

BULL OF POPE PIUS VI

AUCTOREM FIDEI

August 28th, 1794

[Introduction]

PIUS, BISHOP, Servant of the Servants of God. Greetings and [my] apostolic blessing to all the Christian faithful. The Apostle Paul [1] commands us, who look on Jesus as the author and finisher of the faith, to consider diligently the nature and magnitude of the opposition against Him, which He endured from sinners, so that from time to time we, wearied by labours and dangers, do not lose heart and fall almost lifeless. It is of utmost necessity that We strengthen and refresh ourselves with this most wholesome thought when the raging heat of the dreadful and never-ending conspiracy against the very body of Christ which is the Church [2] takes fire, so that, strengthened in the Lord and in the might of His power, and protected by the shield of faith, we may be able to resist in the evil day and quench the fiery darts of the most wicked one. [3] Truly in these tumultuous times, in this revolutionary upheaval, all good men must join the burdensome struggle against any and all enemies of the Christian name. The guardianship and guidance of the entire flock entrusted to our pastoral care are a more serious matter for Us, upon whom greater zeal for the Christian religion is enjoined, than upon all others. [4] But despite the heavy responsibility set upon our shoulders to bear the burden of all who are heavily laden, the more aware We are of our own frailty, the more We harbour a more robust hope. The divinely established ruling principle in the person of Blessed Peter lightens the apostolic duty so that he, who never intended to abandon government of the Church once it has been given by Christ, might not cease to carry on his shoulders the burdens of the apostolic governance of those whom God had given to him as heirs to protect and safeguard with a perpetual succession.

And indeed in these hardships that surround us on every side a heap of other troubles have mounded up, as it were, so that what should have been for us a source of joy is the source of a greater sadness. For in fact, when a leader of God's holy Church under the name of Priest turns the very people of Christ away from the path of truth toward the peril of an erroneous belief, and when this occurs in a major city, then clearly the distress is multiplied, and a greater anxiety is in order. [5]

To be sure this has not occurred in far-off lands but in the full blaze of Italy, under the eyes of the City [viz. Rome], and near the threshold of the Apostles [viz. the tombs of Ss. Peter and Paul]. There was a bishop, distinguished by the honour of two Sees (Scipione de' Ricci, formerly the bishop of Pistoia and Prato), whom we embraced with paternal love as he approached Us to take up his pastoral duty. In the very text of the rite of his sacred ordination he, in turn, bound himself by means of a scrupulous, solemn, oath to the fidelity and obedience due to Us and to this Apostolic See. And yet this same man in the short space of time after he had left our embrace with the kiss of peace, on going to the people entrusted to him, surrounded himself with the deceits of a pack of teachers of a perverse school of thought.

He began to apply himself but not in the measure he should have, that is to say, by defending, nurturing, and perfecting the praiseworthy and peaceful form of Christian teaching that his bishop predecessors had introduced long ago and had almost secured. Instead, he set about confusing, destroying, and utterly overturning that teaching by introducing troublesome novelties under the guise of a sham reform. Further, when at our urging he had decided upon a diocesan synod, it happened that by inflexible pertinacity in his own way of thinking a more severe occasion of ruin grew out of the source from which we should have looked for some kind of remedy for the wounds [he had precipitated].

Truly, after the Synod of Pistoia emerged from the hiding places in which it had lurked concealed for some time, there was no one with pious scruples and good sense who did not at once warn that the plan of the authors had been to unite into one whole, like a body, the seeds of the vicious teachings they had scattered through numerous pamphlets; to revive errors not long since condemned; and to detract from the faith and authority of those apostolic decrees by which they stood condemned.

When we perceived that the more serious were the problems, the more considerably they demanded the support of our pastoral care, we did not delay to take those counsels that seemed appropriate, both in healing and suppressing the emergent evil. Being first mindful of the sage advice of our predecessor St. Zosimus, *Those things that are of great importance call for a weighty examination* [6], We directed four bishops and their personal theologians from the secular clergy to examine the Synod that this bishop had produced. Next we assigned a committee of several cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church and other bishops to study diligently the complete collection of [the Synod's] acts, to compare with each other the widely scattered passages and to discuss the opinions formally identified. We personally received their decisions, both orally and in writing.

