

Oath of fidelity draws theologians' concern

By Teresa Coyle
Catholic News Service

ST. LOUIS — Members of the Catholic Theological Society of America passed a resolution expressing "serious concerns" about a revised profession of faith and a new oath of fidelity published in the Vatican's official periodical of church legislation in March.

The theological society met June 7-10 in St. Louis where a draft statement about the profession and oath focused on imprecision in the Vatican description of who must take the oath and how broadly its pledge of fidelity to church teaching will be interpreted.

Another resolution called on the society's board to draft a statement examining issues raised by 163 German-speaking theologians in the "Cologne Declaration," a statement that criticized what it called the Vatican's "intense fixation" on church teaching about contraception, and Vatican actions in appointing bishops and dealing with theologians.

The oath is "the great unknown," said Father John P. Boyle, president of the society and a professor at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

Published only in Latin, the six-sentence oath in part promises "communion with the Catholic Church" in words and deed and the avoidance of "those teachings contrary to the deposit of faith."

A preface to the oath printed in the Vatican newspaper said the oath applied to those officials who must make a profession of faith according to canon law — seminary professors and rectors, new pastors, deacons, university professors "who teach disciplines which deal with faith or morals" and others.

A CTSA draft statement about the oath

said "we fear that its application could be abusively extended beyond whatever may have been the original intent."

Members of the society passed a resolution "to create a committee, in collaboration with other scholarly societies if advisable, to address the theological and practical issues involved in the newly published profession of faith and oath of fidelity."

The resolution also asked the society president to inform officials of the Canadian and U.S. bishops' conferences of "the society's serious concerns about the profession and oath and about the effects of their implementation."

The draft statement, which was circulated among CTSA members but not voted on, said that before the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the revised profession and new oath it should have discussed their content and form with theologians and other interested parties.

The draft statement said that the pattern of "patient dialogue" and "mutual learning" experienced by the Vatican Congregation for Education and Catholic educators in discussing proposed norms for Catholic higher education could serve as a model to the doctrine congregation.

Dominican Father Benedict Ashley of Washington, a CTSA member, told a reporter later that the oath of fidelity is an "oath of office."

"It's inconsistent for theologians to maintain, as a lot of people are doing here, that they participate in the magisterium (teaching authority of the church) and refuse to take an oath of office."

Father Charles E. Curran, a moral theologian whom the Vatican has declared ineligible to teach Catholic theology, said the



ROME DEMONSTRATION — Protesters fill a street and square in central Rome to show support for a law requiring public hospitals and private ones receiving state aid to make abortion available in the early months of pregnancy. The 10-year-old law has been challenged as having too many loopholes.

oath is "not in accordance with the best of the Christian tradition" and may be "counterproductive in the end."

"In a liturgical setting, I profess my faith every day ... and I will always continue to do so," he said.

The resolution on the Cologne Declaration did not support or contradict statements in the declaration. Rather, it asked the CTSA board to examine the issues raised in the declaration and comment on them from "a North American perspective."

Theologians in Spain, France and Italy have issued statements in support of the Cologne Declaration, which was released in January.

Those statements reflect the opinions only of the signers, not of an organization, said Father Boyle. Because the membership of the CTSA is diverse, developing a

statement acceptable to the members will take time.

Other resolutions passed by the members:

- Expressed gratitude to Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, who earlier in the meeting praised the work of U.S. theologians and expressed hopes for continued collaboration between U.S. bishops and theologians.

- Supported Father Curran, a former president of the society who lost a breach of contract suit against The Catholic University of America in Washington, where he taught for more than 20 years. The university suspended him after the Vatican ruled he was ineligible to teach Catholic theology because of his dissent from certain church teachings.

'New Creation' gets OK from two Vatican prefects

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Heads of two top Vatican agencies have declared that the controversial *New Creation* Catholic sex-education series is doctrinally sound.

But the "delicate" matter of classroom sex education must be handled with "prudence," they said, regardless of the text used.

The series, published by Wm. H. Brown Co. of Dubuque, Iowa, under the ecclesiastical *imprimatur* ("let it be printed") of Archbishop Daniel W. Kucera of Dubuque, has been the object of a campaign by some U.S. Catholic groups to have it banned from Catholic classrooms.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the

Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote to Archbishop Kucera that revisions in the series in 1987 "resulted in a clearer presentation of the church's moral teaching."

