a week" and be preceded by regional reports forwarded to the Vatican.

The pope announced the planned meeting March 5 during a talk to 20 U.S. bishops who had just completed their *ad limina* visits.

The *ad limina* visits — which require a head of a diocese to meet with the pope once every five years to report on the status of his see — followed by five months the pope's trip to the United States, in which he addressed the U.S. bishops in Los Angeles.

"All of these encounters are likewise linked to the future of the Church in the United States, which I hope to be able to reflect on again next year in a meeting with American bishops," the pope said.

In a March 5 interview with National Catholic News Service, Archbishop May described the proposed 1989 meeting as a "national *ad limina*."

He said he was not sure who would attend the meeting or how participants would be selected, but speculated that the country's 13 administrative regions might elect representatives.

These regions would submit reports to conference headquarters in Washington, which would be forwarded to the Vatican before the 1989 meeting, the archbishop said.

The session will not be an "extraordinary synod," but more a "Brazil-type meeting," he explained.

In 1986 Brazilian bishops followed their *ad limina* visits with a summit meeting at the Vatican with the pope and Vatican officials on liberation theology and other issues of concern.

The three-day meeting involved the country's 14 regional secretariats and five resident cardinals.

However, while the Brazilian summit and similar meetings with other episcopates were



Pope John Paul II joins a delegation of prelates from the midwestern United States who visited the Vatican March 5 for *ad limina* visits. After all U.S. bishops have made their visits, the pope is expected to conduct a "summit meeting" on the Church in this country.

"crisis meetings at a time of major problems," this is not the case with the United States, Archbishop May said.

The archbishop would not speculate on specific issues likely to be raised during the meeting.

The possibility of such a meeting has been in the air since 20 leading U.S. churchmen met with Vatican officials in March 1987 preceding the pope's U.S. trip.

At that time Vatican press spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the four days of talks were "part of a process" that could lead to a "much more substantive meeting" involving American Church and Vatican officials in the future.

Archbishop May, president of the Na-

tional Conference of Catholic Bishops, was in Rome not only for his *ad limina* visit but also to participate with other NCCB officials in a February 29 dinner with the pope.

Archbishop May declined to discuss specific issues raised during these meals or in his meetings with Vatican officials.

However, he did say that the pope "never referred" to the controversial document on AIDS released last December by the U.S. Catholic Conference's administrative board.

Doctrinal congregation officials "are still considering a position on it," he said.

Regarding the pope's speech to the U.S. bishops following their *ad limina* visits, Archbishop May said it "couldn't have been more positive, more complimentary to the Church in the U.S., and I was amazed, frankly."

Archbishop May said the pope's positive tone was directly related to his experiences in the United States during last September's visit.

"Apparently he saw a different Church in the United States from what he had been led

to believe," he said.

The pope and the Vatican have received "a lot of false indications" from media reports and "from others too," he added.

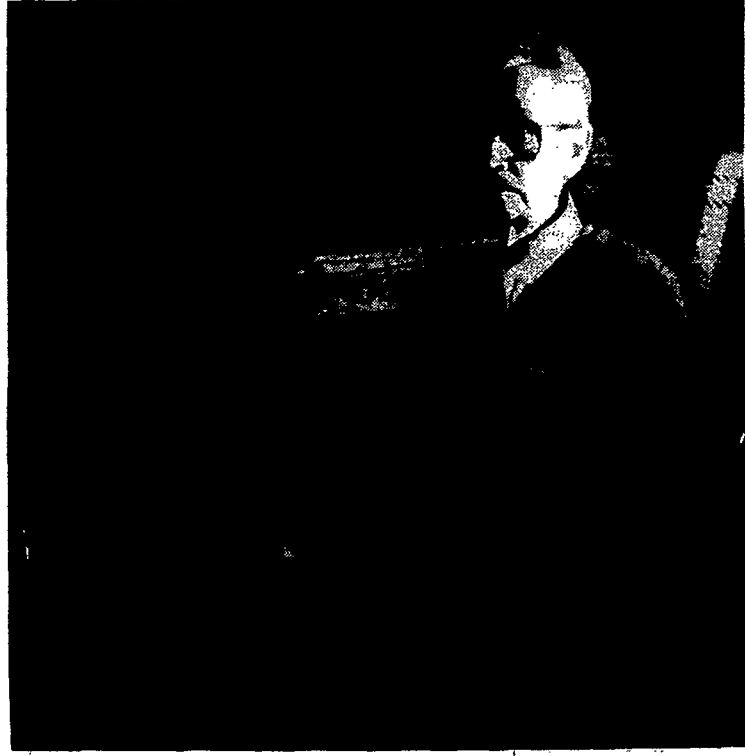
"Despite the fact we had come over here (last March) to try to disabuse him, apparently we didn't succeed," the archbishop said. "But the people succeeded."

Archbishop May said the pope is aware of the debate in the United States over his new social encyclical, "On Social Concerns," and its criticism of the effect of the East-West ideological competition on the Third World.

A "deeper reading" of the encyclical will show that "the pope isn't saying Russia and the United States are equally bad or equally at fault," the archbishop said, but that "each is part of the problem."

Archbishop May said some critics of the U.S. bishops' controversial pastoral letter on the U.S. economy "are a little shocked" by the encyclical, which has shown that the pope and the U.S. bishops "are thinking along the same lines."

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