

# Church: Harassment 'an injustice' to anyone

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Sexual harassment, the issue in the national limelight during Senate hearings on Judge Clarence Thomas' nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court, has long been condemned by church leaders.

"Whenever man is responsible for offending a woman's personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and his own vocation," said Pope John Paul II in his 1988 apostolic letter on women, entitled *Mulieris Dignitatem* ("On the Dignity of Women").

Although making no specific mention of sexual harassment, the letter also criticized any "situations in which the woman remains disadvantaged or discriminated against by the fact of being a woman."

The U.S. bishops have been much more blunt in two drafts of their proposed pastoral letter on women's concerns and in the personnel policies guiding their own employees at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops-U.S. Catholic Conference in Washington.

"Acts of gross injustice like harassment and physical abuse in the workplace and debasement in the media must stop," stated the second draft of the pastoral, entitled *One in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society*.

"Bishops and priests must denounce physical, sexual, economic and psychological acts of injustice against women," the second draft added. "Boys and men must be educated to respect the personal integrity of women, to recognize how sinful violence and every form of sexual exploitation really are."

The NCCB-USCC Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual describes sexual harassment as "a form of misconduct which undermines the integrity of the employment relationship."

"No employee — male or female —

should be subjected to unsolicited and unwelcomed sexual overtures or conduct, either verbal or physical," said the policy, which dates to 1988. Employees found to have engaged in sexual harassment may be suspended, demoted or discharged, "depending on the circumstances," the manual added.

Sexual harassment "does not mean occasional compliments of a socially acceptable nature," the policy states, but rather refers to "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature" in the workplace.

In meetings with workers and in talks marking Women's Day observances, Pope John Paul has made clear his disdain for any activities that harm the dignity or equality of female employees.

"Women must not be discriminated against at work," he said in a 1983 meeting with 15,000 blue-collar workers in Vienna, Austria. They "are active in almost all domains and must be allowed to engage in these activities in accordance with their talents, without being disadvantaged or shut out from positions for which they are qualified."

During a 1987 talk on Italy's annual Women's Day, the pope said the Catholic Church "is interested in the questions regarding the presence of woman in society," especially the "just recognition of their social and civil rights in light of the dignity and identity of every woman."

In 1989, he marked International Women's Day with a call for "commitment of all to the defense and the promotion of the dignity of woman, of her equality" and of her "inalienable human rights."

Although Pope John Paul's 1988 letter was his most lengthy treatment on the subject of women, it was intended primarily as a meditation to be followed at some future date with a papal exhortation "of a pastoral nature on the place of women in the church and in society," the document said.



Judge Clarence Thomas reflects during his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee Oct. 11.

That future document would be a more likely forum for a papal discussion of sexual harassment and other workplace issues.

The 1988 letter was in response to the 1987 Synod of Bishops on the laity, which recommended in its closing propositions that "as an expression of its practice the church must stand firmly against all forms of discrimination and abuse of women."

In the United States, a committee of bishops is writing a third draft of the pastoral letter, and a final vote is not expected before November, 1992.

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., wrote more than a year ago that Catholics don't need to wait for a bishops' pastoral letter to begin fighting the evils of sexism.

Condemning the degradation of women "by physical abuse and incest in the home, sexual harassment in the workplace and rape and pornography in the wider society," Bishop Hubbard said that "it is imperative ... for the church in our diocese to react immediately" against inequality, discrimination and the "patent abuses" suffered by women in society and in the church.



AP/Wide World Photos  
University of Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill is sworn in before testifying to the Senate Judiciary Committee on Capitol Hill Oct. 11.

## Protesters disrupt ceremonies honoring Columbus

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Small groups of protesters tried to disrupt a Mass and a Columbus Day ceremony organized by the Knights of Columbus to kick-off a yearlong commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in America.

Shortly before acting U.S. Attorney General William P. Barr gave a speech at Columbus Square in front of Washington's Union Station Oct. 14, a young blond

man wrote out "500 years of genocide" and sprayed red paint on a Columbus statue at the square.

The man then climbed to the top of the statue, where he read several proclamations and heckled speakers at the ceremony.

"Christopher Columbus and his legacy should not be celebrated," said the man, who refused to identify himself.

Police surrounded the statue, but did not

attempt to bring down the man, who was cheered on by other protesters.

"It is not a legacy of cross-cultural encounters and exchanges, but of nothing less than the rape of one world and people by another. We mourn today all indigenous people in this hemisphere and around the globe who have been killed over the centuries by white racism and imperialism," he added.

Despite the protest, Barr gave his speech.

Praising Christopher Columbus' "courage, steadfast faith and magnificent achievement" in reaching American shores in 1492, Barr called for the "rediscovery" of an America based on "traditional virtues."

"Today, as we seek to build a new and better America, we can draw upon the legacy and example of Christopher Columbus and his men," Barr said. "The task will require courage, leadership, cooperation and reliance upon God."

In the talk, Barr addressed the controversy over whether Columbus "discovered" America, which was already inhabited by Native Americans.

"The world we call 'new' was an old and familiar one to those who lived here before Columbus arrived," he said.

But when Columbus landed on the island of San Salvador on Oct. 12, 1492, Barr said, he "opened up for Europe a 'new world' to the west" and "to the native peoples of America, he revealed a 'new world' to the east — a world of new

ideas, new technology, new religion."

"Out of two utterly disjointed, incomplete worlds, Columbus had forged a single larger, richer one," he said. "In fact, it may be better to speak of Columbus not as the 'discoverer' but rather as the 'creator' of a new world — of the complete globe which we now inhabit."

He said that with "the deterioration of our schools and neighborhoods" and the rise in drug use and violent crime, "the traditional family is in danger today."

Barr, an Irish-American, said that when "our ancestors from across the seas ... came to these shores, they discovered a new home where the rule of law was respected, where government was not above the law, ... where virtue and hard work were rewarded."

"We can — I believe we have to — rediscover that America; we must rediscover the traditional virtues which make America a beacon of hope to all nations," he said. "It will be an arduous task. But it is worthwhile."

"That better America — as old and as new as the spirit of the founding fathers — is out there waiting for us," Barr said. "Guided by the spirit of Columbus, we must find it where it exists and build it where it does not."

The Columbus Square ceremony was the culmination of three days of activities in Washington to help launch the observance of the Columbus quincentenary.



AP/Wide World Photos  
GETTING A GLIMPSE OF GLEMP — Neighborhood children wait for a glimpse of Poland's Cardinal Jozef Glemp upon his arrival Oct. 7 for the dedication of the Polish-Slavic Center in the largely Polish-American Greenpoint section of Brooklyn.