

World & Nation

# Theologians, canonists fault draft on bishops' conferences

By Jerry Filteau  
 Washington (NC) — Several leading U.S. theologians and Church law experts have issued sharp criticisms of a proposed Vatican statement concerning limits on the authority of bishops' conferences. The draft statement was written by top Vatican agencies.

The 30-page document was sent to the world's bishops in late January or early February by Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, head of the Vatican Congregation for Bishops, and was not immediately made public.

The document soon circulated among theologians and others, and National Catholic News Service obtained a copy.

In its March 19 issue, *America*, a Jesuit-run national magazine, featured critiques of the draft from prominent theologians at Catholic University of America theologians and canon lawyers. The scholars said the document must be taken seriously, but does not give a balanced picture of the place of bishops' conferences in the Church.

In a Latin-language cover letter to bishops, Cardinal Gantin emphasized that the draft was a working paper, not a final document. He asked the world's bishops to submit comments and criticisms by the end of this year.

The working paper says bishops' conferences cannot properly be called collegial bodies, and they should not become powerful at the expense of the Church's central authority in Rome or the individual bishop's authority in his own diocese.

The Vatican working paper calls bishops' conferences "useful organs for examining, debating and coordinating important ecclesial problems at the national or supraregional level."

But it warns that such conferences "have no competence to establish doctrinal and moral contents" and do not in themselves have the teaching authority that, according to Church doctrine, belongs to the pope, to

all the world's bishops in union with the pope, and to individual bishops in union with the pope in their own dioceses.

It particularly warns against "an excessive bureaucracy" of national committees, offices and staff in bishops' conferences, "coercing the psychological freedom of the bishops, who are then led to see the episcopal conference as a type of supergovernment of the dioceses."

The role and authority of bishops' conferences since the Second Vatican Council was one of several issues discussed by the 1985 extraordinary session of the world Synod of Bishops. Synod members asked the Vatican

to develop a study on the topic.

Two of the Catholic University theologians who commented in *America* magazine on the document — Jesuit Father Avery Dulles and Father Joseph A. Komonchak — suggested that its warnings against the risks of bureaucracy ought to be taken seriously by bishops' conferences, but they need to be applied as well to other organizational structures in the Church, including the Vatican bureaucracy.

Father Dulles said the working paper focused around two main theses: "that episcopal conferences are not in the true and proper sense collegial and that they have, as

such, no mandate to teach.

"Although many readers, like myself, will find the arguments given for these positions unpersuasive, the positions themselves need to be taken seriously" because they represent views held by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal congregation, and some other top Church officials, he said.

But he said the document's different descriptions of the relationship between collegiality and bishops' conferences are so "inconsistent and confusing," he said, that "one reader wondered if the text was not the work of several authors who did not agree with one another on the point."

## First black archbishop urges blacks to 'share joy'



Archbishop Eugene A. Marino

Belleville, Ill. (NC) — Archbishop Eugene A. Marino, newly named archbishop of Atlanta, told black Catholics to "share the joy" of his appointment as the nation's first black archbishop.

He added that black Catholics were at a special moment as they "continue to reflect on who we are and where we are as African Americans in the Church."

Archbishop Marino made the comments in a homily at Mass for participants in a March 25-27 symposium sponsored by the National Office for Black Catholics and the National Black Lay Catholic Caucus.

About 225 black Catholics from 37 dioceses attended the conference at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. The meeting's focus was developing plans for a lay leadership institute for black Catholics.

"All of you can share the joy now that we have had the appointment of the nation's first black archbishop," Archbishop Marino said. "I did not ask for the assignment; God chose me, and He will give me what is needed to serve the Church."

An auxiliary bishop of Washington for 14 years, Archbishop Marino was named the nation's first black archbishop on March 15. He is scheduled to be installed May 5.

In his homily, the archbishop cited as significant events for black Catholics during the past year the publication of a new black Catholic hymnal; the first National Black Catholic Congress of the century, held last May; Pope John Paul II's address to black Catholics in New Orleans during his 1987 trip; the appointment of the nation's 12th black bishop, Auxiliary Bishop Curtis John Guillory of Galveston-Houston; and his own appointment as archbishop.

But he also told symposium participants that they need not look to "any leader for salvation, black or white," but "to Jesus Christ."

Archbishop Marino reminded the congregation that by living in a secular society, "a selfish society, we have to be wary of letting selfishness instead of self-sacrifice be the norm." He also said he feared black Catholics were getting away from their "spiritual roots as a people."

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 The first issue of each month, the *Courier-Journal* will be featuring some prime dining spots in and around the Rochester diocese. If you, or someone you know would like to have your restaurant included in our *Dining Guide*, call the *Courier-Journal* at 328-4340. Look for our *Dining Guide* in the upcoming months, and pay a visit to the restaurant of your choice; and enjoy a pleasant evening of "Dining Around the Diocese."