

Vatican condemns works by Fr. Anthony de Mello

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican declared that positions of a best-selling Indian author, the late Jesuit Father Anthony de Mello, are incompatible with the faith and urged bishops around the world to have his books withdrawn from sale.

A "notification" by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, made public Aug. 22, sharply critiqued Father de Mello's works, saying they presented God as an impersonal cosmic reality, organized religion as an obstacle to self-awareness and Jesus as one master among many.

Moreover, the doctrinal congregation said, some of Father de Mello's books accuse the church of turning Scripture "into an idol" and blame religious texts for causing people to become "obtuse and cruel."

"In order to protect the good of the Christian faithful, this congregation declares that the above-mentioned positions are incompatible with the Catholic faith and can cause grave harm," said the notification, which was personally approved by Pope John Paul II. It was issued in English and five other languages.

Father de Mello, who died in 1987, wrote a great number of books on personal spirituality, using a simple meditative style that has continued to find a wide readership after his death. Publishers say his works are a mix of Christian and Buddhist parables, Islamic sayings, Hindu breathing exercises and psychological insight.

The Vatican notification and a back-

ground essay was sent to bishops' conferences in late July with a cover letter signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal congregation. Cardinal Ratzinger's letter asked bishops to make the warning known to their faithful and to take steps to curb publication of the late author's works.

It asked bishops to contact publishing houses that had printed Father de Mello's books and "ensure that the texts not be reprinted." As for books already in distribution, it said bishops should try either to get them withdrawn from sale or, at the very least, have copies of the Vatican's notification inserted into every copy before sale.

While some of Father de Mello's works have been published by editorial houses run by religious orders — for example, the Daughters of St. Paul in Italy — many have been printed by general publishers. In the United States, Doubleday has published several of his books, including the popular *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality*, *One Minute Wisdom* and *The Way to Love: The Last Meditations of Anthony de Mello*.

The Vatican notification said Father de Mello's early writings remained within the boundaries of Christian spirituality. But it said his later works and conference presentations, not all of which were necessarily intended for publication, showed a "progressive distancing from the essential contents of the Christian faith."

In particular, it faulted the author's notion that divine revelation was not to be found in the words of Scripture, but rather in silence. It also cited what it called his "indiscriminate" criticism of



Nancy Wiehock/CNS

U.S. attacks criticized

Paul Martin (right) joins other peace activists in front of the White House Aug. 20 to protest the U.S. bombings of two terrorist-linked sites. The demonstration, which included supporters of Pax Christi and the Catholic Worker movement, took place after President Clinton announced that U.S. missiles struck a compound in Afghanistan and a plant in Sudan that U.S. intelligence identified as a chemical weapons facility. The attacks also drew criticism from Latin-rite Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem who on Vatican Radio Aug. 22 warned that the U.S. attacks would only promote violence in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, at a joint assembly in Milwaukee, Aug. 23 issued statements critical of the U.S. bombings.

church institutions.

It referred to one of Father de Mello's stories depicting a visit to the "international fair of religions," at which each faith makes its own claim on salvation. Afterward, in the priest's story, God says he is ashamed at the way religions are acting.

The Vatican said Father de Mello relativized the contents of Christianity, portraying Christ's divine nature as part of

the divine nature shared by all people, and Christ's presence in the Eucharist as one aspect of his presence in all creation.

In recent years, Cardinal Ratzinger and other Vatican officials have repeatedly warned that in India and other Asian countries, basic church teachings are being diluted to make them more compatible with a predominantly non-Christian culture.



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