

Letter from Vatican City

By Xavier Rynne October 25, 1968

Redemptorist Father Francis X. Murphy, the mysterious Vatican insider used the “Xavier Rynne” pseudonym to publish detailed reports about intrigue at the Second Vatican Council. As a journalist, Murphy attended the Second Vatican Council which met at the Vatican from 1962-1965. Under the pseudonym Xavier Rynne, combining his middle name and his mother's maiden name, he revealed the inner workings of Vatican II to The New Yorker. He is credited with setting the tone for the popular view of the council, depicting it as "conservative" versus "liberal".

When Pope Paul retired in mid-July to Castel Gandolfo, in the Alban Hills, where he goes every summer to escape the Roman heat, it was thought that, as in former years, no important business would take place. Things were different this year; suddenly, on July 29th, when it was least expected, the Pope issued his long-awaited encyclical on birth control. Entitled “Humanae Vitae,” it starts out rather hopefully with a series of statements about new problems, such as the population explosion, that have arisen in our day as a result of the sexual relations between husband and wife. Most readers expected the Pope to go on and say—as Pope John XXIII and the recent Vatican Council II said—that the Church must reassess and restate its doctrine in the light of changed conditions and new scientific knowledge. Yet, except for a brief admission that modern problems require “new and deeper reflection” on the message of Christianity, **the encyclical does not contain a single phrase indicating that there has been any reassessment of the moral problem that is troubling so many Roman Catholics today.** The whole import of the pronouncement is that the Church's condemnation of artificial contraception has always been sufficiently well known, and that it was merely necessary to reaffirm it more solemnly.

The encyclical was written—in “anguish,” according to the Pope—in answer to the many questions that were raised by Vatican Council II beginning in October, 1963, when Cardinal Émile Léger, of Montreal, and Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh, of Antioch, brought up the subject on the floor of St. Peter's before the whole Church in council. Their statements, along with others by bishops from many different countries, resulted in the Pope's appointment, in June, 1964, of a **Commission for the Study of the Problems Relating to Population, Family, and Birth, consisting of bishops, moral theologians, canonists, doctors, and qualified laymen, who would study all aspects of the matter and report to him. (Actually, the Commission was merely an enlargement of one appointed the previous year by Pope John.)** Almost exactly two years later, the commission submitted a majority report to Pope Paul. This was shortly followed by **a minority report from Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the arch-conservative ex-prefect of the Curia's Doctrinal Congregation (formerly the Holy Office) and the chairman of the birth-control commission.** This report was presented directly to the Pope by the Cardinal, bypassing the members of the commission. It adhered to the old-line position that no change is possible, reflecting what Ottaviani himself had said in 1964 at the Council—“I issue a warning to you bishops, you who have proclaimed the infallibility of the Pope and of the bishops with the Pope: a doubt has been raised with regard to the Church's teaching on marriage. Can the Church possibly have erred for so many centuries?” The striking parallels in thought and language between the minority report and Pope Paul's encyclical lead to only one conclusion: **The basis of the encyclical was the minority report.**

Probably not since the days of Pope Pius IX's ill-fated “Syllabus of Errors”—a mid-nineteenth-century omnibus of papal condemnations—has any pronouncement of a modern pope created a storm like this. Far from being “well received,” as Pope Paul asserted in one of his audiences a few weeks later, the document started a serious crisis within the Church, the proportions of which are only beginning to be revealed. This is the opinion not only of progressives. According to Sebastian Tromp, S.J., consultant of the Doctrinal Congregation and leading theological spokesman for the conservative Curial position, “The crisis through which the Church is now

passing is more serious than the Reformation.” No modern encyclical has ever been so severely criticized. It has been called “ill-conceived,” “inadequately expressed,” “regressive in its ideas,” and even, flatly, “wrong.” Its defects are all the more glaring in view of the mountain of evidence amassed—by papal decree—and discussed throughout the Catholic world in the last five years. Even a group of Italian theologians (not usually considered the most progressive in the Church), meeting in Bologna soon after the encyclical was issued, pointed out that every footnote in the document referred to a source that was at least twenty years old. “*Humanae Vitae*” can scarcely be called pastoral in tone, nor is its main thesis supported by references to scripture—an omission considered extraordinary under the circumstances. In essence, the encyclical is a document of condemnation and reproof, thus representing a return to the thinking of the days before John XXIII. As far as the encyclical is concerned, Vatican Council II might just as well never have occurred. As a result, there is a growing realization that the Pope has done more than issue an encyclical on birth control; the conviction has now begun to crystallize that he has taken a first important step toward repudiation of the Council.

