

Cardinal calls attack on essay 'programmed'

HUNTINGTON, Ind. (CNS) — Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York said a "very carefully programmed effort" was partly behind attacks made on an essay on abortion he published in his archdiocesan newspaper in June.

In an interview scheduled for publication July 29 in *Our Sunday Visitor*, Cardinal O'Connor said that "powerful organizations in the United States advancing the causes of abortion and euthanasia, assisted suicide, and so on" see materials like his June 14 essay as "an instant threat" and "an opportunity to discredit the church."

Asked whether public officials were involved in the response, Cardinal O'Connor said politicians "feel they must discredit the church's views if they are not going to lose a lot of votes." He did not name any politicians or organizations in the interview.

His essay, which filled 12 pages in *Catholic New York*, his archdiocesan weekly, used a question-and-answer format to discuss church teaching on abortion, laws to prohibit abortions, the pro-life efforts of bishops and lay people, and the situation of Catholic politicians and others who support abortion rights.

It included messages to parents, health-care professionals, the media, educators, the ordained and religious, lawyers, politicians and "all persons of good will" on behalf of the pro-life cause.

Controversy arose over a seeming threat of excommunication by the cardinal. In the essay he said Catholic politicians who back legal abortion risk excommunication, which he added was possibly the church's "only option" for avoiding scandal.

He later said he had "no intention of excommunicating anyone" and said his inten-

tion was to prevent, rather than advocate, excommunication.

Attacks on the essay, Cardinal O'Connor told *Our Sunday Visitor*, a national Catholic newspaper published in Huntington, "avoid the issue" of abortion's morality and instead focus on the essay's comments about the potential for levying church sanctions against Catholic politicians who favor abortion.

"Not one confronts what I said, what the church says, that abortion is the killing of little children," he said. "That is the sum total of it. Everything else is context. But that is the text. It has to be in the headline. It has to be kept before the public."

The cardinal said people he called "pseudo-sophisticated" see the essay and the ensuing controversy as negative. "But I am getting letters from 'little' people all over the country, thanking me profound-

ly," as well as from bishops who "ask me to keep speaking, keep writing."

Noting that some bishops have applied sanctions to Catholics for supporting abortion, the cardinal said that "that's their right, that's their jurisdiction in their own areas of cognizance."

While he repeated he had "no plans" to do the same, "to say that I have no plans to levy any church sanctions is quite different from saying that I would be afraid or unwilling to do so if I felt that was my responsibility."

Cardinal O'Connor said the intent of the essay was to be "consoling, comforting, supporting, assuring those who had had abortions that we don't condemn them, we understand them. Certainly there was no attempt at condemnation or indictment."

He said, "I tried to reach out to all sectors of society, to family people, the legal profession, the medical profession, the nursing profession, to those in public life, in political life. It was an appeal to help restore a sense of the sacredness of all human life."

The cardinal said he has talked with New York Gov. Mario Cuomo on abortion. Cuomo, a Catholic, has long professed to be personally opposed to abortion but bound to permit the right to abortion in the state.

"He (Cuomo) knows that as far as I am concerned there can be absolutely no compromise whatsoever" on abortion, Cardinal O'Connor said.

"The governor knows I will be saying that, please God, until the day I die. I have never attempted to affect the governor's political standing. I will never campaign against the governor. I will never campaign for anybody else."

The cardinal said he has told Cuomo that he prays for him.

"I personally believe that he is continuing to struggle with this. I cannot read any man's conscience. I think it is a cause of great anguish for him for he has spent his life trying to be a Catholic, trying to maintain the teachings of Catholicism," Cardinal O'Connor said.

"In my judgment, he is totally, completely wrong on this (abortion). But I have never called him an evil man. I have never said he shouldn't be the governor or that he should never hold any other political position."



FAMILY ON THE MOVE — After a decade of living in the jungles along the Thai border, a Khmer Rouge family travels through Northern Cambodia's Siem Riep province. They are returning this summer to live in Cambodian territory seized in heavy fighting.

AP/Wide World Photos

Prelate resigns after poor handling of sex-abuse cases

ST. JOHN'S, Newfoundland (CNS) — The archbishop of St. John's submitted his resignation July 12 after an archdiocesan investigating panel sharply criticized his handling of reported child sexual abuse by priests and brothers at a Catholic-run boys orphanage.

Archbishop Alphonsus L. Penney, 65, took a large part of the responsibility for archdiocesan failure to act properly on reports that widespread molestation occurred in the mid-1970s at Mt. Cashel Orphanage in St. John's.

The investigating commission, established by the archbishop and headed by former Newfoundland Lt. Gov. Gordon Winter, an Anglican, said priests who sexually abused boys received better treatment from the hierarchy than did the victims of abuse.

The report further said that a lack of archdiocesan leadership might have encouraged the abuse.

The commission's report, made public July 10, was the latest development in a series of scandals involving sexual abuse of young boys by priests. The scandal has rocked Newfoundland's 120,000 Catholics, who represent half the province's population.

Over the past two years, about 20 Newfoundland Catholics — including priests

and Christian Brothers — have been convicted of or face charges of sexually abusing boys.

The archdiocesan commission investigated allegations of sexual abuse of orphaned boys, who were wards of the state, by more than 20 priests, former priests and other members of the church in Newfoundland.

A separate government inquiry is probing whether social-service workers, judges, police and church officials ignored or covered up the reports of abuse.

The archdiocesan panel said the church failed to act properly although it was aware of the allegations before the scandal became public knowledge two years ago. Archbishop Penney has been in office since 1980.

Under canon law, he remains head of the archdiocese until removed by the pope.

The archbishop told a news conference, "we are a sinful church — the priest offenders, the church administration who did not choose to stand clearly with victims and our parish communities who have not always believed victims or supported them in their suffering."

The commission recommended compensating victims and their families after a clear apology by the church and acknowledgment of responsibility.

Archbishop Penney, who resisted earlier calls for his resignation, said: "We are naked. Our anger, our pain, our anguish, our shame and our vulnerability are clear to the whole world."

"Again, I apologize and express my sincere regrets for failing the victims and their families in their moment of acute pain and desolation," Archbishop Penney said.

The inquiry — one of three which was underway in the province — was set up by the archbishop in April 1989.

As part of their work, the commission's five members were asked to examine lifestyles of the priests and recommend ways to improve reporting of deviant behavior and methods of dealing with it.

One of the other investigations, a public inquiry headed by retired Ontario judge Samuel Hughes, has concluded months of public hearings but has not yet ruled on

allegations that police, social workers and church officials may have covered up abuse cases at the orphanage.

The orphanage was recently closed.

The report "laid our archdiocese bare," archdiocesan spokeswoman Barbara Crosbie said in a telephone interview July 19. "We're all found wanting."

"I think many Catholics in the archdiocese felt the archbishop should resign," she said, but also felt sorry for him.

Crosbie said the report had shocked Newfoundland Catholics out of a "can't-happen-here" attitude and that now "we have to take care that conditions change so that these things don't happen again."

The other inquiry, a smaller church investigation in the Corner Brook area of the province's west coast, was expected to make its report by the end of the year.

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