

THE EXTENT OF THE HARM OF VATICAN II

In a paper published in 1993—*The Prayer of Lady Macbeth: How the Contraceptive Mentality has neutered Religious Life*—the late Fr Paul Mankowski S.J., exposed the effects of the rebellion of innumerable Catholics to the moral teaching in *Humanae Vitae* (July 25th, 1968).¹

That rebellion was not, as has been claimed, something spontaneous precipitated by the spirit of the age. It was precipitated by Vatican II and, specifically, by the words and conduct of the bishops who attended. These chose to favour errors promoted by their *periti*, formed in the heterodoxy of the *nouvelle théologie*, rather than conform themselves to the Church's teaching.² This attitude was manifest in the most scandalous document of that ersatz Council, the so-called Declaration on Religious Freedom, where they ignored the Church's condemnation of two propositions Pius IX had repeated in his *Syllabus of Errors* (December 8th, 1864):

- Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, led by the light of reason, he thinks to be the true religion.
- In the worship of any religion whatever, man can find the way to eternal salvation and can attain eternal salvation.

These condemnations reiterated the teaching of his predecessor Gregory XVI in *Mirari vos* (August 15th, 1832) on the heresy labelled *indifferentism*, “the perverse opinion... spread by the wicked that it is possible to obtain the eternal salvation of the soul by the profession of any kind of religion, as long as morality is maintained”. The teaching was confirmed by Leo XIII in *Libertas praestantissimum* (June 20th, 1888):

“If it be asked which of the many conflicting religions it is necessary to adopt, reason and the natural law unhesitatingly tell us to practise that one which God enjoins upon us and which men can easily recognize by certain exterior notes through which Divine Providence has willed that it should be distinguished, because in a matter of such moment the most terrible loss would be the consequence of error. Wherefore, when a liberty such as We have described [liberty of religion] is offered to man the power is given him to pervert or abandon with impunity the most sacred of duties, and to exchange the unchangeable good for evil. Which, as We have said, is no liberty at all but its degradation and the abject submission of the soul to sin.” [n. 20]

Vatican II's abandonment of Catholic principle here and elsewhere in documents the bishops issued together with personal behaviour which saw them give precedence to ambition over charity scandalised the faithful. To turn the scandal into rebellion all that was needed was a catalyst.

* * * * *

¹ Cf. <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6039>

² This defective 'theology' is mentioned at https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/canonisations-since-vii.pdf The criticism of it by Fr Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance O.P. may be viewed in *Catholic Family News* at <https://ia902804.us.archive.org/26/items/Garrigou-LagranceEnglish/Where%20is%20the%20New%20Theology%20Leading%20Us%20-%20Garrigou-Lagrance%2C%20Reginald%2C%20O.P..pdf>

In his 1998 text *What went wrong with Vatican II* Dr Ralph McInerny, Professor of Mediaeval Studies and Director of the Jacques Maritain Center at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, departed from his theme to address the reaction to *Humanae Vitae*. He set out the statement of Fr Charles Curran, Associate Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of America, subscribed by some two hundred theologians (published June 30th, 1968 in the *New York Times*) in support of its rejection. Inevitably among the reasons the group advanced was the claim that “[the past] authoritative statement on religious liberty... [had] been corrected at a later date”. And with justice! If the Church’s bishops could choose to ignore the Church’s teaching and her authority why were her theologians not entitled to do the same?

Fr Mankowski used the simple analogy of a calculator to demonstrate how the refusal of members of the faithful to accept the Church’s teaching on this moral question entailed rejection of the Church’s authority *in toto*.³ The revolution for which *Humanae Vitae* was the catalyst was not, he argued, a sexual one but religious:

“For it involves the belief that there is a higher, or deeper, or at any rate more reliable mediator of God’s will than the teaching Church... If the Church is wrong in *Humanae vitae*, the judgment that it is wrong can only be made with reference to some standard... the crucial point is that whatever standard is taken as fundamentally reliable, this standard judges the Church, and is not judged by her.”

And the consequences?

“For the vowed religious, the first casualty of the contraceptive mentality is the Church as the focus of religious authority. The realisation, perhaps, was gradual, but when prominent theologians, bishops, and entire episcopal conferences distanced themselves from *Humanae vitae* without severing themselves from the Church, the logic of their dissent could hardly be confined to a single issue. In an astonishingly brief span of years the Church has been transformed from the measuring rod to the thing measured; no longer the guarantor of authentic religious life, she is everywhere under suspicion. In liturgy, scripture, pastoral efforts, theology and sacraments, the Church is regarded by entire congregations as guilty until proven innocent, and proof of this innocence is (in these circles) seldom forthcoming...”

Paul VI complained over the negative reaction to his encyclical but he was hoist with his own petard for he had aided and abetted the bishops’ rebellion in *Dignitatis Humanae* when he endorsed their heterodox utterances. If anyone doubts this let him study Pope Paul’s *Address to the United Nations General Assembly* of October 4th, 1965 where he anticipated the bishops’ departure from Catholic principle by two months publicly contradicting the Church’s position. Later, in the celebrated *Washington Case*, he was to scandalise the faithful still further by refusing to uphold his own moral teaching in *Humanae Vitae*.⁴

³ He writes: “If my pocket calculator has proved unreliable in one calculation, I might still maintain that it ‘gives true answers’ for other calculations, but not *all* others: only, in fact, those which I have some reason to believe to be true. And my basis for judging the instrument accurate in these other computations *cannot* be the calculator itself—but rather some norm (a mathematical table, my own longhand reckonings) that I take to be fundamentally sound...”

