PS1 for 10/22/87#THE PAPAL SYNOD ON THE LAITY

A worldwide ""Synod on the Laity'' called by Pope John Paul II is meeting in Rome, Italy all during the month of October. More than 200 Catholic bishops from all over the world were selected to attend, some by their peers in their own country and some by the Pontiff himself.

Each day, a few members of the Synod address their fellow bishops with prepared statements called ""interventions.'' The media are not permitted to attend, but immediately following each morning and afternoon session, briefings are given in five languages.

While the Synod's assigned subject is the ""laity,'' a coordinated effort is being made by some liberal Catholics to persuade the Synod to endorse a feminist agenda for the church. This includes laying a guilt trip on the Catholic hierarchy for alleged ""oppression'' of women, forcing changes in the language of the Scriptures and hymns in order to eliminate the so-called sexist words, and setting the church on the path toward the eventual ordination of women by authorizing females to serve in pre-ordination ranks such as acolytes and deacons.

Archbishop John L. May, president of the U.S. Bishops' Conference and a delegate to the Synod, held a news conference in Rome on October 9 in which he presumed to predict that the Synod will ""probably'' recommend that the church allow altar girls, while reiterating that the church's ban on the ordination of women is ""clear and not open to change.''

A large delegation of Catholic laymen and women who support traditional Catholic doctrine and liturgy is in Rome to monitor the Synod's media coverage, and to ascertain that it is not skewed toward the feminist goals. These Catholics look upon such changes in Catholic church doctrine and practices as wimpish acquiescence to a militant minority of radical feminists whose real goal is to achieve a gender-neutral theology.

The men and women in this delegation are active in the secular field in the United States and Australia, either as heads of organizations or as authors of publications that support traditional Catholic doctrine. They are speaking out to alert the bishops and the world media covering the Synod about feminist objectives, strategy, and tactics.

In their first news conference, these conservative lay Catholics urged that Synod speakers NOT use ""words that have different meanings to different groups, such as women's liberation, women's movement, sexism, and equality of men and women.'' These conservative Catholics asserted that ""women's liberation is known in the United States and Australia as women's lib and is popularly understood to mean liberation from home, husband, family and children through easy divorce, abortion, contraception, and the abandonment of motherhood as a fulltime career.''

These conservative lay Catholics warned that the use of such words ""manifests insensitivity to the overwhelming majority of Catholic women who are faithful to church and family, and who believe that the laity should enthusiastically support family, lifetime marriage, and the life and care of babies, born and unborn.''

The leader of the delegation, Mrs. Kathleen Sullivan of Chicago, said, ""If some clergy and even hierarchy feel guilty about their treatment of women, they should make amends to the women they have demeaned. Guilt is personal, not collective, and those who feel guilty should not try to redirect church teaching through adopting the semantics of women's lib.''

These conservative lay Catholics urged that ""the family and the right to life'' be the primary themes of this Synod. One cannot address the subject of women in the 1980s,'' they said, ""without expressing horror at the holocaust in which 20 million unborn babies

were killed by their mothers in the United States alone.''

Other members of this conservative group want the Synod to address the problem of easy, no-fault divorce, calling it the biggest socio-economic phenomenon of the 1970s and the greatest cause of societal breakdown and of poverty for women and children in the United States.

Still others in this conservative group asked the Synod to address the problems of the Catholic laity in Communist countries because those behind the Iron Curtain are denied the most precious right of all, the right to practice their religion.

Members of this lay conservative delegation, who will remain in Rome throughout the month, are ready to provide what they see as a needed balance to the easy access to the media enjoyed by liberal and feminist Catholics. When Archbishop Rembert Weakland told the Synod that the Bible should be purged of those portions he considers offensive to women because of their patriarchal themes and phrases, the conservative Catholics promptly spoke out against this censorship of the Scriptures.