

Bishop questions barring of female priests

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — In an article in *Worship* magazine, Bishop Kenneth E. Untener of Saginaw, Mich., has questioned the rationale for the Catholic Church's ban on ordaining women.

He contended that one of the main arguments used in the church today against ordaining women — that the priest must be male because he acts "in the person of Christ" — is of recent vintage and has no basis in Scripture or the first 1,900 years of Christian theology.

He did not question use of the phrase itself to refer to the ordained priest. What he found questionable, he said, was "a major shift in the way it is interpreted" in church documents since the 1940s.

Only recently, he said, has it come to be

used "to describe the priest as taking on the 'role' of Christ ... 'impersonating' Christ in somewhat the same way that an actor takes on a role 'in the person of' someone else."

In a 1976 declaration, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said the Catholic Church does not consider itself able to ordain women for a number of reasons, among them Christ's example in choosing only men as apostles, the unbroken tradition of the church that should be considered "normative," and the fact that in celebrating the Eucharist, a priest acts in the person of Christ, who was a man.

Bishop Untener's article appeared in the "Forum" section of the January issue of *Worship*, a bimonthly liturgical magazine published by the Benedictine monks of St.

John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.

He said the phrase "in the person of Christ" does not appear in the New Testament itself except in one passage in the Latin Vulgate Bible, which was "a faulty rendering of the original Greek."

He said St. Jerome translated the Greek *en prosopo Christou* in 2 Corinthians 2:10 as "in persona Christi" — which in English would be "in the person of Christ."

But, Bishop Untener said, the original Greek means "in the presence of Christ" or "before (the face of) Christ," and that is the way it is translated in current English versions of Scripture done under Catholic auspices.

"In the early centuries we do not see this phrase used to describe the role of the ordained priest. ... The first significant

theological use of this phrase in the context of ordained priesthood was in the 13th century by Thomas Aquinas," Bishop Untener wrote.

"Aquinas says that an instrument acts not by the power of its own form, but by the power of the one who moves it," he commented. "Thus Christ makes use of the instrument of a priest in the sacraments in the same way that a physician makes use of a scalpel — as an instrument, although in this case, an animate instrument."

He said the frequent, modern use of "in the person of Christ" to refer to the ordained priest began with Pope Pius XII's encyclical letter *Mediator Dei* in 1947.

Pope Pius said Christ is present in the Mass "both in the person of his minister and above all under the eucharistic species."

He also said that through ordination priests "represent the person of Jesus Christ before their people."

In a third reference, the encyclical says that in the eucharistic sacrifice "the priest is the same, Jesus Christ, whose sacred person his minister represents" and that the priest "possesses the power of performing actions in virtue of Christ's very person."

Pope Pius gave no references for the first two statements, and referred only to Thomas Aquinas, not to St. Paul, as a reference for the third, Bishop Untener said.

Bishop Untener quoted the five references to priests acting "in the person of Christ" in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, noting that only one carries a citation to a previous use of the phrase — and that was to *Mediator Dei*, not to Thomas Aquinas or St. Paul.

"After Vatican II the phrase begins to be used very frequently," he said. "We find it in the writings of Pope Paul VI, in the 1970 General Instruction on the Roman Missal and in the 1971 Synod of Bishops. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith began using it in 1973 and has used it repeatedly after that. John Paul II uses it frequently."

"Thus a phrase used very infrequently for 19 centuries has become standard terminology for our times. This raises a theological question that deserves careful examination. Theologically speaking, the usage of this phrase is relatively recent and relatively unexamined. A great deal of work is needed on this crucial point," Bishop Untener wrote.

Officials blast university for authorization of group

By Norman McCarthy
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A decision by Jesuit-run Georgetown University to grant benefits, including funding, to an abortion-rights student group has been criticized by church and school officials.

Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington called the university's decision "most regrettable" and said he hopes it will be reversed.

The Catholic university agreed to the formation of GU Choice after a three-month study found the group in compliance with all university policies. Cardinal Hickey issued a statement saying "to allow such a group access to university facilities, office space and funding is inconsistent with the aims of an institution of higher learning that has a Catholic identity."

A Feb. 25 letter signed by the dean of Georgetown's Office of Student Affairs, John J. DeGioia, said GU Choice will have access to 18 university benefits, including funding. It will have a mailbox, the use of university vans, access to other services and office space.

DeGioia's letter said the organizers of GU Choice know they will have to conduct activities "in an institutional context in which the matter of abortion is settled." The group is expected to provide "a forum for the free exchange of ideas on matters related to abortion and the 'choice' debate," the letter said.

But Cardinal Hickey said GU Choice does not share the "clear institutional commitment of Georgetown University to the church's teaching with respect to the humanity of the unborn child."

DeGioia's letter noted that the university does not provide "official recognition," endorsements or sponsorship for any student club or organization. To qualify for benefits, an organization must be open to all undergraduates, have at least 12 student

members, not duplicate the activities of another group, have a sound constitution and comply with all university policies.

Georgetown University, its hospital and student health center have strict policies prohibiting abortions or abortion counseling, the letter pointed out, adding, "There can be no cooperation of the club in the advocacy and practice of abortion."

Cardinal Hickey said such proclamations are not enough.

"As a Catholic institution of higher learning, Georgetown University has both the right and responsibility to decide which of its groups are deserving of recognition and support. It is my hope that the decision to grant support to GU Choice will be reversed."

Laura Garcia, a visiting assistant professor and co-founder of University Faculty for Life, said letters protesting the approval of GU Choice will be written to DeGioia and the university's president, Jesuit Father Leo J. O'Donovan.

In a March "action alert," The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights also urged its 19,000 members to send letters urging Father O'Donovan to reverse the decision.

Monsignor Robert Charlebois, national executive director of the league, said the school's decision was "an affront to all American Catholics" and said the group's presence at Georgetown "betrays the trust of all those loyal lay men and women" who support the university.

He charged that because authorized campus groups receive a variety of benefits from the university, contributions to the university could now go to support legalized abortion.

Under those circumstances, he said that "it is a serious matter of conscience whether any faithful Catholic should donate money to Georgetown."

political and economic problems, he said.

Representing Catholics in the United States, Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk pledged the aid of the U.S. church in developing Middle East peace programs "to address the legitimate concerns of Palestinians, Israel's need for survival and security, the rights of the Lebanese to freedom from outside domination."

The foundations of his position have been that Iraq must leave Kuwait, that war in the region would create more injustices than it would solve, and an international meeting is needed to discuss all the problems in the Middle East.

For the pope, this has meant walking a political tightrope because the Catholic Church has little influence in the region and has to protect the Catholic minority living in Arab countries, often under religious restrictions.



AP/Wide World Photos
YOUNG VICTIMS — At a hospital in the Peruvian town of Chimbote March 2, children suffering from cholera receive intravenous solution to combat severe dehydration. About 200 people in Peru have died during the epidemic.

Summit

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religions, said Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir, a Lebanese. This is an obstacle in solving the Palestinian and Lebanese problems, he added.

Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, who handles Vatican relations with governments, said the church hopes to further its peace plans through diplomatic activity "so that negotiations prevail over armed confrontation" and by fostering massive aid programs for Middle East refugees.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said summit participants "did not discuss whether the war was just or not," but concentrated on its consequences and the future role of the church.

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