A key passage of the encyclical asserts, “Each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life.” Yet it holds that the rhythm method (that is, reliance on the so-called “safe” period) is acceptable. This is a distinction that modern theology finds incomprehensible. For example, a distinguished group of theologians from France, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, Holland, and Czechoslovakia met in Amsterdam in September and issued a respectful critique pointing out that while the document on marriage issued by the Council, “*Gaudium et Spes*,” opened up new perspectives in the theology of marriage, the encyclical represented a retreat from, and rejection of, the Council’s position. The theologians stated that they could not understand the distinction that the encyclical tried to establish between reliance on the safe period and use of other contraceptive methods. “Each of these methods, it seems to us, can be used for good or for evil,” they said. “Their moral value depends not on whether they represent an interference in the biological process but, rather, on whether they serve to promote true conjugal love and responsible parenthood by ensuring the essential purpose of marriage and of the family.” The encyclical, unable to point to any scriptural texts either supporting its distinction between the two methods or proving the immorality of contraceptives, falls back on a strong appeal to “the natural law” and the constant teaching of the Catholic Church. (The concept of natural law is an idea borrowed from the Stoics by early Christian thinkers. In the fourth century, St. Augustine completed the alliance between Stoic and Christian ideas about marriage; as he tells us in his “Confessions,” he was a reformed roué who in his later years looked on the sensual pleasure of the sexual act as evil.)

Four years ago, after issuing his warning to the bishops at Vatican II, Cardinal Ottaviani said in an interview that the Church’s doctrine on marriage could never change, because it was based on “the natural law and several scriptural texts.” After the appearance of the encyclical, a statement originating in the Catholic University of America, and eventually signed by over six hundred theologians, canonists, and clerics, pointed out that some of the ethical conclusions contained in it “are based on an inadequate concept of the natural law,” adding, “The multiple forms of natural-law theory are ignored, and the fact that competent philosophers come to different conclusions on this very question is disregarded. Even the minority report of the papal commission noted grave difficulty in attempting to present conclusive proof of the immorality of artificial contraception based on the natural law.” Last August, in the London Times, Dr. John Marshall, the prominent English physician who was a member of the Pope’s birth-control commission, expressed shock at finding that the encyclical contained “no theological argument to support the view that contraception is contrary to the natural law.” Dr. Marshall recalled that in April, 1965, a crisis arose in the commission when the four theologians supporting the minority view could not demonstrate the intrinsic evil of contraception on the basis of the natural law; he said that they “rested their case on authority and on the fear of possible consequences that any change might have on both authority and sexual morality.” He had been startled by their admission, he said, because he had taken it for granted that theologians could buttress their stand with telling arguments from natural law or from scripture. No

scriptural texts have been forthcoming from Cardinal Ottaviani, or from the minority report, or from the encyclical itself. According to Dr. Marshall, the encyclical's assertion that it is not given to man to separate the procreative and the unitive aspects of the act of intercourse is "simply made without any proof being offered." He was also shocked by the statement that the use of contraceptives leads to "conjugal infidelity." "There is no scientific evidence to support this sociological assertion," he observed. "The assertion, moreover, casts a gratuitous slur—which I greatly regret—on the countless responsible married people who practice contraception and whose family life is an example to all."

Even in the Pope's official newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Carmelite Father Gino Concetti stated that "it is not possible to prove with conclusiveness" that contraception is forbidden by the natural law. The encyclical's reaffirmation of the Church's bleak attitude toward sex, which has plagued Catholic theology for some fifteen hundred years, is one of the most regressive aspects of the document. On this point, the *Tablet*, a London Catholic weekly, commented, "For centuries, the Church taught that married people necessarily sinned, if only venially, whenever they had intercourse—even though intercourse is part of the sacramentality of marriage. 'We have done away with this monstrous piece of Manichaeian rubbish.'" Except that, unfortunately, the encyclical reaffirms it. As for the rhythm method, the encyclical ignores the strong medical and scientific doubts about it expressed in the majority report of the papal commission. Dr. André Hellegers, a French member of the commission who had submitted to it medical evidence that rhythm babies are apt to be born with defects, ruefully observed, "I cannot believe that salvation is based on the thermometer [a necessary tool of the rhythm method], or that damnation is based on rubber."

