

World & Nation

Capsules

Review ruling, court urged

Washington — The Reagan administration November 10 suggested that a Missouri abortion case provides a good opportunity for the U.S. Supreme Court to reconsider *Roe vs. Wade*, the 1973 abortion decision. In a friend-of-the-court brief, filed by Solicitor General Charles Fried, the Justice Department suggested the high court take up a case involving major provisions of a Missouri anti-abortion law struck down by a federal appeals court in July. According to the brief, "if the court is prepared to reconsider *Roe vs. Wade*, this case presents an appropriate opportunity for doing so."

Seminarians' numbers drop

Washington — For the fourth straight year the number of seminarians in U.S. Catholic seminaries has dropped at all levels, according to data released in November. There were 8,921 seminarians at the start of the current school year, down 5.2 percent from last year's total of 9,410. The new total is about a fifth of seminarian totals in the mid-60s and less than half the numbers in the mid-70s. The figures are compiled yearly by Benedictine Father Adrian Fuerst, seminary researcher for the Washington-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

Women's progress surveyed

Washington — Women serve as chancellors in at least 17 U.S. dioceses, and 82 women administer priestless parishes in 38 dioceses, according to a survey by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office of Public Affairs. A total of 117 of the nation's 188 dioceses, archdioceses and other church jurisdictions responded to the survey. The public affairs office conducted the study in anticipation of questions about women in the church prompted by the U.S. bishops' proposed pastoral letter on women in church and society, according to a November 10 announcement of the survey results.

Pope marks millennium

Vatican City — Pope John Paul II told a group of Soviet and international scholars that the time has come to rediscover the richness of religion and the important role it can play in Soviet society. He said the understanding of religious worship must go beyond the "reductive explanations offered by ideologies of the past century." The pope apparently was referring to Marxism's view of religion as the opium of the people. Pope John Paul spoke November 12 at the Vatican to participants in an international conference on "The Baptism of the Russian Lands," marking the millennium of Christianity in several parts of what is now the Soviet Union.

Homily blasts apartheid

Pretoria, South Africa — Bishops in southern Africa have defended an official of the Vatican delegation in South Africa who was criticized for a homily questioning the country's apartheid policy. The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference said those critical of the homily "misunderstand completely the role of the church" to express "concern for the oppressed of South Africa." Msgr. Mario Cassari, charge d'affaires of the apostolic delegation in South Africa, said South Africa's policy of racial segregation, apartheid, was "morally criminal" and that censorship of the media is "not the fruit of Christian and democratic methods."

U.N. urged to defend faith

United Nations — The Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations expressed "profound dismay" that some countries deny the right of people to practice their faith, and he asked nations to work seriously to end religious intolerance. Archbishop Renato R. Martino, the permanent observer and papal nuncio to the United Nations, spoke November 10 before the General Assembly's Third Committee, which was discussing the "elimination of all forms of religious intolerance."

Vatican halts statement on theologians

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — Last-minute criticisms by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith led the U.S. bishops November 14 to put off a vote until next June on a proposed statement about the relationship between bishops and theologians.

The doctrinal congregation sent a five-page letter criticizing the proposed statement just before the bishops gathered for their November 14-17 meeting.

It said in part that one whole section of the document "seems to place bishops and theologians on the same level."

Bishop Raymond W. Lessard of Savannah, Ga., chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine, which drafted the statement that the bishops were to consider during their meeting, said the committee had no time to consider the Vatican intervention, so it had decided to delay its document until the bishops meet again in June, and in the meantime to meet with Vatican officials on the issue.

His announcement provoked some criticism of the Vatican method of procedure in such issues.

Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago agreed with the committee decision to delay the document and said he fully supports close cooperation between the U.S. bishops and the various offices of the Vatican, but said the Vatican has a responsibility to respond "sufficiently in advance of our general meetings."

"Interventions at the last minute place the Holy See and the conference in a delicate position that might be perceived as confrontational," he said.

Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York said he was in "complete sympathy with the obvious frustration of the committee... I feel frustration myself" at the last-minute interruption of the bishops' plans.

