

Pope adds to canon law: Teachings require assent

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Citing the need to defend the Catholic faith, Pope John Paul II changed the Code of Canon Law to underline Catholics' obligation to accept church teaching.

The pope said he was adding two items to canon law "to defend the faith of the Catholic Church," particularly when dealing with teachings that are "definitive" but have not been proclaimed as infallible.

In an apostolic letter, "Ad Tuendam Fidem" ("To Defend the Faith"), the pope ordered the changes to be made in the Latin-rite and Eastern-rite codes of canon law.

The Vatican press office distributed the letter June 30 in Latin and Italian. The office also published a commentary written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The commentary said the pope's 1994 letter explaining that only men could be ordained to the priesthood was an example of the teachings that require "firm and definitive assent," even if they are not solemnly proclaimed as infallible.

"Whoever denies these truths would be in a position of rejecting a truth of Catholic doctrine and would, therefore, no longer be in full communion with the Catholic Church," the doctrinal congregation said.

Canon 750 of the Latin code and Canon 598 of the Eastern code say Catholics must believe all that is contained in the written Word of God and all that has been proclaimed as being divinely revealed.

The pope added a second paragraph to each code to underline the assent required when dealing with church teaching that has

not been proclaimed as divinely revealed but has been taught as belonging to the Catholic faith and its unbroken tradition.

The new paragraph says:

"Each and every thing definitively proposed by the magisterium of the church regarding faith and morals, that is those which are required in order to piously safeguard and faithfully expound the deposit of faith, also must be firmly accepted and held; one who denies the propositions which are to be held definitively, therefore, opposes the doctrine of the Catholic Church."

The second change ordered by the pope applies church penalties to those who deny the definitive teachings.

The papal letter reaffirmed the three traditional levels of church teaching and the type of assent required by each.

Truths contained in the Word of God and those teachings which the church says are divinely and formally revealed are in the first category.

Those who "obstinately" doubt or deny the first category of truths fall "under the censure of heresy," according to the doctrinal congregation commentary.

Truths in the first category include everything in the creed, the solemnly defined dogmas regarding Christ, the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the infallibility of the pope and "the grave immorality of direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being," the congregation said.

The second category includes dogmatic and moral teachings "which are necessary for faithfully keeping and expounding the deposit of faith, even if they have not been proposed by the magisterium of the church as formally revealed."



CNS/Reuters

Pope bestows palliums

Portland Archbishop John G. Vlazny kneels before Pope John Paul II to receive the pallium June 29. The white cloth, symbolizing unity with the Apostolic See, was given to 19 archbishops, including Seattle Archbishop Alexander J. Brunett, during the ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica.

Truths in the second category have a logical or historical connection to the truths in the first category, the congregation said. It gave several examples, including church teaching against euthanasia, the canonization of saints, and the teaching that only men can be ordained.

The third category refers to other teachings of the pope or of bishops that are not intended to be definitive.

Pope John Paul's three-page letter and his changes to canon law regard only the second category of church teaching.

The doctrinal congregation said, "Every believer ... is required to give firm and definitive assent to these truths, based on

faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the magisterium and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the magisterium in these matters."

It said the fact that they have not been proposed as "formally revealed" does not diminish their authority, nor does it rule out the possibility that some day a pope or a church council will promulgate them at the higher level.

Regarding the teachings of the first and second categories, the congregation said, "It is important to emphasize that there is no difference with respect to the full and irrevocable character of the assent which is owed to these teachings."

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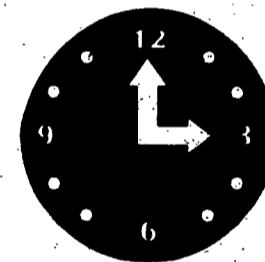
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