

Churches bombed



AP/Wide World Photos

No suspects in attacks

Cardinal Rosallo Castillo Lara of Venezuela points out to Pope John Paul II the damage sustained a day earlier in a Tuesday, July 27, bombing inside Rome's St. John Lateran Basilica. The basilica serves as the pope's seat as the bishop of Rome. Standing next to the pope, fourth from the left, is Italian president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro. Police offered no immediate indication of who carried out the July 27 attacks on two Roman churches and another bombing in Milan that killed at least five people.

Speakers tell conference encyclical remains valid

OMAHA, Neb. (CNS) — Despite indifference and dissent since its issuance 25 years ago, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life") still offers the best guidelines on human sexuality available today, speakers at an international conference here agreed.

Humanae Vitae is "the most comprehensive, compelling understanding of human sexuality that is to be found anywhere in the world today, but it has been largely treated with indifference," said Father Richard John Neuhaus, president of the Institute on Religion and Public Life and editor of *First Things*.

Father Neuhaus was keynote speaker at the July 25-30 International *Humanae Vitae* Conference in Omaha. The conference, attended by some 1,500 people, was sponsored by Omaha's Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical.

Humanae Vitae could have become a prophetic teaching tool distinguishing Catholics as a people ahead of their time, but instead is a missed opportunity because dissent obscured its basic principles, Father Neuhaus said.

The 25 years of debate concerning *Humanae Vitae* "can be characterized as arrested adolescence," he said.

Many conference speakers sharply criticized widespread dissent against *Humanae Vitae*, which reaffirmed church teaching against artificial contraception.

Calling dissent on the encyclical "destructive and indefensible," Monsignor William Smith, a professor of theology at St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., said the clergy, especially those who teach moral theology, should be "the first to expound the church's teaching on marriage without ambiguity."

Archbishop J. Francis Stafford of Denver recalled the pressures put on him and other priests to dissent from *Humanae Vitae*. He told the conference that he was the only one at an Aug. 4, 1968, meeting of more than 50 Baltimore priests to refuse to publicly dissent from the encyclical. He said his refusal led to isolation and abuse from other priests.

Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J., said timid religious leaders are partially to blame for the breakdown of family life in the United States and the "sexual chaos" that has resulted.

"One of the results of secularization is the removal of marriage and family life and sexuality from their religious roots and relationships," said Bishop McHugh of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

"It is certainly explained by the lessening moral authority or reluctance of religious leaders to assert religious teaching, the failure of churches to fulfill their prophetic role in a rapidly changing society," he said.

Capuchin Franciscan Father Ronald D. Lawler urged the church to "teach chastity with gracious force," saying that "too much of our moral education is legalistic."

"Many Catholics are alienated from the church's teachings on sexuality because of our institutional failure to teach what we know about chastity," said Father Lawler, theological consultant to the Diocese of Pittsburgh and director of education at the Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Center in Braintree, Mass.

The message of chastity is a difficult one to get across, he added, because it is too commonly understood as a negative prohibition rather than a positive virtue.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta had been scheduled to address the conference but was unable to travel to Omaha.

At the Vatican, the 25th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* was marked by a dozen articles in *L'Osservatore Romano*, covering such topics as the document's historical precedents to its fueling of extensive research into natural family planning methods.

The first article in the newspaper series included confirmation that the majority of a Vatican commission advising the pope recommended allowing some exceptions to the church's traditional ban on artificial birth control.

The newspaper reported that Pope Paul VI reaffirmed traditional church teaching about artificial birth control — knowing many people disagreed with him — because he felt the truth about the human person and married love was best protected in the traditional teaching.

In the United States, Miami Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy was among several bishops issuing pastoral letters or commentary on the anniversary.

Contemporary society separates sexuality from married love, he said, adding that Cohabitation, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, abortion, divorce and single parenting reflect confusion about the meaning of human sexuality, a rejection of morality and a trivialization of sex.



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