He suggested that the late intervention was not completely the Vatican's fault because the doctrinal congregation "is incredibly

understaffed" and, in terms of theologians to consult with, does not have the "extraordinary resources available to us."

Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, told Cardinal O'Connor that the first draft of the proposed document "was in the hands of the (doctrinal) congregation 13 months ago."

He agreed that the congregation was understaffed but said that it "would have more resources than we would have in consulting theologians — I can't think of any place where there are more theologians" than at the pontifical universities in Rome.

The proposed document is titled "Doctrinal Responsibilities: Approaches to Promoting Cooperation and Resolving Misunderstandings Between Bishops and Theologians." It was first discussed by the bishops at their general meeting in Washington a year ago but was tabled when the bishops ran out of time to debate it.

The Vatican critique was sent to the Vatican Embassy in Washington November 10, and forwarded to the bishops' conference the same day.

Sent by Archbishop Alberto Bovone, secretary of the doctrinal congregation, the critique said the bishops' proposed document had "praiseworthy aspects, particularly in that area where it highlights the specific and different roles of bishops and theologians, underlining the need for mutual cooperation."

But it criticized at length the proposed guidelines for formal doctrinal dialogue which make up the second half of the document. It said that section's "whole orientation" tends to "equate bishops and theologians" or put them "on the same level."

Bishop Lessard told the bishops that the committee decided to defer the document until it could:

● Deal with the Vatican critique and "any further eventual communication" that the Vatican might have.

Conference president denies ideological aims

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — The president of the U.S. bishops' conference November 14 rejected criticism that the conference pursues an ideological agenda, saying the bishops' aims are in line with those of Pope John Paul II.

"My own conviction in the matter is that the only 'ideology' which the conference has is that of fidelity to the Gospel and Church teaching," said Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference.

He made the comments in his presidential address delivered the first day of the November 14-17 general meeting of the U.S. bishops in Washington.

Archbishop May said the bishops are sometimes criticized for being "too concerned about the world, of pursuing an agenda that, in the minds of some critics, is secular, leftist or in some way ideological."

But the bishops' work for justice and peace is fundamentally a work of faith, he said.

Archbishop May said U.S. Catholics "need to hear that the work the U.S. bishops have begun — whether on nuclear policy, human rights or advocacy for the unborn, the poor and the homeless — will continue."

He said this work is "not some fringe aspect of our mission" but an essential part. However, if the bishops or any part of the Church "were to pursue justice apart from the life of prayer, we would betray our Lord and our mission," he said.

During his address, Archbishop May also congratulated President-elect George Bush and assured him of the bishops' "continuing commitment to the commonweal," adding that Catholics have always stood ready to serve their nation.

But, he said, "our voices will not be heard only in praise and appreciation. We will stand with the Holy Father in denouncing injustices and actions which foster disrespect for human life, from abortion to the death penalty... from poverty to the arms race."

"No one seeks confrontation," the prelate said, "but the Church cannot be true to its mission if we fail to live up to our responsibility to defend the human person."

Archbishop May said that in reading Pope John Paul's comments to U.S. bishops during this year's "ad limina" meetings at the Vatican he was impressed by the "convergence between (the pope's) aspirations and the initiatives of our conference both past and present."

Archbishop May called it "significant and deeply reassuring" that the pope had "indicated we are moving in the right direction."

He said the news media had portrayed as evidence of "some sort of struggle with the Holy See" a report on the agenda for the bishops' meeting that, if approved, would urge the Vatican to throw out its first draft of a statement on the status of bishops' conferences.

The Holy See itself, he said, requested the bishops' conference perform a "critical evaluation" of the document.

The conference should get credit for responding in a "painstakingly scholarly and objective fashion," he said. That the conference was approached for its evaluation, he added, shows the "overriding concern for truth within the church itself."

Other conferences critical of draft

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — Bishops in Canada, Latin America and East Asia were very critical of the Vatican draft document on bishops' conferences, U.S. bishops were told November 14 in discussing a report on U.S. opposition to the draft.