Professor John T. Noonan, Jr., of the University of California at Berkeley, another member of the commission and the author of an immense scholarly work, "Contraception," published three years ago by the Harvard University Press, voiced in an interview his disappointment that the Pope did not consult with the commission while it was meeting, and added, "The new document is not an infallible statement. It is a fallible document written by a fallible man in the fallible exercise of his office." The peremptory nature of the encyclical also seems to have come as something of a shock to Cardinal John Heenan, of Westminster, a vice-chairman of the papal commission, who had indicated in a speech over a year ago that some change in present teaching was contemplated. Last spring, Cardinal Heenan spoke with irony about the minority report. "Although I presided at many meetings of the pontifical commission, I did not see [the minority report] before it appeared in the newspapers," he said. "This does not constitute what in England we would call an official minority report."

Death has silenced one of the most eloquent voices raised at the Council on the subject of marriage and birth control—that of the aged Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh. His strong and forthright words were one of the memorable events of the Council: "Frankly, can the official position of the Church in this matter not be reviewed in the light of modern theological, medical, psychological, and sociological science? In marriage, the development of personality and its integration into the creative plan of God are all one. Thus, the end of marriage should not be divided into 'primary' [procreation] and 'secondary' [conjugal love]. . . . And are we not entitled to ask if certain attitudes are not the product of outmoded ideas and, perhaps, a bachelor psychosis on the part of those unacquainted with this sector of life? Are we not, perhaps unwittingly, setting up a Manichaeian conception of man and the world, in which the work of the flesh, vitiated in itself, is tolerated only in view of children? How relieved the Christian conscience felt when Pope Paul announced to the world that the problem of birth control and family morality 'is under study—a study as extensive and deep as possible; that is, as serious and honest as the great importance of this problem requires.' "

The dramatic retirement of Cardinal Léger from the Archdiocese of Montreal last year to devote himself to working as a missionary among the poor and leprosy in Africa has caused speculation here that he may have been motivated by advance word of what was coming. The Cardinal was a leading spokesman at the Council for

a reassessment of the doctrine on marriage and family life. Speaking on the floor of St. Peter's, he said, "A certain pessimistic and negative attitude regarding human love, attributable neither to scripture nor to tradition but to philosophies of past centuries, has prevailed [in the Church], and this has veiled the importance and legitimacy of conjugal love in marriage. . . . Conjugal love is good and holy in itself, and it should be accepted by Christians without fear. In marriage, the spouses consider each other not as mere procreators but as persons loved for their own sakes. The intimate union of the spouses finds a purpose in love. And this end is truly the end of the act itself, even when it is not ordained to procreation."

It is interesting to note that a key phrase used by Pope John in his speech at the opening of the Council—"without fear"—occurs in Cardinal Léger's statement. After studying the text of "Humanae Vitae," many have reached the sad conclusion that it is to a considerable extent a product of the psychology of fear. If the encyclical aimed at proclaiming the authority of the papacy and improving public morality, it seems to have served its purpose badly. In fact, it can be said to have substantially damaged papal authority. And in raising so many questions of conscience among the clergy and the laity it has created more problems than it has solved.

The encyclical is not an infallible statement by the Pope. It deals not with divine revelation but with a question that involves human wisdom. Monsignor Ferdinando Lambruschini, the Curia official who presented the encyclical at a press conference in Rome, acknowledged that the document was not infallible, and that the possibility of revision—if new data appeared—was not excluded by Pope Paul. He added, however, that while the encyclical "is not infallible," loyal and full assent was owed it "in proportion to the level of authority from which it emanates." A prominent English Catholic layman, T. F. Burns, the editor of the Tablet, who was for many years director of the old and distinguished Catholic publishing house of Burns & Oates, expressed in his newspaper what many Catholics feel about the encyclical when he defined the difference between "divine revelation of truth inaccessible to reason" and natural ethics: "If he [the Pope] speaks about the natural law—precisely the subject within the scope of reason—his decision is worth only the facts and arguments produced in its support. . . . As St. Thomas [Aquinas] observed . . . in the field of reason, the argument from authority is the feeblest." During September, twenty thousand laymen held a traditional annual meeting, called the Katholikentag, in Essen, Germany. Pope Paul "sent them a special message, asserting that "the great majority of Catholics throughout the world have given both assent and obedience" to his encyclical. The laymen, however, voted a resolution stating that parents "cannot follow the demand of obedience" by the Pope in this matter and asked him to withdraw the encyclical. The subtly worded resolution continued, "We share with Pope Paul VI his concern for a right understanding of the nature of marriage, but in conscience we reject the governess-like attitude of L'Osservatore Romano, which tries to regiment faithful and adult Christians into the role of mute receivers of orders."