As revised, "the program does not appear ... to be problematic from the doctrinal point of view," he said.

Cardinal William W. Baum, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, wrote that he concurred with Cardinal Ratzinger's judgment, and said that questions about the way the series is used in any diocese should be handled locally by the diocesan bishop, not by the Vatican.

Copies of the two cardinals' letters and a cover letter by Archbishop Kucera were sent to all U.S. bishops June 6 by Archbi-

shop John L. May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Archbishop Kucera said in his letter that from the start it was his position that a decision to use the series or how to use it was up to each local bishop. "An *imprimatur* is not intended to be a substitute for local decisions," he said.

He said he hoped the cardinals' comments would help local bishops and "ease the consciences of many well-meaning people who are naturally concerned about the whole area of sex education, given the permissive nature of American society with its rampant disregard for moral values."

Cardinal Ratzinger said in his letter that

while he judged the series free of doctrinal problems, it was within the competence of the Congregation for Catholic Education to deal with questions of "overall pedagogy" and the rights of parents with regard to classroom sex education in Catholic schools.

Cardinal Baum said his congregation "gives preference to education in human sexuality on a one-to-one basis, precisely because of the delicate nature of the subject matter."

"Nevertheless, it is obvious that a large number of parents — the majority in fact — welcome the Catholic school's assistance in this as well as in the other aspects of religious education and consider the class-

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MOURNING CONTINUES — Some two-million Iranians flock to Tehran's Beheshte Zahra cemetery Sunday, June 11, the seventh day of mourning for the late Ayatollah Khomeini.

Bishop Wuerl allows Tridentine Mass in Pittsburgh

PITTSBURGH (CNS) — Bishop Donald W. Wuerl of Pittsburgh has approved use of the Latin-language Tridentine Mass "to respond to the legitimate spiritual needs" of Catholics who "find the Tridentine Mass to be a source of real spiritual growth."

Authorized celebration of the 1962 version of the Latin Mass began June 11 in the Pittsburgh Diocese. The Masses will be celebrated twice a month at two sites.

"We are aware that a very small number of Catholics have not found the revised liturgy to be personally satisfying or spiritually rewarding," Bishop Wuerl wrote in a letter published June 2 in the *Pittsburgh Catholic*, diocesan newspaper.

"I share the concern of our Holy Father for those who are still attached to the Latin Mass," the bishop wrote.

In 1984, Pope John Paul II granted bishops permission to authorize use of the Tridentine liturgy under certain conditions. After traditionalist Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre was excommunicated last sum-

mer, the pope urged wider permission for Catholics faithful to the church yet "attached to the Latin liturgical tradition."

More than a dozen U.S. bishops have granted such permission within the past year.

"The celebration of the Tridentine Mass should not be construed in any way as fostering separate parish communities or the encouragement of an alternate rite within the church," Bishop Wuerl wrote.

"The use of the Tridentine Mass is intended as a concession to respond to the spiritual needs of particular individuals in the diocese," he said.

Bishop Wuerl said permission for the Tridentine Mass is intended only for people who are active members of a parish and have not "in any way impugned the lawfulness" of the post-Vatican II liturgy.

The diocesan office for clergy will approve priests to celebrate the liturgies, which will be held at 3 p.m. on the second and fourth Sundays of each month at the Duquesne University chapel in Pittsburgh

and at St. Peter and Paul Church in Beaver.

About 300 people attended the June 11 Mass at Duquesne and another 500 were present for the Tridentine liturgy in Beaver.

Bishop Wuerl's statement said the Latin Mass will not be celebrated if the scheduled Sunday falls on Easter. The liturgy also is not to be used on holy days, for funerals, nor for the celebration of other sacraments.

Permission for the Masses was based on a recommendation by the diocesan chancellor, worship commission chairman and theological commission chairman. Their recommendation was reviewed by the diocesan administrative board and priests' council before being approved by the bishop.

In 1987, while he was auxiliary bishop of Seattle, Bishop Wuerl declined to grant Catholics there permission to celebrate the Tridentine-rite liturgy.

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