

U.S. Bishops' Pastoral: Human Life in Our Day

(Continued from Page 11)

the supreme, though not infallible Authority of the Pope, it must be something more than that miserable counterfeit which, as I have said above, now goes by the name.

"If in a particular case it is to be taken as a sacred and sovereign monitor, its dictate, in order to prevail against the voice of the Pope, must follow upon serious thought, prayer, and all available means of arriving at a right judgment on the matter in question. And further, obedience to the Pope is what is called 'in possession' that is, the *onus probandi* (burden of proof) of establishing a case against him lies, as in all cases of exception, on the side of conscience.

"Unless a man is able to say to himself, as in the Presence of God, that he must not, and dare not, act upon the Papal injunction, he is

Church in the Modern World reminds us that "in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily. They must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50).

We must not suppose that there is such conflict between authority and freedom, between objective values and subjective fulfillment, that one can only prevail by the elimination of the other.

Married couples faced with conflicting duties are often caught in agonizing crises of conscience. For

"We feel bound to remind Catholic married couples . . . that however circumstances may reduce moral guilt, no one following the teaching of the Church can deny the objective evil of artificial contraception."

bound to obey it and would commit a great sin in disobeying it. *Prima facie* it is his bounden duty, even from a sentiment of loyalty, to believe the Pope right and to act accordingly. . . ." (*A Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*)

HUMANAE VITAE DOES NOT DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF THE GOOD FAITH OF THOSE WHO MAKE PRACTICAL DECISIONS IN CONSCIENCE AGAINST WHAT THE CHURCH CONSIDERS A DIVINE LAW AND THE WILL OF GOD.

THE ENCYCLICAL DOES NOT UNDERTAKE TO JUDGE THE CONSCIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS BUT TO SET FORTH THE AUTHENTIC TEACHING OF THE CHURCH WHICH CATHOLICS BELIEVE INTERPRETS THE DIVINE LAW TO WHICH CONSCIENCE SHOULD BE CONFORMED.

The Pastoral Constitution on the

example, at times it proves difficult to harmonize the sexual expression of conjugal love with respect for the life-giving power of sexual union and the demands of responsible parenthood. Pope Paul's encyclical and the commentaries of the international episcopates on it are sensitive, as are we, to these painful situations.

Filled with compassion for the human condition the Holy Father offers us counsel which we make our own:

"Let married couples, then, face up to the efforts needed, supported by the faith and hope which do not disappoint. . . because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Who has been given to us; let them implore divine assistance by persevering prayer; above all, let them draw from the source of grace and charity in the Eucharist. And if an should still keep it held over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the

"The expression of theological dissent from the magisterium is in order only if the reasons are serious and well founded, if the manner of the dissent does not question or impugn the teaching authority of the Church and is such as not to give scandal."

mercy of God, which is poured forth in the Sacrament of Penance" (*Humanae Vitae*, 25.)

WE FEEL BOUND TO REMIND CATHOLIC MARRIED COUPLES, WHEN THEY ARE SUBJECTED TO THE PRESSURES WHICH PROMPT THE HOLY FATHER'S CONCERN, THAT HOWEVER CIRCUMSTANCES MAY REDUCE MORAL GUILT, NO ONE FOLLOWING THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH CAN DENY THE OBJECTIVE EVIL OF ARTIFICIAL CONTRACEPTION ITSELF.

WITH PASTORAL SOLICITUDE WE URGE THOSE WHO HAVE RESORTED TO ARTIFICIAL CONTRACEPTION NEVER TO LOSE HEART BUT TO CONTINUE TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE STRENGTH WHICH COMES FROM THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND THE GRACE, HEALING, AND PEACE IN THE EUCHARIST.

May we all be mindful of the invitation of Jesus: "The man who comes to me I will never turn away" (Jn. 6:37). Humility, awareness of our pilgrim state, a willingness and determination to grow in the likeness of the Risen Christ will help to restore direction of purpose and spiritual stability.

Negative Reactions To The Encyclical

The position taken by the Holy Father in his encyclical troubled many. The reasons for this are numerous. Not a few had been led and had led others to believe that a contrary decision might be anticipated. The mass media which largely shape public opinion have, as the Holy Father himself pointed out, at times

amplified the voices which are contrary to the voice of the Church.

Then, too, doctrine on this point has its effect not only on the intellects of those who hear it but on their deepest emotions; it is hardly surprising that negative reactions have ranged from sincere anguish to angry hurt or bitter disappointment, even among devout believers. Finally, a decision on a point so long uncontroverted and only recently confronted by new questions was bound to meet with mixed reactions.

That tensions such as these should arise within the household of the faith is not surprising and need not be scandalous. The Holy Father frankly confessed that his teaching would not be easily received by all. Some reactions were regrettable, however, in the light of the explicit teaching of Vatican Council II concerning the obligation of Catholics to assent to papal teaching even when it is not presented with the seal of infallibility. The Council declared:

"In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul. This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex-cathedra*. That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known chiefly either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or

from his manner of speaking" (*Lumen Gentium*, 25).

Pope Paul has recalled this obligation several times with respect to his encyclical on the regulation of birth, beginning when he exhorted priests "to be the first to give, in the exercise of your ministry, the example of loyal internal and external obedience to the teaching authority of the Church." (*Humanae Vitae*, 20)

Norms of Licit Theological Dissent

There exist in the Church a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought and also general norms of licit dissent. This is particularly true in the area of legitimate theological speculation and research. When conclusions reached by such professional theological work prompt a scholar to dissent from non-infallible received teaching the norms of licit dissent come into play.

They require of him careful respect for the consciences of those who lack his special competence or opportunity for judicious investigation. These norms also require setting forth his dissent with propriety and with regard for the gravity of the matter and the deference due the authority which has pronounced on it.

The reverence due all sacred matters, particularly questions which touch on salvation, will not necessarily require the responsible scholar to relinquish his opinion but certainly to propose it with prudence born of intellectual grace and a Christian confidence that the truth is greater and will prevail.

When there is question of theological dissent from non-infallible doctrine, we must recall that there is always a presumption in favor of the magisterium.

"The Encyclical does not undertake to judge the consciences of individuals but to set forth the authentic teachings of the Church which Catholics believe interprets the divine law to which consciences should be formed."

Even non-infallible authentic doctrine, though it may admit of development or call for clarification or revision, remains binding and carries with it a moral certitude, especially when it is addressed to the universal Church, without ambiguity, in response to urgent questions bound up with faith and crucial to morals.

The expression of theological dissent from the magisterium is in order only if the reasons are serious and well-founded, if the manner of the dissent does not question or impugn the teaching authority of the Church and is such as not to give scandal.

Since our age is characterized by popular interest in theological debate and given the realities of modern mass media, the ways in which theological dissent may be effectively expressed, in a manner consistent with pastoral solicitude, should become the object of fruitful dialogue between bishops and theologians. These have their diverse ministries in the Church, their distinct responsibilities to the faith and their respective charisms.

Even responsible dissent does not excuse one from faithful presentation of the authentic doctrine of the Church when one is performing a pastoral ministry in Her name.

We count on priests, the counselors of persons and families, to heed the appeal of Pope Paul that they "expound the Church's teaching on marriage without ambiguity;" that they "diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ," but "teach married couples the indispensable way of prayer . . . without ever allowing them to be discouraged by their weakness" (*Humanae Vitae*, 29).

We commend to confessors, as does Pope Paul, the example of the Lord Himself, who was indeed intransigent with evil, but merciful towards individuals.

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