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## Official

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The pressures on Pope Paul to speak on contraception other than he did have been sustained and massive. They have been pressures of human respect, politics, prestigious opinion, emotional torment, threats that Church unity might be destroyed or ecumenical hopes dimmed, and, concentrating all these directly upon him, a virtually unanimous world press.

These are pressures before which lesser men would buckle in their eagerness to enjoy popular favor, to preserve an image of modernity and to seem to lead into the better future while in fact merely following the dictates of the moment.

In the face of such pressures, not all of them unworthy and some almost unendurable to the priestly, even the human spirit, the Holy Father's pronouncement must be seen by the just and generous as truly magnanimous and the Pope himself takes on heroic stature as a courageous teacher to our times, prophetic in the Old Testament sense, evangelical in the richest sense of the New.

The sensitive among the devout may read his words with tears, tears of admiration for the valiant Vicar of Christ who must bear fearless witness to the truth and tears of compassion for all who must, with equal Christian valor, bear the burden of the human condition made objectively holy, even when existentially heartbreaking, by those demands of truth with which beauty and goodness must always be reconciled.

Many Americans will see the situation in lighter perspective if they remember an incident, charged with like passionate controversy, which occurred on a lesser

but important level of history not so many years ago. Given the acclaim of some of the experts opposing the Holy Father presently command and the unpopularity he well knew his authoritative decision would provoke, world reaction to the Pope's bold, historic action recalls the excitement all over the United States the night of President Truman's plucky firing of Douglas MacArthur.

The parallel is imperfect, of course; the Church is not literally an army and the setting forth of religious truth is not the same as the development of political or military tactic. However, the parallel is, in its way, instructive. The professionals have been fully consulted and patiently heard; the leader has finally spoken as only he could and should do.

It now remains to be seen whether lesser spokesmen among the people of God have a sense of responsibility and order proportionate to that of the subordinate chieftains of the wisdom of the world. General MacArthur acted with great grace in response to his commander-in-chief and in accordance with the pledged word which constituted him in his proper place and dignity. One wonders whether we, in our various posts of competence and authority within the Church, will make good the assurances all parties gave from the beginning, gave and presumably meant, that our doctrinal opinions were speculative pending the pronouncement of the Pope; that our practical recommendations and disciplinary procedures were contingent upon the directives the Holy Father has now given without fear or ambiguity.

Our conformity with this given word will be the measure not only of our Catholic fidelity to the Pope but of our greatness, particularly, as he said pointedly, the greatness and the integrity of those specifically among us who teach or preach moral theology.

In this connection, and in view of the position which certain journalistic and broadly theological circles have attempted to consign to the Pope in the controversy on contraception, it is well to note that the Holy Father is not and has not been a kind of referee between two schools of thought on the question. Some lecturers and writers, including a few within the household of the faith, have inaccurately and unjustly represented the so-called "majority" and "minority" groups within commissions counseling the Pope as mutually exclusive camps of opposition as between which the Pope is maneuvered, by this construction of things, into acting as arbiter.

The fact is that each member of any commission advising the Pope on doctrine acts in accordance with his own conscience, on the basis of his own qualifications and within his own competence; if he acts in a Catholic spirit his contribution is not analogous to that of the member of a political caucus or a parliamentary debate. In such a process as that in the background of the Pope's doctrinal and disciplinary pronouncement there is no winning bloc or losing bloc; to suggest otherwise is to misread the contribution of those bishops, priests and laymen who served on the commissions and to contradict the theological premises on which they loyally, competently and sometimes sacrificially served.

The Pope is not a theological referee in a crisis of this kind. Rather, mindful of apostolic responsibilities proper and special to him, aware of the requirements in conscience of his unique teaching office in the Church (as a matter of faith) and in the world (as a matter of history), Pope Paul has heard all sides and now speaks not as a teacher among many teachers but as the supreme teacher, under God, of the flock committed to him in Peter by Christ.

It is difficult to see how the Pope could have spoken on the central issue of direct artificial contraception other than he did. The pretense that he would or should speak otherwise, especially any such pretense on the part of responsible theologians, has frequently been cruel to Pope Paul as a person and callous, often brutally so, to the conscientious, hard-pressed, decent Christians whom some writers have seemed intent on aligning into pressure groups for the embarrassment of their Father in Christ.

The attack on the Holy Father will be manifold. It will be said that he has failed to conform to the spirit and insights of the world in which we are privileged to live; Sacred Scripture, from Isaiah and Osee to St. Paul, will comfort him and confirm his conscience on this point. It will be said that history will judge harshly his effort to witness to truth and to serve humanity; a good defense can already be made against that facile argument, but, in any case, it is not the judgment of history that Paul must either fear or face.

Most painful to him, and most shameful on the part of his critics, will be the suggestion that he has loftily branded millions of his own flock, Catholics trapped in the mentality and the practice of contraception, as mortally sinful. He has, of course, done no such thing. Only God judges who, among the weak, the frustrated, the confused, the desperate, are sinners and who, in varying degrees and for a variety of reasons, may be diminished in their moral guilt.

What Pope Paul has done, what he had to do, is recall to a generation that does not like the word the fact that sin exists; that artificial contraception is objectively sinful; that those who impose it, foster it, counsel it, whether they be governments, experts, or—God forgive them!—spiritual directors, impose, foster and counsel objective sin—just as they would if they taught racism, hatred, fraud, injustice or impiety. The Holy Father has pointed out what is, in fact, sinful, not who is, alas, a sinner. This is what Christianity always requires us to do, nothing more and nothing less. The Church denounces errors, not persons; it exposes false ideas rather than presumes to judge individuals or name names. The Pope has done his duty bravely and clearly, with prophetic service of human civilization and pastoral fidelity to divine faith. He has left to priests of truly pastoral spirit the patient but honest guidance of individual souls, enmeshed in the problems which arise around the universal objective truth of the Church's moral teaching; this guidance confessors must give with tender sympathy for human weakness (it is also their own) and loving zeal for souls, but without violation of God's Will and the teaching of His Church.

How could Pope Paul have done or said other than he did? He has resisted the compulsions of the statistics, the economic determinism and the political absolutism of an age of computers and conformism destructive of the person. He has defended life and love against political controls and selfishness ultimately destructive of both. With apostolic integrity he has braved the sneers of the cynical and the honest dissent of those who do not share his faith concerning the divine origins and eternal purposes of life and of love. Pope Paul, even as every Catholic Christian, must do everything humanly possible and divinely permitted to realize the hopes of humanity and to alleviate the woes of the world beginning with the material poverty that inhibits the transmission of life and the cultural poverty that hampers the enjoyment of love. But he cannot call light darkness or darkness light, what is false true, what is evil good. This was forbidden him, in so many words, when he was consecrated a bishop, an authentic teacher in the Church, long before he acquired the awesome obligations which are his as Chief Shepherd of Christ's flock.

God console, preserve, protect and strengthen him — and all the faithful!

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