⁴ Cf. George Weigel, *The Courage to be Catholic*, New York, 2002, pp. 68 et seq.

Fr Mankowski demonstrates how the *modus operandi* of the rebels reflected the deference to Protestantism the Council's bishops had shown.

"Dissenters from *Humanae vitae*... maintain that an action specifically and categorically condemned by the Church may be contemplated and chosen in good will as a licit option by a conscientious Catholic."

Protestantism's signal characteristic, as English historian Sir Maurice Powicke had noted some 27 years earlier, is the assertion of the supremacy of conscience.⁵

Chesterton remarked in his *Orthodoxy* how the Protestant revolt had not only set the vices free but also the virtues - set them free from each other⁶ - a character which appears in the justifications advanced for rejecting the Church's teaching.

"Dissenters... placed enormous rhetorical stress on the primacy of charity in the Church's moral tradition. No one could deny the centrality of charity... but on the level of popular controversy it resulted in the illegitimate derivation of two erroneous propositions: first, that an act that is not a sin against charity is no sin at all; second, that any act done with a charitable intention is for that reason justified... The theological justification for these arguments, however, necessitated a reformulation of the Christian imperative of charity and of traditional Catholic moral reasoning. In this new scheme, the morally preferable option is not one that conforms to a relevant principle of conduct but the one that results in more good (i.e., more "pre-moral good") than its rivals."

Here we see the closing of the mind to the duty to love God first. Charity to one's neighbour is secondary and, in the absence of love of God, not charity at all. That contraception, no matter what form it takes, offends God as the creator and giver of life is ignored.

The dissenters' attitude evidences another aberration abroad at Vatican II, the contention that it is possible to do evil that good may come of it. In his long-winded encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25th, 1995) Pope John Paul sought to defend the Church's teaching against contraception and abortion. The ambivalence of expression he employed, however, moved many of the faithful to find in n. 73 of that document an exception to the rule of morals in hard cases.⁷ That these should have sought to excuse the inexcusable is evidence of Vatican II's spirit of ambivalence. Pope Benedict XVI, one of the Council's *alumni*, was himself guilty of the aberration evidenced by gratuitous remarks he made addressing the use of condoms in the course of a published interview with Peter Seewald in 2010.⁸

Fr Mankowski cites a distinction of theologian, John Finnis, to the point. While the traditional belief of Christians is that they are *to serve* the good, the dissenters argued that their duty is *to effect* the good.

"[T]he belief that our Christian duty is to effect the good has been used by Catholic theologians to justify instances of abortion, euthanasia, threatened destruction of civilian populations as a deterrent and so forth, [yet] it is contraception that provided the real impulse behind the

⁵ "The claim of conscience in the end took the place of Rome." Sir Maurice Powicke, *The Reformation in England*, London, 1941

⁶ *Orthodoxy*, London, 1908, Ch. III, *The Suicide of Thought*

⁷ For our criticism and its correct interpretation see https://www.superflumina.org/ev73suprempr_final.html

⁸ *Luce del Mondo*. See *The Pope and the Question of Condoms* at https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/pope-condoms-conflated.pdf for criticism of his conduct.

advancement of this theory, and indeed it is the justification of contraception that continues to provide the rallying point of dissent in the Church.”

The consequence has been reduction of Catholic principle to the banal and secular manifest in—

“the direction of change in religious communities... the de-emphasis on adoration, catechesis, spiritual works of mercy... the new stress on consciousness raising, political action, community organizing, world peace, environmental awareness... the excuses and justifications frequently offered by priests and nuns acting as university officials or appointed agents of state for their complicity in scandals of political and public life, for their actions that are contrary to Church teaching. Is it not the case, almost without exception, that their plea is to a higher responsibility to effect the good, rather than to serve it?”

Something else died in the rebellion the Council precipitated, the spirit of asceticism.

“Before the availability of reliable contraception Catholic couples could plausibly be urged to accept the various disciplines of married love as part of an asceticism of patience. With the Pill, the ground changed almost overnight. Now couples were required to make the asceticism of renunciation a part of their married lives, because the twin hardships of sexual abstinence and provision for large families became easily, eminently, avoidable.”

What should married couples do to resolve the question?

“Not for the first time, they looked to their clergy and religious—those set apart and coached in asceticism—for their clues on how to respond...”

And what was the advice?

“With a vehemence that outdid the most truculent layman, Catholic clergy and religious led the charge *against Humanae vitae*, and I would wager that, given an equal number of randomly selected priests or religious and married laymen, one would find greater support for the Church’s teaching in the latter group than the former — by far.”

Thus with their corruption of religious life the Council’s bishops facilitated a systematic attack on the integrity of the family.

Fr Mankowski closes by addressing the aberrations that have plagued the Church since the Council’s close.

“We are frequently invited, sometimes by fellow Catholics, to view the scandal of priestly and religious paedophilia (and other sexual abuses) as an occasion to despair, as an assault on our faith... [But] when the prayer of Lady Macbeth goes up, when we trade in the multiform protections and incentives of a responsible tradition of asceticism for the wisdom of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, one would expect it to breed maggots...”

In what is set out above we have not covered a fraction of the evils for which Vatican II is responsible. In the fulness of time God’s Holy Church will correct the errors for which that pseudo-synod is responsible and identify the harm for which it is responsible, visiting with condign anathemas those who persist in holding to its heterodox teachings.

Michael Baker

November 26th, 2023—*Last Sunday after Pentecost*