The report came from Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, one of the ex-presidents of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops who asked the Vatican Congregation for Bishops to discard its first draft of a proposed statement on the theological basis and juridical status of bishops' conferences.

The NCCB ex-presidents urged a fresh start, saying the first draft is not "adequately suited to serve as the basis for an effective discussion of this important issue."

The Vatican draft argued that episcopal conferences are not true expressions of collegiality in the Church, that the rationale for their existence is strictly practical, not theological, and that they have no authority to teach doctrine.

The ex-presidents' report criticized the Vatican document for ambiguity in terminology and one-sidedness in its presentation on all three major issues.

The bishops were to debate and vote November 16 on whether to approve the report and send it to the Vatican.

During a question-answer session following the preliminary presentation of the report, one bishop asked whether other bishops' conferences had voiced similar criticisms and concerns.

● Meet with officials of the doctrinal congregation "to clarify further the concerns of the congregation and to explain the intent and content of 'Doctrinal Responsibilities.'"

● Incorporate any "appropriate clarifications" into a final draft to be presented to the bishops next June.

At a press conference following the session at which the document delay was announced, Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile, Ala., said he thought there was a "misreading of the intent and content of the paper" by the doctrinal congregation.

The Alabama archbishop, who guided much of the document's development and is Bishop Lessard's successor as head of the bishops' Committee on Doctrine, said that in its objections the Vatican agency "misrepresents" the nature of the doctrinal dialogue treated in the guidelines.

In a joint statement the presidents of the Catholic Theological Society of America and the Canon Law Society of America expressed "regret" that the document had to be delayed and "surprise" the Vatican comments "arrived so very late and ... appear to have been done in haste."

The formulation of "Doctrinal Responsibilities" began with a joint project in 1980 of a task force formed by the two Catholic societies. Their final report in 1983 on cooperation between bishops and theologians served as a basis for the document drafted by the bishops' committee.

The presidents of the two societies called the collaboration between bishops and theologians in writing the document "a splendid example of the cooperation the document tries to foster."

They said their societies would continue to assist the doctrine committee and the bishops' conference "in any way they think appropriate as the consideration of 'Doctrinal Responsibilities' continues."

Father John Boyle, president of the theological society, released the statement. He said Vincentian Father Paul Golden, the canon law society president, joined him in it.

Archbishop May said that the pope during the "ad limina" visits also praised Catholic Relief Services and cited the U.S. bishops' pastoral letters on war and peace and the economy "not as interesting relics of our past but as living organisms within a community which has the power to transform lives and structures."

Archbishop May said items to be voted on during the bishops' general meeting show the bishops' initiatives echo the pontiff's appeals for "solidarity with all men and women."

As examples, he referred to statements on religious liberty in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, on normalization of U.S. relations with Vietnam, and on opposing government sanctions against employers who hire illegal aliens. The bishops were to vote on all three statements during their meeting.

Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, current NCCB president, said the Vatican document was a major item of discussion at a meeting in Montreal of leaders of bishops' conferences of the United States, Canada and Latin America. He said the comments there indicated that the U.S. objections to the document were widely shared by the other bishops' conferences of the Americas.

Monsignor Daniel Hoye, NCCB general secretary, said the only other written response he had seen came from the bishops of East Asia. Their reaction to the document was "very negative," he said.

In his presidential address November 14 opening the meeting, Archbishop May criticized some media reports for writing about the ex-presidents' report "as if it signaled some sort of struggle with the Holy See."

"This is simply false," he said, noting that the Vatican had sent the draft document out specifically for the bishops of the world to take a "critical look" at it and to send back their criticisms.

Bishop Malone, immediate past president of the NCCB, said the report had received "nearly unanimous acclaim" from the 50-bishop Administrative Committee of the NCCB when it was presented to that group in September.

Subsequent complaints about "what was called the 'tone' of the document" led the committee to rewrite it in a "more gracious tone," he said, but there was "no change in the content of the document" in the revised version that was given to the bishops at the start of their November meeting.