A rundown of public statements made in immediate response to the encyclical reveals a surprising range of highly individual interpretations and reactions. Cardinal Richard Cushing, of Boston: "Rome has spoken." Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, of Los Angeles: "Refreshing." Archbishop Terence Cooke, of New York: "'Thou art Peter Where Peter is, there is the Church.' . . . Be assured of our prayerful pastoral efforts in fulfilling this urgent responsibility." Archbishop John Krol, of Philadelphia: "The Church is not a mere echo of the religious consciousness of the community, nor an expression of the opinion of the faithful." Cardinal Heenan, of Westminster: "The Pope has given his promised guidance on the morality of artificial contraception. He realized that his words would be a disappointment to many. He foresaw that they would create bitterness in those who had expected a different solution to this delicate problem. . . . While accepting it, we look forward to further pastoral guidance on the whole question of Christian family life." Archbishop John Murphy, of Cardiff: "It will be hailed as the Magna Carta not merely of all women but of all men and all children." Cardinal Bernard Alfrink, of Utrecht: "Encyclicals are statements of papal authority that one cannot ignore. Catholics must think

this over in forming their consciences.” Patrick Casey, Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar-General of Westminster: “We are rational beings; we are not animals; this is not the farmyard.” Dom Sebastian Moore, of Downside Abbey: “A piece of reasoning that is odd in the extreme. . . . This extraordinary conclusion follows from a fallacious understanding of the concept of the natural law, which sees the will of God inscribed not just in man and his life taken as a whole but in the detail of physical process. This fallacy has been exposed and rejected by every Catholic thinker of any standing. . . . Who will not be struck by the difference in attitude between this encyclical and the decrees of the recent Council, the latter concerned with human life in all its complexity, the former content, at its crucial point, with a facile and exploded theory?” Father Anton Meinrad Meier, the Swiss moral theologian: “It subordinates common sense to biological laws and the magisterium [teaching authority] of the Church, and therefore contradicts itself.” Monsignor George Schlichte, of the Seminary for Delayed Vocations, in Boston. “Neither Biblical, theological, nor truly historical.” Cardinal Patrick O’Boyle, of Washington: “Follow the encyclical without equivocation, ambiguity, or dissimulation.” Cardinal Julius Döpfner, of Munich: “The German bishops will study the text of the encyclical to see what help can be given to the faithful of Germany. But it will not be easy for priests to explain why the ban was renewed.” Archbishop Thomas Roberts, S.J., formerly of Bombay, now resident in England: “In my long experience of life, I have found that the truth always comes out best by an overstatement by the other side. This is what has happened now. A storm has broken out, and it will grow.” Archbishop Denis Hurley, of Durban (unlike most bishops, he is a theologian in his own right): “Acceptance [of the encyclical] is one of the most painful experiences of my life as a bishop.” Father Hans Küng, of Tübingen University, in Germany: “The encyclical is not only not infallible, it is wrong.”

The right of freedom of conscience, for both priests and laymen, has now become the chief issue arising out of the promulgation of the encyclical. Vatican II’s statement on the subject could not be more clear-cut: “The Vatican Council professes its belief that it is upon the human conscience that these obligations [to seek the truth] fall and exert their binding force. . . . No one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly. . . . Man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience.” In their statements made as national hierarchies, the Canadian, Belgian, and German bishops showed the greatest consideration for the faithful’s rights of conscience. The English hierarchy left it to be inferred that there are circumstances under which Catholics may allowably dissent from particular articles of the teaching of the encyclical. The most sophisticated declaration was that of the Italian bishops, who stressed the pastoral aspects of the encyclical, thus avoiding the need to discuss its doctrinal status. It is the American hierarchy that has taken the hardest line. In its statement, from which many individual bishops may have privately demurred, it endorsed the encyclical in full and directed that it must be obeyed to the letter. Four American prelates—McIntyre of Los Angeles, Krol of Philadelphia, Cody of Chicago, and O’Boyle of Washington—even undertook to journey here to profess their loyalty to the Pope, as if there might be some doubt about it. Pope Paul did not see them. The word is that they came to ask permission for the wholesale excommunication of dissenters, and were told to calm down. Since their return home, the most vociferous exponent of the hard line has been Cardinal O’Boyle, in whose diocese the Catholic University of America is situated. The style of his approach to dissenters has been likened to that of Mayor Daley at the Democratic National Convention. When Cardinal O’Boyle addressed the congregation in his cathedral to ask for support of the encyclical—as if it were the old days, when the faithful stood up to take a pledge for the Legion of Decency—many members of the congregation walked out. Admittedly, the burden is heavier for priests and teachers, who are subject to administrative pressures in their jobs, than it is for most of the laity, and if the Cardinal goes on at the present rate he may succeed in getting his clergy to walk out, too.

