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Bishops' AIDS Policy Urges Abstinence

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In issuing the statement Thursday, the bishops asserted that it did not repudiate or contradict a 1987 statement that provoked an unusual public dispute among them over whether it gave the impression the church was changing its position on birth control.

The statement issued by the bishops, who met in Baltimore this week, condemned educational programs promoting the use of condoms to counter AIDS. Such programs create a false sense of security and can encourage promiscuous behavior, the bishops said. Government Help Urged
The statement also urged Government assistance and protection for people with AIDS.

The earlier AIDS statement, issued by the 50-member administrative board of bishops' conference, expressed a willingness to tolerate AIDS education programs that provided information on condoms if those programs stressed the moral dimensions of sexuality and linked it to marriage.

The use of condoms will not be discussed at a major Vatican conference on AIDS to be held next week, its organizers have said. John Cardinal O'Connor of New York will be among the scientists, theologians, religious leaders and government officials speaking at the meeting, which will focus on combating AIDS and caring for those affected by it.

After the 1987 statement was issued, Cardinal O'Connor, Bernard Cardinal Law of Boston and several other prelates and Vatican officials complained that it gave the impression that the Catholic church was modifying its official condemnation of birth control. In June 1988, the bishops voted to authorize a "new, updated statement" without rescinding the existing one.

Archbishop Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, who headed the committee that drafted the new document, insisted that the two statements were not contradictory. He noted that the 1987 statement rejected "safe sex" approaches to AIDS prevention and that it stressed the church teaching that sexual activity should be limited to marriage.

The conference also affirmed a section of the statement rejecting "the idea that this illness is a direct punishment by God," though some bishops expressed concern that the language did not sufficiently portray God as active in human life.

Many bishops have expressed frustration that their debate over the AIDS documents has often obscured the bishops' hope to mobilize public support for those suffering from the condition. "Persons with AIDS are often shunned," said Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, the president of the conference, after the debate Thursday. "They lose their jobs; they can't rent homes; schools won't educate them; insurance companies won't cover them. As moral leaders, we say that sort of discrimination is a scandal, and compassion is the only Gospel response."

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