

Church

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1996 state ballot an initiative that would end affirmative-action programs in all state-run agencies. These programs cover hiring practices concerning women and minorities, and create set-asides for state work and purchase contracts with minority and women-owned businesses.

Meanwhile, just four days after Cardinal Mahony released his statement, the United States Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in the case of *Adarand Constructors vs. Peña* that Congress must meet tougher standards to justify hiring practices that give preferential treatment to minorities.

Moreover, another Republican presidential contender, Senator Robert Dole of Kansas, has proposed the elimination of affirmative-action initiatives on the federal level. Dole's activities prompted President Bill Clinton to endorse affirmative-action programs July 17, following an administration review that showed affirmative action has helped women and minorities. President Clinton's conclusion was, "Mend it, don't end it."

Still, debate over the issue rages, in part because it has become a symbolic target for people who are upset over the course the nation and its economy seem to be taking, speculated Nancy Wisdo, a staff member at the United States Catholic Conference's Department of Social Development and World Peace in Washington, D.C.

"I think there's an uneasiness in the land, there's an uneasiness about the economy," Wisdo said. "(People) are searching for the one thing's that a cause (of the problems), and for some it's immigration, for some people it's affirmative action."

In light of the current climate, it seems likely that affirmative action will become a ballot issue in California in 1996, and an issue in the 1996 presidential campaign.

The Catholic Church is likely to be in the thick of the battle.



"We (the Catholic Church) have something to contribute to that debate," John Carr observed after the Supreme Court ruling. Carr, USCC director of social development and world peace, added: "Not only are we in support of affirmative action, but we are a diverse church with whites and blacks and Hispanics, with women and men."

In his June 8 statement, Cardinal Mahony pointed to the history of church statements supporting actions to counter the effects of prejudice. Those statements are drawn from such documents as *Gaudium et spes*; Pope John Paul II's 1987 social encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei So-*

cialis; and two pastoral letters from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops — "Brothers and Sisters to Us" (1979) on prejudice and "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy" (1986).

Cardinal Mahony explained that affirmative-action programs grew out of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, specifically addressing "persistent discrimination against African Americans in the United States," he wrote.

Initially, the Civil Rights Act dealt with underrepresentation of minority workers on the payrolls of federal contractors. Over the next few years, and especially during the administration of Republican President Richard M. Nixon, affirmative-action protections were extended to women and other minority groups. The protections now cover hiring policies, procurement programs, and admissions at colleges and universities.

Foes of affirmative action argue that the measures have succeeded, and that prejudice is no longer the problem it once was. Indeed, some opponents argue that reverse discrimination has now become a greater problem and that affirmative-action efforts actually help to undermine women's and minorities' credibility in seeking jobs.

Although progress has been made toward ending discrimination, Cardinal Mahony countered in his letter, prejudice has not been eliminated and affirmative action is still needed in some form.

"The temptation of the current debate regarding the future of affirmative action is to adopt the view of those who claim that the fight against economic, social and racial discrimination has been fully successful and who press for the surrender of protections won after a long and bitter battle," Cardinal Mahony wrote.

"Successes we can claim have been real but limited and were achieved only because of vigilance and determination. Only vigilance and determination will ensure that we do not regress," he continued.

The cardinal noted that the U.S. bishops' 1986 pastoral letter on the economy states: "Judiciously administered affirmative-action programs in education and employment can be important expressions of the drive for solidarity and participation that is the heart of true justice."

Foreshadowing some of the comments President Clinton made a month later, Cardinal Mahony said it is possible to

change current programs, and that people may legitimately disagree on specifics of affirmative-action policies.

But, the cardinal wrote, any change must involve an acknowledgement of past and present discrimination and must maintain as its principal goal ending discrimination.

"Society, including government, has a responsibility for eliminating the discrimination historically suffered by certain groups of persons and an obligation to take an active role in setting standards and providing mechanisms for relief," the cardinal wrote. "The human impact of our choices must remain uppermost in our debate."

Many of the documents mentioned by Cardinal Mahony were also cited in a memorandum produced in anticipation of the affirmative-action debate by Thomas Shellabarger, a policy adviser with the USCC's Department of Social Development and World Peace.

At this point, Shellabarger said, the USCC is delaying action until the president or Congress put forth specific proposals. And he said he does not expect much action until next year because of current battles over welfare reform and the federal budget.

"The review that President Clinton did and the results of that have pretty much slowed momentum, but I don't know what's going to happen in the next session (of Congress)," Shellabarger said.

Nor will the national conference get involved in the California situation unless asked to do so by the bishops of California, he added.

A wait-and-see attitude seems to be the norm across the country, Shellabarger acknowledged. Unlike California, most states have not yet become embroiled in the affirmative-action debate, he added, noting that Cardinal Mahony is the only bishop of whom he is aware to have made a major statement on the subject recently.

Indeed, officials of the New York Catholic Conference and of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester acknowledged that they have not yet begun to deal with attempts to overturn affirmative-action programs.

Meanwhile, the bishops of California are themselves waiting to see what form the initiative proposal will take before moving ahead from Cardinal Mahony's statement, noted Rick Mockler, director of Catholic Charities of California.

Catholic conference officials in California are concerned about the tenor of the discussion of the issue so far, Mockler said. And they disagree with the notion that the problems of prejudice have been adequately addressed.

"Racism is a serious problem that exists in the institutions in the state, and there has to be measures taken to address the problems," Mockler said.

In addition, church leaders recognize that many Catholics favor efforts to eliminate affirmative action and need to be educated about the church's position, Mockler acknowledged.

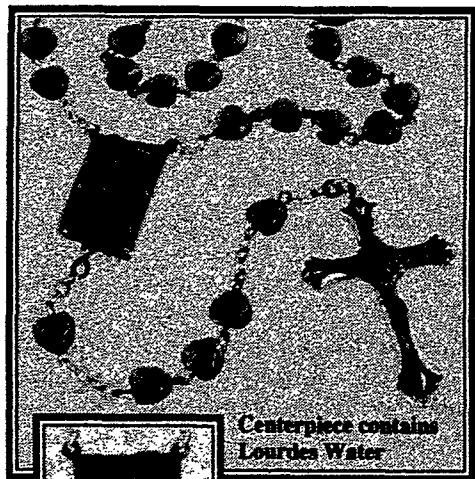
"I think it would be fair to say that the Catholic parishes and Catholic faith communities have not spent a great deal of time in looking at racism from the context of our faith tradition," Mockler said.

Indeed, Cardinal Mahony's letter calls for parishes throughout his archdiocese to conduct educational sessions during the next 18 months to address the issues of prejudice and affirmative action.

As the affirmative-action debate widens during the next year and perhaps becomes part of the 1996 presidential campaign, it seems certain that Catholics nationally and locally will be asked to examine the issue.

As Cardinal Mahony noted in his letter, "Let us take care that among the many complex facts of the affirmative-action policies we debate that we are sure to consider their moral and ethical dimensions. The success of our decision-making process will depend on this."

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