There is now little doubt among observers here that the issuance of “*Humanae Vitae*” is part of a campaign by Pope Paul against what he regards as the threat of neo-modernism in the Church today. On several occasions recently, he has been heard to say, “I am ready to face unpopularity, just as Pius X did when he suppressed modernism.” Historians are generally agreed that the witch-hunting that followed that operation, beginning in 1907, was a discredit to the Church. Besides the birth-control encyclical, there are other indications of Pope Paul’s hardened attitude. In June, he issued a platitudinous doctrinal statement, which he called his Credo, in reply to a catechism published by the Dutch bishops. (He may publicly condemn the catechism unless revisions insisted on by Roman theologians are incorporated into the next edition.) Then he made a fear-laden speech at the Eucharistic Congress in Bogotá, backing away from the stand he had taken in his 1967 encyclical, “*Populorum Progressio*,” in which he approved of recourse to revolutionary means in extreme situations of injustice. In the speech he also said, “The pastors of the Church [i.e., the bishops] . . . feel the instability that threatens us all,” and “We share in your distress, brothers, and in your fear.” Moreover, his remarks at recent general audiences have tended to be condemnatory. He has condemned modern films, modern music, the press, ecumenical “extremists,” and theological avant-gardism. Despite Vatican II’s promise of a more liberal era, the Doctrinal Congregation, with the Pope’s approval, has been stepping up its condemnations of the writings of theologians.

The Pope is said to have on his desk drafts of a variety of encyclicals soon to be issued—on the magisterium of the Church, on the crisis of authority, on defections from the priesthood. He is known to be particularly upset by the freedom with which certain national hierarchies have interpreted his birth-control encyclical, and intends to issue a “*Motu Proprio*,” or papal decree, limiting this sort of expression. In a speech here on October 14th he said, “Even some episcopal conferences themselves, on their own account, go beyond the proper limits.” It is also known that he feels a “sense of urgency because in four years he will be seventy-five. According to one report, Pope Paul, before his prostate surgery last year, wrote out in his own hand a letter of resignation, in which he said that if the operation were unsuccessful or resulted in a prolonged or incapacitating illness, he would “hand on” his powers to a cardinal to be designated by the Sacred College. He also stated his intention of resigning, regardless of the state of his health, when he reached seventy-five. Pope Paul’s penchant for the symbolic gesture is well known, and rumors about his resignation first arose two years ago when he visited the castle at Fumone where St. Celestine V—the only Pope in history to resign the office—ended his days in 1296. Those who have met Pope Paul recently report that he appears remarkably relaxed—he has a knack of putting people at their ease and of being warm in conversation. However, if the subject of his authority arises, his face and his mood change. The late Father Giulio Bevilacqua, an old friend who died shortly after the Pope made him a cardinal, wrote that whenever they were talking at table and he happened to mention the subject of the Pope’s authority, Paul would not answer but would merely smile wanly. The Pope’s notion of his own office, and of ecclesiastical authority in general, is even more rigorous than that of Pius XII. His sensitivity about his prerogatives as successor to St. Peter is repeatedly revealed. “Whom have you come to Rome to see?” he asks the pilgrims who flock here. “The Vicar of Christ! The successor of the Prince of the Apostles!” In speaking to the Latin-American prelates assembled at Bogotá, he referred to his authority as that of “him who by divine right possesses such a protected and awesome charism” —a phrase impossible to imagine on the lips of John XXIII. It is sometimes said that the difference between Pope John’s attitude and Pope Paul’s is this: John believed so firmly in the divine nature of the Church that he was anxious for everybody to embrace it and share in it; Paul is so deeply aware of its divine nature that he is afraid it may be contaminated.

It may well be that obsessive concern over the primacy of Peter and a desire to strengthen the authority of the papacy were what prompted Pope Paul to make an overhasty announcement that the bones of St. Peter had at last been identified. The announcement was received here with mixed feelings, in view of the conflicting opinions of archeologists. The Pope admitted that the evidence was not incontrovertible, and the circumstances

surrounding the discovery of the bones unfortunately bear this out. Excavations beneath St. Peter's that were begun in 1940 turned up a vast Roman cemetery, over which the Emperor Constantine had built his original basilica—the predecessor of the present Renaissance building. Below the site of the main altar was found a grave-like hole marked by a funerary monument dating from the second century. This is in all probability the site of the actual tomb of Peter, according to the archeologists. However, the few human bones (not a complete skeleton) uncovered in the course of the diggings were mixed with the bones of fowl. (The early Christians were given to picnicking at burial sites.) The unprofessional handling of these skeletal remains by the late Monsignor Ludwig Kaas, one of the Vatican officials in charge, caused the archeologists on the job to conclude that it would be impossible to decide which bones belonged to whom. Since history has preserved no authentic details of St. Peter's stature or physical peculiarities, there is very little basis for determining which particular bones, if any, were actually part of his skeleton. Last June, despite the objections of experts within the Vatican itself, Pope Paul accepted the identification put forward by Professoressa Margherita Guarducci, who has worked at the site. Unfortunately, her work is that of an epigraphist, and her area of competence is largely limited to the inscriptions on tombs. It is she who decided that a particular set of bones were definitely those of Peter. Paul's acceptance of this evidence is as disturbing to ordinary Catholics as it is to the archeological experts. Since the primacy of Peter is well established, they wonder whether this announcement serves to bolster it. Pope Pius XII, in 1950, was far more prudent; he claimed that the tomb of the first Apostle had been found, but he admitted that the problem of identifying the actual bones was close to insoluble.

Observers here are coming to believe that “theologian” and “theology” are dangerous words. For example, it is known that heresy charges are being compiled by the Doctrinal Congregation, with the Pope's approval, against Fathers Edward Schillebeeckx, Dominique Chenu, and Hans Küng because of the theological opinions expressed in their recent writings. Father Schillebeeckx, the well-known Dutch theologian and author of many books, was approached by the papal pro-nuncio to Holland before the encyclical was issued, reportedly to get his approval of the text in advance. It was hinted that in return the heresy charges against him would be dropped. Schillebeeckx replied that he could give no answer without first reading the encyclical. When he did read it, he said no. The Doctrinal Congregation is now holding a “preliminary hearing,” which may lead to a trial, and has appointed Karl Rahner, the noted German theologian, to defend Father Schillebeeckx. His bishop, Cardinal Alfrink, of Utrecht, when asked if he knew anything about the charges against Father Schillebeeckx, said that he did not but that he was sure the theologian could successfully defend himself against the Doctrinal Congregation. Father Chenu, the French Dominican authority on Thomas Aquinas, has been forbidden by the Dominican Master General, in Rome, to give a lecture at a theological congress to be held next spring in Waltersberg, Germany. (Father Schillebeeckx, also a Dominican, has likewise been barred from addressing the congress.) Father Chenu is believed to be one of those whom the Pope condemned, without naming names, in his audience on September 18th, for taking part in intercommunion activity “not in accord with ecumenical principles.” Father Chenu had done in Paris what Senator Robert Kennedy did in Washington when he received communion in a Baptist church as an act of solidarity with Negroes following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Father Küng, the outspoken young Swiss who is dean of the Catholic theological faculty at Tübingen University, recently compared the birth-control encyclical to the Galileo case. This imputation was indignantly rejected by *L'Osservatore Romano* as absurd. Pope Paul is worried about Küng's latest book on the theology of the Church. Entitled simply “The Church,” it has three hundred and eighty-seven pages on the New Testament theology of the Church as a community, a hundred pages on the ministry of the Church, and only thirty-six pages on the papacy, which is disposed of almost as a footnote. Pope Paul ordered the Doctrinal Congregation to summon Father Küng to Rome for a talk about his book. To the astonishment of old Curial hands, Küng replied that he did not have time to visit Rome at the moment. He promised, however, to come later if a number of conditions were met—one being that he be shown in advance the dossier on him compiled by Cardinal Ottaviani. The Curia cannot silence the doughty young theologian, because his university is state-

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run. Moreover, he would be welcome at any number of Protestant universities if he ever ran out of Catholic schools at which to lecture—an unlikely eventuality.

