

World & Nation

Theologian urges pope to rethink birth control

By John Thavis

VATICAN CITY (NC) — A prominent moral theologian has urged Pope John Paul II to reopen church debate on birth control through a worldwide consultation with bishops, theologians and lay Catholics.

Father Bernard Haring, retired professor at Rome's Alphonsianum Academy and the author of several works on sexual morality, said the consultation was needed to stop a "catastrophic" process of polarization now occurring in the church.

Father Haring made the comments in an article he wrote for the Jan. 15 issue of the Italian Catholic magazine *Il Regno* (The Kingdom). The West German Redemptorist priest said he was making the suggestion in response to recent statements on birth control made by the pope and a Vatican theologian.

Father Haring said he was proposing the consultation to prevent abandonment of the church by Catholics "from assuming even more catastrophic dimensions" and to restore an atmosphere of trust among theologians.

He said the climate has worsened to the point that lists have been drawn up naming theologians who can be "trusted" on the question of birth control. The lists are often based on anonymous accusations, he said.

"I have personally seen a list of these 'reliable ones' in circulation at the Vatican," he said.

The priest said this new attitude of theological "intransigence" was responsible for a "psychological schism" in the church.

"It is necessary to find a way out of this blind alley," he said.

Father Haring proposed that the pope name a commission that was "beyond any suspicion" to consult individually on the birth control issue with every bishop, every theological faculty and the most important associations of lay people. It should also consider the positions of other Christian churches, especially the Orthodox, he said.

The commission would seek to define the best approach to the birth control question, publishing its survey results and making clear whether there is uncertainty on the matter, Father Haring said.

Among other things, he said, the commission would have to examine to what extent papal pronouncements on the issue should be considered "as doctrine revealed by God."

In recent years, Pope John Paul has repeatedly emphasized the teaching of the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life"), which condemned contraceptive methods. Last year,

marking the 20th anniversary of the encyclical, the pope said there can be no exceptions to the ban on birth control and that disputing church teaching on the point is "equal to refusing to God himself the obedience of our intelligence."

Father Haring said the crucial point is not whether artificial or natural methods are used to space births, but how a couple comes to a decision to responsibly transmit life.

Some believe, he said, that fundamental medical ethics should apply in this case: that contraceptives would be used only in situations where natural methods could not achieve results. They would see contraceptives as sometimes working to serve the larger meaning of marriage, he added.

Father Haring said these positions were currently being "violently attacked," in particular by Monsignor Carlo Caffarra, a moral theologian who heads the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family Studies at Rome's Lateran University.

Last November, following a theological congress on *Humanae Vitae* organized by the institute, Monsignor Caffarra compared contraception to homicide.

Father Haring said Monsignor Caffarra's statements, and his influence at the Vatican, have had the effect of an "earthquake" in theological circles.

"What is striking is not so much an intolerant and surprisingly simplistic theology, but the fact that he deliberately sets himself up as the front-line defender of the orthodoxy of the faith and loyalty to the pope," Father Haring said.

A secretary to Monsignor Caffarra said he would have no immediate comment on Father Haring's article.

Father Haring urged that the monsignor and his followers take a "pause of silence" so that a climate of trust can be re-established and the issue of birth control can be discussed in mutual respect.

"I hope our beloved pope understands that this is a conflict of epic proportions, no less than the one experienced at Antioch between Peter and Paul. The consultation should be conducted on the basis of a dialogue free from violence, out in the open and with mutual love," he said.

The Vatican should make clear at the outset of such a consultation that it will not tolerate "mutual accusations of heresy" and "the collecting of anonymous accusations," he said.

Father Haring retired last year from the Alphonsianum, which is connected with Lateran University.

Brazilian bishops said targeted by death squads

VATICAN CITY (NC) — Brazilian Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider and other bishops, priests and religious are among 350 people targeted for assassination by Brazilian death squads, according to the Brazilian bishops' conference.

Conference vice president Bishop Jose Ivo Lorscheider released a list of people targeted by

death squads for their work on behalf of farmworkers and agrarian reform.

The list included labor organizers and small farmers.

