

World & Nation

Pope cites Anglican decision, schism as 'shadows' on 1988

By John Thavis

VATICAN CITY (NC) — Pope John Paul II said the "unilateral" decision by the Anglican Church to allow the ordination of women bishops marred an otherwise fruitful year of ecumenical progress in 1988.

The pope, in a year-end assessment of church events, also expressed his personal disappointment that rebel Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre took steps that produced a formal schism within the church.

The pope made the remarks in a lengthy address Dec. 23 to members of the Roman Curia, the church's central administrative staff, and cardinals resident in Rome. Most of his speech was a review of the year's most important events — including the closing of the Marian year, the celebration of 1,000 years of Christianity in parts of the Soviet Union and the long-awaited reform of Curia offices.

But 1988 was also marked by two "shadows," the pope said — Archbishop Lefebvre's schismatic act in June and the decision in August by the Anglicans' Lambeth Conference to respect local Anglican church policies on ordaining women as bishops.

The Anglican decision, the pope said, not only threatened ecumenism but also represented a break with tradition within the Anglican Church.

"Unfortunately — and I say this with sincere sorrow — this was a unilateral initiative" that "did not adequately take into account either the ecumenical or ecclesiastical dimensions of the problem, in contrast with the way that has al-

ways been clearly followed by the Catholic Church, as well as the Orthodox Church and the ancient Eastern churches," the pope said.

The Anglican policy "certainly does not favor the common efforts of prayer and study" by the joint Catholic-Anglican dialogue commission and "it poses serious obstacles to progress in mutual reconciliation, which in these last decades has arrived at such promising results," he said.

"I ask those responsible to make every effort so that painful and deplorable consequences may be avoided, not only in ecumenical relations but also inside the Anglican community itself," the pope said.

"The constant line of tradition common to all the churches cannot be so easily interrupted, in a way of proceeding which none of us has the power or the right to authorize," he said.

The Anglican decision was a compromise resolution that recognized sharp differences of opinion among Anglicans over women bishops. It did not make a judgment about the validity of women bishops, but said member churches of the Anglican community should respect each others' decision on the matter.

In his remarks about Archbishop Lefebvre, the pope did not mention the 83-year-old Swiss prelate by name, referring instead to the church's failed attempts to reconcile with a "well-known community." Those efforts broke down when Archbishop Lefebvre, who rejects several main teachings of the Second Vatican Council, illicitly ordained bishops in Ecône, Switzerland, June 30. The move brought auto-

matic excommunication.

The pope said the church's attempt to work out a solution with Archbishop Lefebvre was marked by respect for the people involved and for "the reactions that deprecable abuses may have provoked." The pope was apparently referring to abuses in interpreting the council's teachings, but he did not spell them out.

The pope said, however, that he did not want excommunication to be "the last word." For that reason, he set up a commission to reintegrate Archbishop Lefebvre's followers. The initial results, he said, "offer reason for hope." Recently, several religious institutes previously loyal to Archbishop Lefebvre were juridically regularized under the commission.

The pope said the celebrations marking the millennium of Christianity in the ancient Rus — now part of three Soviet republics — marked an important moment of "nostalgia for communion" between Catholics and Orthodox Christians, who are a vast majority in the Soviet Union. He noted that he had sent a high-ranking Vatican delegation to the ceremonies in Moscow and Kiev.

The pope also offered a year-end prayer that "God will reward everyone's efforts in favor of religious liberty, as a condition and a basis of an equitable solution of the problems that still afflict those peoples." His words were an apparent reference to the estimated several million Eastern-rite Catholics in Soviet Ukraine, who cannot legally practice their faith.

The pope also spoke at length about the 20th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human

Life"), the much-discussed 1968 encyclical that condemned contraceptive birth control. During the year, the pope called the encyclical "prophetic" and spoke to a meeting of international bishops on ways to promote its teachings.

"If the encyclical continues to meet with misunderstanding and criticisms, this only demonstrates how necessary it is to keep working to understand the effective depth of the problem," the pope told the Curia.

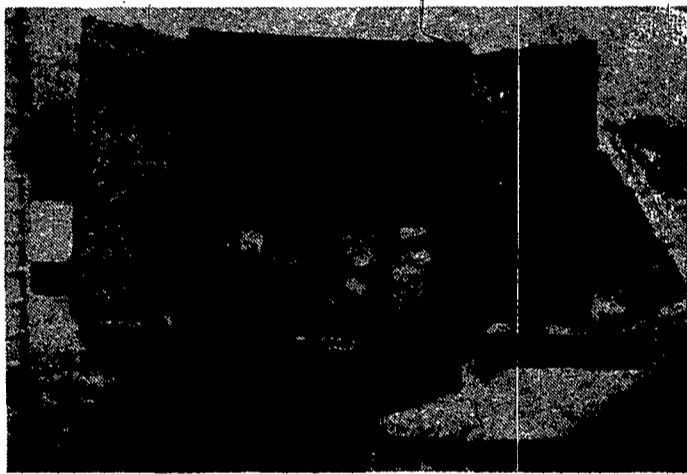
The church, he said, would persist in warning about how serious the problem of birth control is, and would not "exempt itself from its responsibilities as mother and teacher."

He said contemporary explanations of humankind's nature and destiny have led to a "widespread sense of confusion," a condition in which human dignity is sometimes "challenged, threatened and often compromised."



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