

Vatican issues fidelity oath for seminary, pastoral staff

By Greg Erlandson
NC News

VATICAN CITY — Newly appointed seminary rectors and professors, deacons and pastors must take an oath of fidelity as well as recite a revised profession of faith, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has announced.

The new oath in part promises "communion with the Catholic Church" in words and deed and the avoidance of "those teachings contrary to the deposit of the faith."

Along with the oath, the doctrinal congregation published a revised profession of faith, with three added sentences "to better distinguish the type of truth and the relative assent requested," according to an explanatory note.

The new oath and revised profession of faith, both published only in Latin, went into effect March 1.

The oath of fidelity "is a public commitment to exercise one's office in the church with fidelity both to the profession of faith and to the particular obligations inherent in one's office," Franciscan Father Umberto Betti told Vatican Radio.

Father Betti, a consultant to the doctrinal congregation, said this public commitment explains why the church takes certain actions, such as removing the teaching faculties of some theologians it decides have strayed from their commitment.

Removal of the faculties "is not an oppressive measure, but simply the verification that one has not remained faithful to the commitment which one assumed to teach in the name of the church," he said.

Because bishops and cardinals already have their own oaths of fidelity, the new oath directly affects those officials who must make a profession of faith when they first begin their terms of office according to canon law.

These include pastors, seminary rectors, professors of theology and philosophy in seminaries, deacons, rectors of ecclesiastical or Catholic universities, university teachers "who teach disciplines which deal with faith or morals" and superiors in religious institutes.

The six-sentence oath promises to undertake one's office "with great diligence and fidelity," to "preserve the whole deposit of the faith," to "pass it on and explain it

faithfully," and to avoid contrary teachings.

The oath declares one's willingness to "follow the discipline common to the church" and to obey canon law.

It also commits the oath-taker to "follow with Christian obedience those things" which the teachers and leaders of the church state and to assist diocesan bishops so that "all proceed in communion with the church."

A person would take the oath with his or her hand on the Bible.

Until 1967 all priests and church officials were required to take "the oath against modernism." The 1910 oath was a strongly worded and long statement rejecting specific modernist errors and affirming specific Catholic teachings.

Modernism was an early 20th-century Catholic intellectual movement that looked at church doctrine through new methods of historical criticism and evolutionary philosophy. It was condemned in 1907 by Pope Pius X.

The anti-modernist oath was dropped in 1967 when a new profession of faith was drafted.

The newly revised profession of faith retains a recitation of the Nicene Creed. In addition three new sentences have been added that "make a triple distinction of doctrines proposed by the church," said Father Betti.

"With a firm faith I also believe all those things which are contained in the word of God, whether written or handed on, and those things which are to be believed as proposed by the church whether by a solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal magisterium as divinely revealed," the first of the additions says.

Father Betti said an example of such a dogma would be papal infallibility or the

Immaculate Conception.

"I also firmly embrace and retain all and everything which is definitively proposed in doctrine either about faith or moral by the church," the second states.

Father Betti said it was his opinion that the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life") which condemns artificial birth control and abortion, would fall into this category.

"In addition I adhere by religious assent of the will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman pontiff or the college of bishops declare when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim them by a definitive act," the profession concludes.

Father Betti did not give an example for this category.

"These also merit not an assent of faith, not a definitive assent, but always a religious assent by which one adheres to that teaching," he said.

The new additions replace the ending of the 1967 profession of faith, which was a declaration to "embrace and retain each and everything which has been proposed by the church regarding the teaching of faith and morals, whether defined by solemn judgment or asserted and declared by the ordinary magisterium, especially those things which concern the mystery of the holy church of Christ and its sacraments and the sacrifice of the Mass and the primacy of the Roman pontiff."

While the profession of faith "is the condition which enables one to assume an office in the church," Father Betti explained in the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, "the oath of fidelity is the public commitment to exercise it well before the church itself and before the institutions and persons for which it was assumed."

Cardinal fights racism

CHICAGO (NC) — Suggesting that Chicago's mayoral elections offer a chance to move beyond racism, Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago said the city's residents "must dissipate the cloud of racial hatred and animosity that hangs over us." "There are no winners in the wars incited by prejudice," said the cardinal. The cardinal made the remarks Feb. 23, five days before Richard M. Daley, Illinois state's attorney, defeated Eugene Sawyer, acting mayor, in the Chicago Democratic primary Feb. 28.

Guatemala peace talks start

GUATEMALA CITY (NC) — The president of the Guatemalan bishops' conference opened a national dialogue on the country's social, political and economic problems March 1 with some of Guatema-

la's most important political and economic groups staying away from the talks. The army, the rebel Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity and the National Chamber of Commerce and Industrial Development stayed away from the dialogue. The chamber, regarded as the country's most important business group, said the dialogue's "ultimate purpose" was unclear.

Senate approves Sullivan

WASHINGTON (NC) — The Senate voted 98-1 in favor of Dr. Louis Sullivan's nomination as U.S. health and human services secretary, with one senator calling him "a caring advocate" for America's poor. The dissenting vote came from Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., who said he could not vote for Sullivan because it disturbed him that Sullivan declined to take a final stand on several abortion-related issues.

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