

July 5, 1977. . . . Pastoral Letter Touching Upon the Reflections on The Service
of Authority in The Church Today. . . . Humberto Cardinal Medeiros.

Dearly beloved in Christ:

During the past few weeks two apparently dissimilar, but essentially related incidents have disturbed the peace of the Catholic Church, adding to the confusion already existing among many of the faithful. In Europe an archbishop of the Church who had expressed dissatisfaction with what he regarded as the dangerous direction of the Second Vatican Council has now drawn the attention of the entire world to his attitude of dissent by conducting ceremonies of clerical ordination in defiance of the explicit prohibition of the Holy Father. In the United States, a group of Catholic theologians, commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America, have called into question the position of the Catholic Church on matters pertaining to human sexuality, for reasons which they have formulated on the basis of their collective examination of scientific evidence which they consider to be of preponderant validity. Both the Archbishop and the Commission of five theologians have been given wide publicity by the media of social communications.

In view of this, it is my obligation, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as Archbishop of Boston, to point out, both for the Catholic faithful and for the entire community, the serious injury to the Catholic Church which has resulted from these irresponsible attacks on the Church's teaching authority which is a gift of service from God for the salvation of His People. Originating as they do within the Catholic Community, and carrying the weight of influence generated by the Church's divinely instituted organization, these attacks have had the effect of weakening the allegiance in faith owed by Catholics to the Holy Father, and to the structure through which he chooses to lead,

RCAB 00684

teach and govern the Church as its Supreme Shepherd.

The collegial unity which exists among bishops by divine institution is shattered when individual bishops declare their independence of the central and highest authority which God has provided as the visible and effective symbol of His own divine presence within the Christian community. And the unifying power of the truth revealed by God for the direction of men's lives toward happiness and peace is seriously impeded when individual theologians, who identify themselves as Catholics, and thus as accredited spokesmen for the Church, create the impression that they no longer accept the Church's officially presented guidelines for the moral regulation of an important area of human free activity.

In order for you to evaluate better the seriousness of these attacks on the teaching authority of the Church, I am forced to give you three lengthy quotations from the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in three different places on this brief Pastoral Letter. I do this because I know from experience that you seldom come in direct contact with the true teaching of the Church as taught by the Council. Here is the first quotation:

"This sacred synod, following in the steps of the First Vatican Council, teaches and declares with it that Jesus Christ, the eternal pastor, set up the Holy Church by entrusting the apostles with their mission as He, Himself had been sent by the Father (cf. Jn. 20:21). He willed that their successors, the bishops namely, should be the shepherds in His Church until the end of the world. In order that the episcopate itself, however, might be one and undivided, He put Peter at the head of

RCAB 00685

the other apostles, and in him He set up a lasting and visible source and foundation of the unity both of faith and of communion. This teaching concerning the institution, the permanence, the nature and import of the sacred Primacy of the Roman Pontiff and his infallible teaching office, the sacred synod proposes anew to be firmly believed by all the faithful, and, proceeding undeviatingly with this same undertaking, it proposes to proclaim publicly and enunciate clearly the doctrine concerning bishops, successors of the apostles, who together with Peter's successor, the Vicar of Christ and the visible head of the whole Church, direct the house of the living God." (Lumen gentium, 18)

The Council set down very concisely the faith of the Church we are to believe concerning the Pope and bishops in the Church and their service of authority in teaching. Please listen to the following very carefully; it is my second quotation:

"Among the more important duties of bishops that of preaching the Gospel has pride of place. For the bishops are heralds of the faith, who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people assigned to them, the faith which is destined to inform their thinking and direct their conduct; and under the light of the Holy Spirit they make that faith shine forth, drawing from the storehouse of revelation new things and old (cf. Mt. 13:52); they make it bear fruit and with watchfulness they ward off

RCAB 00686

whatever errors threaten their flock (cf. 2 Tim. 4:14). Bishops who teach in communion with the Roman Pontiff are to be revered by all as witnesses of divine and Catholic truth; the faithful, for their part, are obliged to submit to their bishops' decision, made in the name of Christ, in matters of faith and morals, and to adhere to it with a ready and respectful allegiance of mind. This loyal submission of the will and intellect must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak ex cathedra, in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and sincere assent be given to decisions made by him conformably with his manifest mind and intention, which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated." (Lumen gentium, 25)

With this teaching of the Council in mind and heart, let us continue our reflexion. I can think of no period of history when the Church has been more open to legitimate exchange of opinion, and more sympathetic toward honest differences of opinion than during the pontificate of our beloved and saintly Pope Paul VI. The view of contemporary social problems inspired by Vatican II has been evident in every aspect of the Church's formulation of policy, and in every pronouncement of the Holy Father as he endeavors patiently and firmly to bring the Church into more effective relationship with the modern world, and to level the barriers

RCAB 00687

of injustice and hatred, of selfishness and greed which have separated the rich from the poor, the powerful from the helpless, the worldly-wise from the supernaturally enlightened faithful, over the centuries of men's failure to discover their unity before God through their common human nature..