They decided that the Synod must be universally condemned and that very many of its propositions must be reprov'd with more or less serious censures, some indeed in and of themselves, and others in connection with the formally expressed opinions. After hearing and considering their observations, We also took care that certain leading statements of wrongful teachings taken from it—ones to which the condemnable opinions spread by the Synod directly or indirectly referred—were reduced to a certain order for the future, and that each one of these should be subject to its own special censure.

However, in case obstinate men should seize an opportunity for detraction, notwithstanding either the very carefully conducted comparison of passages or the investigation of the formal opinions, to meet this probable calumny We determined to make use of the wise counsel, duly and cautiously applied, which several of our most holy predecessors, as well as highly esteemed bishops, and even general councils, had provided, larded with notable examples when they had had cause to restrain the rise of dangerous or harmful novelties of this sort. They knew the capacity of innovators in the art of deception.

In order not to shock the ears of Catholics, the innovators sought to hide their tortuous manoeuvres by seemingly innocuous words [7] such as would allow them to insinuate error into souls in the subtlest manner. Once the truth had been compromised, they could, by means of slight changes or additions in phraseology, distort the confession of the faith necessary for our salvation, and lead the faithful by gradual errors to their eternal damnation. Regardless of the circumstances under which it is used this manner of dissimulating and lying is vicious. It can never be tolerated in a synod for the reason that a synod's principal glory consists above all in teaching the truth with clarity and excluding all danger of error.

Moreover, while this is sinful it cannot be excused in the way that one sees it being done, under the erroneous pretext that seemingly shocking affirmations in one place are developed along orthodox lines in others, while in yet other places they are corrected—as if allowing the possibility of either affirming or denying the statement, or of leaving it up the personal inclination of the individual. Such has always been the fraudulent and daring method used by innovators to establish error. It comprehends both the promoting of error and excusing it.

It is as if the innovators had pretended they always intended to present the alternative passages, especially to those of simple faith who come to know only some part of the conclusions of such discussions, published in the common language for everyone's use. Or again, as if the same faithful had the ability, without getting confused and avoiding all risk of error, to examine such documents and judge such matters for themselves.

It is a most reprehensible technique for the insinuation of doctrinal errors and one condemned long ago by our predecessor St. Celestine [8] who found it used in the writings of Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, [a device] he exposed to condemn it with the greatest possible severity. Once these texts were examined carefully, the impostor was exposed and confounded, for he expressed himself in a plethora of words, mixing things which were true with others which were obscure; in such a way, at times, that he was able to confess those things which were denied while at the same time possessing a basis for denying the very sentences he confessed. In order to expose such snares, a thing which is frequently necessary in every century, no other method is required than the following: whenever it becomes necessary to expose statements that disguise some suspected error or danger under the veil of ambiguity, one must denounce the perverse meaning under which the error opposed to Catholic truth is camouflaged.

The more freely We embraced a program of complete moderation, the more we foresaw that, in order to reconcile souls and bring them to the unity of spirit in the bond of peace (which, we are glad to say, has by God's favour already happily occurred in many), it would be of enormous assistance to be prepared in case pertinacious sectarians of the synod—if any, God forbid, still remain,—should be free in the future to bring in as allies the Catholic schools and make them partners of their own just condemnation and set in motion new disturbances. They endeavour to entice to their side the clearly unwilling and resistant schools by a kind of

distorted likeness of similar terms, even though the schools profess expressly different opinions. Then, if any previously imagined, milder opinion about the synod has hitherto escaped the notice of these imprudent men, let every opportunity of complaining still be closed to them. If they are sound in doctrine, as they wish to appear, they cannot take it hard that the teachings identified in this manner—teachings that exhibit errors from which they claim to be entirely distant—stand condemned.

