

World & Nation

Pope John Paul II leaving mark on 20-year-old encyclical

By Greg Erlanson

Vatican City (NC) — It was a hot and humid summer in Rome 20 years ago when Pope Paul VI boosted the birth-control debate among Catholics to red-hot temperatures by issuing his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life"), which closed the doctrinal door on artificial contraception.

Its release to a waiting Church on July 29, 1968, brought an explosion of protests and declarations that left a papacy in shock and a Church divided.

For the past 10 years a different pope has made the "birth control encyclical" his own. While he has called the document part of the "permanent patrimony" of the Church's moral

teaching, Pope John Paul II's own thinking also has left a lasting imprint.

Pope Paul's encyclical contained no surprises, reaffirming the Church's traditional opposition to artificial methods of birth control. However, the pope sought to place the teaching within a positive framework: Every sexual act must be open to the transmission of new life. In particular, he stressed the "inseparable connection willed by God" between the unitive and procreative aspects of intercourse.

The ensuing public controversy scarred the remaining two-thirds of the diplomat-pope's pontificate. Ten years later, a little more than a month before his death, Pope Paul broke his long silence on the subject. In a June 23, 1978,

speech marking the anniversary of his election, the ailing pope spoke of the painful reception accorded *Humanae Vitae*.

"This document of our pontificate caused us anguish," he said, "perhaps especially because among Catholics and public opinion in general there was a certain climate of expectancy that concessions, relaxations or liberalization of the Church's moral doctrine and teaching on marriage would be made."

The pope told the College of Cardinals that the time had come to "reassert the important principles which ... we pronounced in a very carefully formulated way."

Taking that message to heart was one of those cardinals, Karol Wojtyla, archbishop of

Krakow, Poland. Elected pope four months after Pope Paul's speech, he wholeheartedly adopted his predecessor's encyclical, while simultaneously making it his own.

Pope John Paul II brought to the question of contraception his philosophy of personalism with its emphasis on the dignity of the human individual. He wrote in his apostolic letter on the family that sexuality "is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such."

Likewise, he said, fertility "surpasses the purely biological order and involves a whole series of personal values."

Contraception does not just sever the unitive and procreative aspects of human love, but violates the person's "innermost being" by frustrating the "total physical self-giving" that is characteristic of human love, the pontiff declared.

In a 1984 talk, the pope said intercourse "ceases to be an act of love" when birth control is used, because it violates the "inner order of conjugal communion."

Last year, in a talk to natural family planning experts meeting in Rome, the pope emphasized that, far from being a teaching that will one day be reversed, *Humanae Vitae* is "a teaching which belongs to the permanent patrimony of the moral doctrine of the Church."

In 1987, he said that "what is taught by the Church on contraception does not belong to material freely debatable among theologians." Not everyone is convinced, of course. Statistics indicate that Catholics still practice artificial birth control at roughly the same rate as non-Catholics.

Ex-Lefebvrites form society under papal authority

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Several priests and seminarians who split with excommunicated Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre have taken steps to be legally incorporated into the Catholic Church as the Priestly Society of St. Peter, according to a Vatican official.

The terms for the new society are to be drawn from the proposed reconciliation agreement with the Vatican, which the archbishop rejected before leading his followers into schism, said Father Camille Perl, secretary of the newly formed pontifical commission charged with aiding those followers of Archbishop Lefebvre who wish to remain loyal to the pope. Those terms include permission to use the Latin-language Tridentine Mass.

At least 13 priests and 20 seminarians who were followers of the archbishop met Vatican officials in early July to set in motion their le-

gal recognition as a clerical organization, said Father Perl, the commission's No. 2 official.

Plans fall for those priests and seminarians to form their own pontifical society of apostolic life, with a constitution to be approved by the Vatican, Father Perl said. The society "will be open to all Archbishop Lefebvre's followers" and to other priests who wish to join it, he said.

Father Perl said the Society of St. Peter was founded by Father Joseph Bisig, former head of Archbishop Lefebvre's monastery at Hauterive, near Fribourg, Switzerland. He said Father Bisig personally had begun conversations with Vatican officials concerning legal recognition of the society.

About 200 priests and 250 seminarians belonged to the archbishop's Priestly Society of St. Pius X at the time of the June 30 excommunication, Father Perl said, noting that it was

too early to tell how many of these would be attracted to the new society.

Father Perl said the organization founded by Father Bisig would be incorporated into the Church under terms outlined in May in a papal proposal rejected by Archbishop Lefebvre.

Under the terms of that proposal, the archbishop and his followers would have been allowed to continue celebrating the Tridentine Mass in Latin — the traditional Catholic Mass prior to the liturgical reforms that followed Vatican II — as long as they recognized the validity of the current liturgy. Archbishop Lefebvre's movement also would have been allowed to retain its spiritual traditions and to run seminaries, subject to papal authority.

"We want to show our brothers who caused the rupture that traditional Catholics can remain in the Church," Father Bisig said in an interview with the Italian Catholic monthly magazine *30 Giorni* (30 Days).

The priest said he was the No. 2 official in Archbishop Lefebvre's society until he left it at the time of the excommunication. Father Bisig said he constantly opposed plans to ordain bishops against papal orders, but he also expressed sympathy with the archbishop's goals.

"He has fought against progressivism and modernism," Father Bisig said. "This is also our objective, but we want to do it within the Church."

Vatican says laity may not serve Communion when 'ordinary ministers' are present, able

Vatican City (NC) — A Vatican commission has ruled against using lay ministers of the Eucharist to distribute Communion when enough priests or deacons are available, reflecting what one liturgical expert called the "consistent position of the Holy See."

If "ordinary ministers" — priests or deacons — are available, whether or not they are participating at the altar, they would take precedence over any extraordinary ministers, ruled the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law. "Extraordinary ministers" are members of the laity designated to distribute Communion as needed by the Church.

A U.S. liturgical expert, Divine Word Father Thomas Krosnicki, said the ruling reflects Vatican concerns about the use of extraordinary ministers in various countries. He said the Vati-

can has always been "very concerned about the role of the ordinary minister" and the proper use of extraordinary ministers.

The 1980 Vatican instruction on the Eucharist, *Inaestimabile Donum* ("The Priceless Gift"), said those lay faithful authorized to be extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist could distribute Communion under certain circumstances: when no ordinary minister is present; when the priest is impeded by illness or advanced age; or when "the number of faithful going to Communion is so large as to make the celebration of Mass excessively long."

"Accordingly, a reprehensible attitude is shown by those priests who, though present at the celebration, refrain from distributing Communion and leave this task to the laity," the instruction added.

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