According to a Jan. 10 Vatican Radio report, Bishop Lorscheider said that in addition to Cardinal Lorscheider, other bishops threatened with death are:

- Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga of the Territorial Prelature of Sao Felix.
- Bishop Jaco Hilgert of Cruz Alta.
- Bishop Moacyr Grechi of Rio Branco.
- Bishop Waldyr Calheiros de Novaes of Barra do Pirai-Volta Redonda.

Cardinal Lorscheider and Bishop Casaldaliga's names were on a death squad "black list," the report said. Another name on this list was Francisco Mendes, an ecologist and organizer who was assassinated last December, allegedly by gunmen hired by large landholders.

Formation is topic for next synod

VATICAN CITY (NC) — Priestly formation is the theme selected by Pope John Paul II for the next world Synod of Bishops, the Vatican announced. The Jan. 19 announcement said the theme of the 1990 synod will be "Priests and Their Formation in the Modern World." The monthlong synod will take place at the Vatican Sept. 30-Oct. 28, 1990. It will be the eighth ordinary synod since the gatherings were instituted by Pope Paul VI in 1965.



POPULAR PRIEST — Father Joseph Walljewski of LaCrosse, Wis., mingles with some of the Peruvian orphans he serves at his Casa Hogar Juan Pablo II orphanage in Lurin, Peru. The priest started the orphanage in 1985 after receiving seed money from Pope John Paul II.

AP-Wide World Photos

Ex-policeman suspected in South African arson

PRETORIA, South Africa (NC) — The South African government said it suspects a white, neo-Nazi ex-policeman of setting the fire that severely damaged the headquarters of the Southern African Bishops' Conference last October.

Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok, making the announcement Jan. 10, also said three members of the outlawed African National Congress, an anti-apartheid organization, are suspected of accidentally bombing Khotso House, the Johannesburg headquarters of the South African Council of Churches, last August.

Vlok said he was making details of the investigations into those incidents public to counter "malicious accusations" that the police were dragging their feet in the sabotage cases.

The law and order official said in his statement that Barend Strydom, arrested on charges of shooting dead seven black South Africans on the streets of Pretoria last November, was involved in the arson of the bishops' headquarters, called Khanya House.

The 23-year-old Strydom led The White Wolves, a small group of whites seeking to create an exclusively white state in South Africa.

Fire erupted in Khanya House about 2 a.m. Oct. 12, quickly spreading along trails of gasoline and kerosene police said were laid down by the arsonists. Later, two explosive mines were

found in the building.

The blaze forced seven people in the building to flee for their lives. An elderly nun and several other Khanya House residents who had come to her aid had to be rescued by firemen from a second-floor balcony where they were trapped by flames.

Damage was estimated at 1 million rand (about \$410,000). It was expected that the building would be ready for use again in March.

Vlok had appointed a police general to lead an investigation of the attacks on Khanya House, the Council of Churches building and on the headquarters of the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

In the Council of Churches case, Vlok said one of the suspects is a 33-year-old white woman, Shirley Gunn, who joined the ANC in 1986 and underwent guerrilla training in Angola.

"It is suspected that the white woman and the other two persons took explosives to Khotso House (the church council's building) with the intention of constructing a car bomb (and) the explosives detonated prematurely," Vlok said.

The government issued photographs of Gunn and asked for information on her whereabouts.

However, after the bombing of Khotso House, a message purportedly from The White Wolves said that group claimed responsibility for the attack.

Paraguan police block Catholic radio station

ASUNCION, Paraguay (NC) — Paraguayan police blocked off the entrances to the Catholic Church-operated station Radio Caritas to prevent a Jan. 17 broadcast featuring political opponents of Gen. Alfredo Stroessner's government.

The police action marked the second time in a month that a Radio Caritas broadcast had been blocked by the government.

The Jan. 17 broadcast was to have discussed human-rights violations in Paraguay and government prohibition of a Feb. 12 rally by the

coalition of opposition groups known as the "National Accord." Authentic Liberal Radical Party President Domingo Laino, Popular Democratic Movement leader Hugo Richer and labor leader Alan Flores were the scheduled guests on the canceled program.

After more than two hours off the air, a Radio Caritas announcer told listeners that the guests and six Radio Caritas journalists, including news director Benjamin Fernandez and program host Juanita Carracela, had been denied access to the station by the police.

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