Dearly beloved in Christ, in a world which needs so desperately the "aggiornamento" or renewal of Vatican II, it is senseless, and I say this in deep sorrow for this tragedy we see - it is senseless, for an individual bishop to demand that the directives of the Council be abandoned and to allege, as justification for his refusal of submission to the Holy See, his own conviction that the present directions of the Church are diabolically inspired! Lord, send him your Holy Spirit of light for repentance, and courage to accept your mercy in the Church.

It is likewise wrong, but for a different reason, for a group of professed Catholic theologians to suggest that the teachings of Vatican II have opened the way for a completely new formulation of the Church's position on problems relating to human sexuality. Let me assure you that no one who reads the documents of the Council carefully and without bias, can possibly gain such an impression. It is no argument against the teaching of the Council to assert that its true significance is to be sought in the developing thought of those who follow new direction of secular scholarship and scientific exploration. What Vatican II teaches is to be interpreted and applied not by individual theologians but by the magisterial authority of the Church which convoked the Council and teaches through the Council. For the field of human sexuality this teaching has been summarized and reaffirmed in the December 1975 document issued by the Holy See entitled "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics". I exhort you to study this "Declaration" in the light of the Catholic Faith for

RCAB 00688

the proper formation of your conscience in these delicate matters. Together with it, study also the Pastoral Letter of the American Bishops concerning moral values entitled "To Live in Christ Jesus" issued last November. Both these documents have been published in The Pilot.

Dearly beloved in Christ, there is no reason for confusion if we listen to those who are empowered by God to speak with the authority of Christ. Confusion spreads only when those who lack this authority speak as though they possessed it. In the Catholic Church the source of authority is the Pope and the bishops in union with him. Moreover the right of each bishop to teach with authority is dependent on his fidelity to the teaching of the universal Church and on his collegial unity with the Holy Father.

Because of the vital importance of this doctrine, I must again quote extensively from the Second Vatican Council, and this is my third quotation:

"Episcopal consecration confers, together with the office of sanctifying, the duty also of teaching and ruling, which, however, of their very nature can be exercised only in hierarchial communion with the head and members of the college." (Lumen gentium, 20-21)

"The college or body of bishops has for all that no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head, whose primatial authority, let it be added, over all, whether pastors or faithful, remains in its integrity. For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme and

universal power over the whole church, a power which he can exercise unhindered. The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in their role as teachers and pastors, and in it the apostolic college is perpetuated.

Together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him, they have supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff." (Lumen gentium, 22)

Such is the Faith of the Catholic Church concerning the service of Authority given to it by Jesus Christ for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Within the Church the position of individual theologians entitles them indeed to associate freely with one another in the pursuit of the theological enterprise and to work with one another for precise formulation and practical application of the truth as God reveals it and reason discovers it.

It is the responsibility of the teaching authority of the Church to listen to theologians and to judge whether their informed consensus is in harmony with the faith of the Church, and then to accept any fresh insights into the Faith for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. And it is the responsibility of theologians to work within the Church, as living members of the Church, - and therefore as believers in the faith of the Church, - and not to speak to the Church from the independent platforms of the secular academic world, as if they were non-believers. The Church suffers greatly when Catholic theologians, claiming the right to speak independently of ecclesiastical supervision,

- seeming to reject the service of authority give to the Church by Christ - continue to present themselves as molders of Catholic opinion and as authentic counsellors for Catholics in the formation of their judgments of conscience. When theological science thus takes on the forms of secularized scholarship, Catholic theologians who speak its language find themselves usurping the authority of the Church's hierarchy as they become publicly identified with secularized efforts to legalize sexual aberration and to make immorality look respectable. May the Holy Spirit enlighten those who inflict such pain and confusion on the Church, fragmenting it against the will of Christ!

In conclusion, let me warn you all, my beloved brothers and sisters, against the disastrous consequences of the attitude of indifference toward the Church into which many Catholics seem to be falling today due in no small measure to the confusion created by those who should know better. The Church is God's Church, not just a human society to be governed by civil law and to be manipulated into the formulation of policies dictated by civil authorities. When the human structure which God has instituted for the governing of the Church is disregarded, the responsibility of men toward God which is fundamental to the sense of sin begins to disappear. We must not expect the Church to change the laws of God. However, the world may seem to change, it is still God's world. However we grow in knowledge, or extend our conquest of the forces of nature, what we learn always reflects God's truth and goodness, and what we are called to do always demands conformity with God's will as it is embodied in our human condition and is made known to us by reason and the revelation of God.

As your Archbishop, it is my grave obligation to defend the integrity of the Church's Faith against both the erosion of its divinely

liberalized immorality. In your confusion, look to the authentic teaching of the Church and your vision will become clear as crystal. As you experience the perplexity of changing moral standards in the un-christian world to which the Lord sends us, follow the wholesome restraints of Christian morality as they are clearly and simply presented by the Church, and your self-discipline will bring you strength and peace. You can be certain that Jesus is with us until the end of time.

Listening to the voice of the Supreme Shepherd of the Church and of the Bishops in union with him, you listen to the voice of Christ. His peace be every in your hearts.

Humberto Cardinal Medeiros
Archbishop of Boston

July 5, 1977

RCAB 00692