Yet We did not think that We had sincerely proved our mildness, or more correctly, the charity that impels us toward our brother whom we wish to assist by every means, if We may still be able. [9] Indeed, We are impelled by the charity that moved our predecessor Celestine. [10] He did not refuse to wait with a patience greater than seemed necessary, even against what the law demanded, for priests to mend their ways. For we, along with Augustine and the Fathers of Milevis, prefer and desire that men who teach perverse things be healed in the Church by pastoral care rather than that they be cut off from Her without hope of salvation, if necessity does not force one to act. [11]

Therefore, so it should not appear that any effort to win over a brother was overlooked, before We progressed further. We thought to summon the aforementioned bishop to Us by means of very cordial letters written to him at our request, promising that we would receive him with good will and that he would not be barred from freely and openly declaring what seemed to him to meet the needs of his interests. In truth, We had not lost hope of the possibility that, if he possessed that teachable mind which Augustine, [12] following the Apostle, required above all else in a bishop, [We would find him amenable to Our direction]. As soon as the chief points of doctrine under dispute, which seemed worthy of greater consideration, were proposed to him simply and candidly, without contention and rancour, [We hoped] he could explain more reasonably what had been proposed ambiguously, and would openly repudiate the manifestly perverse notions displayed. And thus, with his name held in high regard amid the acclaim of all good men, the turmoil aroused in the Church would be restrained as peaceably as possible by a much-desired correction. [13]

But now since he, alleging ill health, has decided not to avail himself of the kindness offered, We can no longer postpone fulfilling our apostolic duty.

It is not a matter of the danger to one or other of the dioceses: any novelty at all assails the Universal Church. [14] For a long time, from every side, the judgment of the supreme Apostolic See has not only been awaited but earnestly demanded by unremitting, repeated, petitions. God forbid that the voice of Peter ever be silent in that See, where, living and presiding perpetually, he presents the truth of the faith to those in search of it. [15] A more lengthy forbearance in such matters is not safe because it is almost as much a crime to close one's eyes in such cases, as it is to preach their offences to religion. [16]

Therefore, such a wound must be healed, a wound which harms not just one member, but the entire body of the Church. [17] With the aid of divine piety We must take care that, with the

dissensions removed, the Catholic faith is preserved inviolate and that, once those who defend perverse teachings have been recalled from error, those whose faith has been proved may be fortified by our authority. [18]

After beseeching the light of the Holy Ghost both with our own incessant public and private prayers and also with those of the pious Christian faithful, and after considering everything fully and seasonably, We have resolved to condemn and reprove the several propositions, doctrines, and opinions of the acts and decrees of the aforementioned Synod, either those expressly taught or those conveyed through ambiguity, with their own appropriate notes and censures for each of them (as was said above), just as We condemn and reprove them in this our Constitution, which will be valid in perpetuity.

They are as follows...

Footnotes

Note: the references to Coustant are to the works of the French Benedictine, Pierre Coustant (1654 – 1721).

1. Hebrews 12
2. Colossians 1
3. Ephesians 6]
4. Pope St. Siricius, To Himerius of Tarragona, Epistle 1 in Coustant.
5. Pope St. Celestine I, Epistle 12, in Coustant.
6. Pope St. Zosimus, Epistle 2 in Coustant.
7. Pope St. Leo the Great, Epistle 129, in the edition of Baller.
8. Pope St. Celestine I, Epistle 13, no. 2 in Coustant.
9. Pope St. Celestine I, Epistle 14, To the Clergy and People of Constantinople, no. 8, in Coustant.
10. Epistle 13, To Nestorius, no. 9.
11. Epistle 176, no. 4; 178, no. 2 in the Maurist edition.
12. Book 4, On Baptism Against the Donatists, ch. 5, and Book 5, ch. 26.
13. Pope St. Celestine I, Epistle 16, no. 2 in Coustant.
14. Pope St. Celestine I, Epistle 21, To the Bishops of France.
15. St. Peter Chrysologus, Epistle to Eutyches.
16. Pope St. Celestine I, Epistle 12, no. 2.
17. Pope St. Celestine I, Epistle 11, To Cyril, no. 3.
18. Pope St. Leo the Great, Epistle 23, To Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople.