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The glass casket containing the body of Pope John XXIII is carried through St. Peter's Square June 3.

Pope John XXIII laid to rest again

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Flanked by the recently exhumed and treated body of Pope John XXIII, Pope John Paul II praised his predecessor for attentively following the Holy Spirit's guidance, particularly in convoking the Second Vatican Council.

The former pontiff's body, laid with arms crossed in a glass casket decked with red and yellow roses, rested at the side of the altar in St. Peter's Square for the Pentecost Mass June 3, before being moved to a newly prepared resting place in the basilica.

"We have the joy to host, near the altar, the venerated remains of Blessed John XXIII," said Pope John Paul, to repeated bursts of applause.

Before the Mass, which also marked the 38th anniversary of Pope John's death, the former pontiff's body was wheeled in procession through the square on a red-draped platform. After an initial light applause, the crowd of about 30,000 fell silent, many of them blessing themselves as his casket went past.

Pope John Paul, who arrived after the glass coffin reached the altar, paused briefly to bow to his predecessor's body before beginning the Mass.

He said the Second Vatican Council, which Pope John opened in 1962, took "the form of a renewed Pentecost," the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles.

"Even in our time," the pope said, "the church is passed through by a 'strong driving wind.' It is experiencing the Spirit's divine breath, which opens it to evangelization of the world."

Strong sunshine poked through the overcast sky and gleamed off Pope John's wax-covered face and hands, giving them the look of slightly yellowed translucent alabaster. From certain angles, it appeared the corners of his mouth held the hint of a smile.

After the Mass, 16 attendants carried the 1,000-pound shatterproof casket into the basilica to the main altar for public display into the early evening. Once the basilica's doors closed for the night, the casket was moved to its new final resting place at a prominent altar, dedicated to St. Jerome, on the main level.

In January, several months after Pope John Paul declared him blessed, Pope John was exhumed from the basilica's crypt in anticipation of the move upstairs, intended to facilitate the flow of visitors to his tomb.



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Friendly fire: Top Vatican officials debate role of local bishop

In recent years, some bishops have lamented that the Vatican exerts too much control and leaves them too little space for pastoral flexibility.

In Rome, such criticism has received a cool reception. Vatican officials strongly defend the need for central authority, particularly when it comes to anything that touches upon doctrinal issues.

But over the past year, the debate has been raised to a more prominent level by a new protagonist who sits inside, not outside, the Vatican walls.

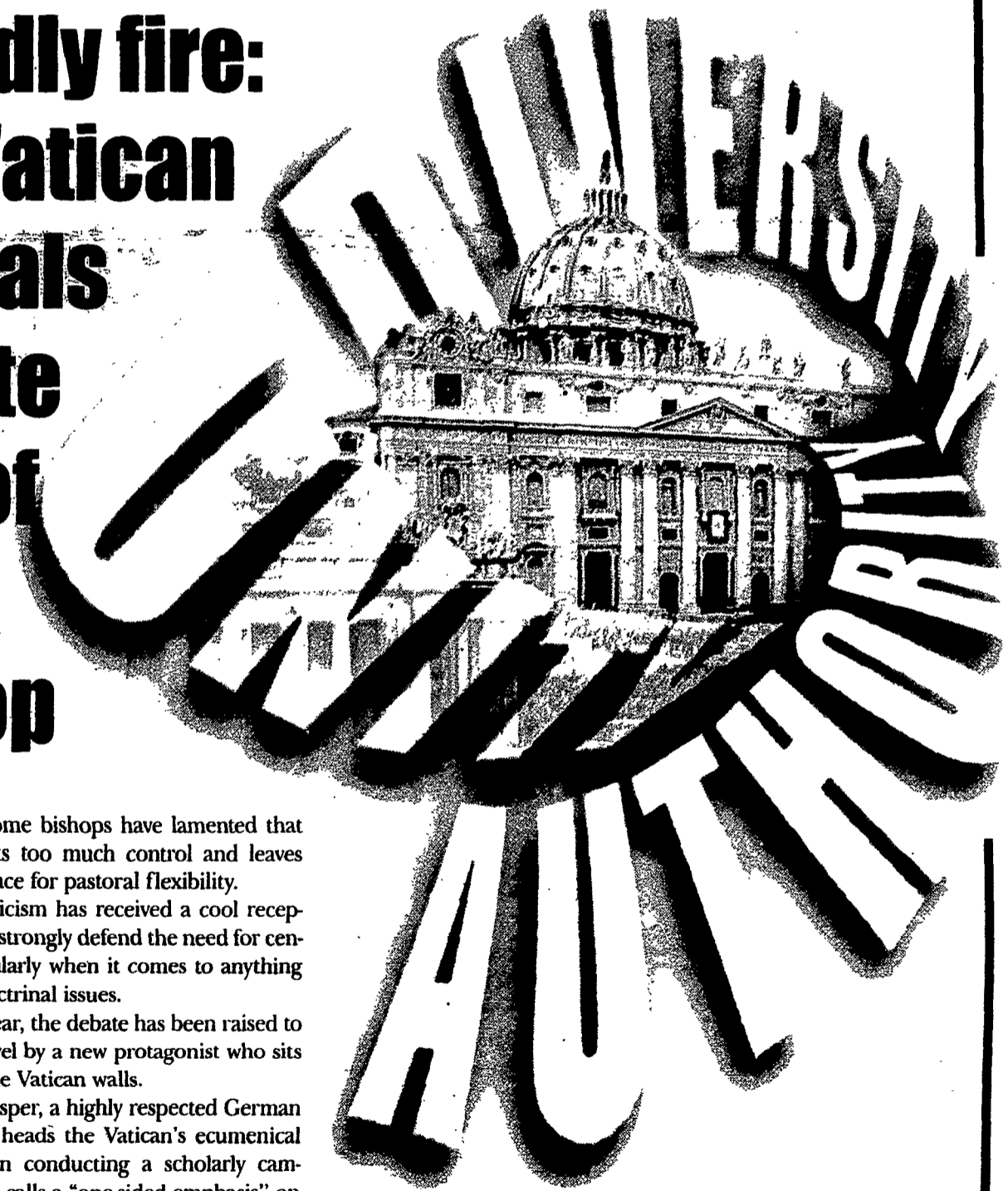
Cardinal Walter Kasper, a highly respected German theologian who now heads the Vatican's ecumenical department, has been conducting a scholarly campaign against what he calls a "one-sided emphasis" on the universal church and a corresponding decline in the authority of local bishops around the world. He was elevated to the rank of cardinal Feb. 21.

Granting freedom to bishops is in the tradition of the early church, Cardinal Kasper said, and the centralization of church authority has now "gone too far."

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Story by John Thavis

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