The substance of the Church's deposit of faith is one thing, Pope John said, "but the way it is expressed is another." This distinction between the truth and its formulation is anathema to the Roman theologians with whom Pope Paul has now surrounded himself. They have rejected Pope John's call for the Church to understand the modern world as an attempt to "humanize" the Church and the Catholic faith, and to make them "worldly." Cardinal Michele Pellegrino, of Turin, one of the most progressive Italian prelates, in a recent article here entitled "What the Church Means and Does Not Mean by Change," defined the true nature of aggiornamento and criticized, without mentioning the Pope, what is now recognized as Paul's fear-ridden and backward-looking attitude. Another Italian progressive, Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, speaking in the cathedral of Bologna as ex-archbishop of that city, scornfully referred to "those worried Christians" who "do not notice, or have not noticed, that if there is a crisis of faith in the Church today, it is a crisis of growth." Meanwhile, one can hardly overstate the seriousness of the theological crisis that the encyclical has stirred up. The unprecedented nature of the criticisms of Pope Paul, who up to now was considered progressive for carrying Vatican Council II to its conclusion after Pope John's death, is in itself sufficient to indicate this. A leading dogmatic theologian, Father George Tavard, whose books include the well-known "Holy Writ or Holy Church," has written an outspoken and penetrating critique of what he calls "the non-encyclical on birth control" for the National Catholic Reporter. In it he says, "It is within its own basic methodical assumptions that 'Humanae Vitae' does not make sense. I say this with all the greater sorrow, as I have until now considered Pope Paul as one of the most effective instruments of the needed reform of the Church. . . . This non-encyclical has plunged the Catholic world into unprecedented crises. . . . For the careful judgment of moral theologians cannot be disregarded, even by a Pope, without damage to the entire theological enterprise. . . . The days of pronouncements to which all the Church submits because they come from the Pope's office are over. The credibility of the Pope's ordinary magisterium has been immeasurably damaged."

Father Bernard Häring, of Rome, who has taught at Yale and Union Theological Seminary and is widely regarded as the leading moral theologian today, said in his article "The Encyclical Crisis," in *Commonweal*, "No papal teaching document has ever caused such an earthquake in the Church as the encyclical 'Humanae Vitae.' . . . The document is regarded as a great victory by those groups who opposed the Council from beginning to end. . . . The day after the encyclical appeared . . . a priest came with the question whether he should not in honesty to his conscience give up his priestly ministry; he could not act in accordance with the encyclical." Father Häring then remarked, "If the Pope deserves admiration for the courage to follow his conscience and to do the most unpopular thing, all responsible men and women must show forth similar honesty and courage of conscience."

One of the most depressing aspects of the Pope's new hard-line policy is that it has been inspired and supported by the same group of Church officials who tried unsuccessfully to thwart the majority of the bishops at the Council. At their center, now as before, is Cardinal Ottaviani, seventy-eight, who is at his desk in the old Holy office building every day, even though he resigned in January as head of the Doctrinal Congregation. Working closely with him are Cardinal Amleto Cicognani, eighty-five, Secretary of State, who has daily meetings with the Pope; Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti, seventy, head of the Congregation for Religious Orders; and two new cardinals, the Curia-trained Dino Staffa, sixty-two, and Pericle Felici, fifty-seven, who were rewarded with red hats for their services at the Council. In a recent interview in *De Tijd*, the Dutch national Catholic daily, Father Schilleheekx said of this group, "In my opinion, Pope Paul has become a prisoner of five or six cardinals. Because of their one-sided information, he became convinced of the necessity of a hard line. Everybody knows who these cardinals are. They are really blind. They are the ones who are destroying the Church."

Earlier this summer, at the Liturgical Biblical Institute, in Canon City, Colorado, Father Häring made a fiery appeal to faithful Catholics to break through the small circle of Curial diehards who, he said, are destroying the Church by refusing to accept the changes wrought by the extraordinary magisterium of the Church—that is, the Pope and the bishops together at Vatican Council II. “The Pope must not let the Church fall into the hands of a small minority! “Father Häring cried. “It is for love of him that we have to cry now to the whole Church, ‘Rescue the Pope!’ ”