

Vatican to theologians: 'Don't dissent in public'

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — A newly released Vatican document calls on dissenting theologians to reflect "in silence and prayer" and refrain from making public issues of their disagreements with church teachings.

Issued June 26, the instruction said some forms of theological debate can help the church grow, but declared that the "pressure of public opinion" has no place in the clarification of doctrinal issues.

It also warned against setting up the individual conscience as a type of "supreme magisterium" for those who question church teachings.

Entitled "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian," the 28-page document was signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and approved by Pope John Paul II. It was addressed primarily to the world's bishops and theologians.

The instruction was prepared during a period of troubling theological dissent. Last year, 163 German-speaking theologians issued a declaration criticizing the way bishops and theology professors were appointed, and challenging papal authority on birth control teachings. The declaration was later endorsed by groups of theologians in other European countries.

The Vatican document contrasted theological doubts that are confined to private inquiry against the expression of open disagreement in the mass media or by organized groups. It used the term "dissent" in the latter case, meaning "public opposition to the magisterium of the church."

Individual theologians may privately raise questions about church teachings, the instruction said, although willingness to "submit loyally" to the magisterium — the church's teaching authority — on all

matters should be the rule.

The degree to which a theologian may question a given teaching is tied to the hierarchical level of that teaching, the document said. It defined these hierarchical levels and the degree to which theologians must submit to them as follows:

- Infallible declarations, which require of theologians the adherence of "theological faith."

- Definitive teachings on faith and morals, which "must be firmly accepted and held."

- Non-definitive pronouncements about doctrine, which call for "submission of will and intellect."

- Interventions in issues under discussion, which are less authoritative but which still call for an attitude of assent.

If a theologian reaches an opinion contrary to church teaching and cannot give his "intellectual assent" to it, he must "remain open to a deeper examination of the question," the document said.

This can be a "difficult trial," the document acknowledged, representing "a call to suffer for the truth, in silence and prayer." The theologian should know that "if the truth really is at stake, it will ultimately prevail," it said.

"In cases like these, the theologian should avoid turning to the 'mass media,' but have recourse to the responsible authority, for it is not by seeking to exert the pressure of public opinion that one contributes to the clarification of doctrinal issues and renders service to the truth," it said.

The document elaborated on this point in its longest section, entitled "The Problem of Dissent," which condemned the "serious harm" done to the church by "attitudes of general opposition to church teaching."

The document said dissent shows up in the claim that theologians are not bound to

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Association censures university

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The American Association of University Professors voted June 16 to censure Catholic University of America and two Catholic colleges for violating principles of academic freedom and due process.

The association's action came in response to CUA's 1987 suspension of Father Charles E. Curran, a tenured professor of moral theology. The suspension, the professors stated, violated "values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy that the administration had publicly promised to uphold."

CUA's president, Jesuit Father William J. Byron, countered, however, saying that "autonomy was not only protected, it was exercised in (Father Curran's) case."

Father Curran was suspended after the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared him ineligible to teach Catholic theology. He is currently on a leave of absence from CUA and will begin teaching this September at the University of Auburn, Ga., as a visiting professor.

The association's report said the university had "meticulously observed" due pro-

cess in withdrawing Father Curran's "canonical mission," or church mandate to teach, but it said CUA violated its own and the association's norms in initially suspending Father Curran from teaching without a prior hearing.

The group also said CUA had violated the priest's academic freedom and deprived him of due process in prohibiting him from teaching anywhere in the university as a Catholic theologian.

In a statement following the censure, Father Byron said an offer to let Father Curran teach social ethics outside the theology department "remains on the table," and that the decision barring him from teaching Catholic theology was an autonomous decision by the university.

Father Byron also said it was "presumptuous" for the professors' group to "attempt to decide" what constitutes academic freedom in the field of Catholic theology.

Also censured were St. Leo College in St. Leo, Fla., and Alvernia College in Reading, Pa.

Chileans outraged at discovery of graves

SANTIAGO, Chile (CNS) — The bishops of Chile have expressed outrage over the discovery of mass graves used to bury political prisoners executed during the 17-year military dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

They said there can be "no excuse" for the executions.

The bishops called on all Chileans to observe a national day of prayer June 24 in memory of "those who suffered most during those years" of military rule.

The discovery of 20 corpses in a mass grave at a beach near a concentration camp for political prisoners in Pisagua, about 1,200 miles north of the capital of Santiago, has sent shock waves throughout Chilean society.

According to Hernan Sanchez, a special investigator assigned by the Chilean government, the victims had been given military trials and executed by firing squads. He said that among the first 20 corpses found was that of a Catholic priest.



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