

World & Nation

Auxiliary seeks study of women's ordination

By Daniel Medinger
 Baltimore (NC) — Saying that arguments given to exclude women from the priesthood are unsupportable, Auxiliary Bishop P. Francis Murphy of Baltimore has called for an international commission to investigate the issue of women's priestly ordination.

The bishop said the proposed international commission should be established at the Vatican level and be composed of an equal number of men and women, including feminist scholars in Scripture, anthropology and theology, as well as bishops from various parts of the world and members of the Orthodox and other major Christian communities.

"The commission's study might uncover new and persuasive arguments that support the Church's present teaching on the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood," Bishop Murphy said. "Or it could discover and support modern scholarly and pastoral developments that would lead to the opening of ordination for women."

"In my view, I am convinced that the

commission would find compelling reasons for opening up the priesthood to women," he said.

In 1977, under Pope Paul VI, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith reaffirmed the tradition of a male-only priesthood. Pope John Paul II has said the issue of women's ordination is closed.

Bishop Murphy made his remarks at a lecture series, "The American Church: An Open Future," June 15 in Schenectady, N.Y. His comments were made in response to the first public draft of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on women, "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption."

"I believe that we bishops have shown a willingness to listen to and learn from women in terms of their feelings about the Church, both positive and negative," Bishop Murphy said. "But when it comes to reflecting on our heritage, it is clear we are back in a world where the word of God has been interpreted only in the light of the experience of men."

Bishop Murphy credited the writers of the pastoral letter for preparing "a challenging

document that has some great strengths and insights but ... it has a fundamental weakness."

That weakness, he said, is trying "to fit the experience of women into the traditional, male-dominated categories of Church teaching, language and practice."

Bishop Murphy said the strength of the letter was that "the Church had listened to a wide diversity of women and consulted the experience of many whose talents and aspirations are unjustly overlooked."

But he criticized the letter, saying it was not forward-looking enough.

"We need to open both eyes to discover what God is showing us about the role of women in our time. For the Church to look exclusively to its past teachings for its current policies on women is futile," he said.

He said, as an analogy, that while St. Thomas Aquinas was a great doctor of the Church, consulting his teaching for answers to women's issues today was like "planning a trip to the moon using only pre-Copernican astronomy."

Pope plans imminent publication of paper on women

By Greg Erlanson
 Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II has announced the imminent publication of a document on the "dignity and vocation of women" in response to concerns raised during the 1987 Synod of Bishops' discussion of the role of the laity.

Speaking at the Vatican to the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops June 17, the pope said the document on women would be issued before his forthcoming apostolic exhortation on the 1987 synod theme: "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World."

"In this way I wish to respond to the desire expressed by the synodal fathers and at the same time insert the reflection on the role of woman in the context of the Marian year," the pope said.

The Marian year will close August 15.

The pope also announced the formation of a commission to study the questions of lay

"ministry," "duty" and "office" raised during the synod.

The commission will be supervised by the general secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Archbishop Jan Schotte.

A third theme of the synod — the role of movements and associations in the Church — is to be addressed by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the pope said.

The council will examine criteria for formal Vatican approval of such organizations, the pope said.

Women, movements and lay ministries were three of the most discussed issues to emerge during the October 1-30 synod.

The pope spoke with the council at the conclusion of its June 14-17 plenary. The council met to examine a draft of the apostolic exhortation and to make recommendations for the theme of the next Synod of Bishops.

The pope said a major concern of the synod members last year had been the

"dignity of woman in society and the Church."

Conscious of the "active and efficacious role" of women in the history of Church and culture, the synod members hoped to "deepen the necessary theological and anthropological foundations and to resolve the problems relative to the true meaning and dignity of woman and man," the pope said.

Declaring it a theme "particularly dear to me, above all in this Marian year," the pope said the forthcoming document would be an "ample document on the dignity and vocation of woman."

Chicago Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin, a member of the synod council, said the final papal exhortation on the synod is likely to be released early this fall.

Cardinal Bernardin told National Catholic News Service June 17 that the council had reviewed a 111-page draft of the exhortation, which he described as "very fine."

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