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From the Editor's Desk

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The Pope and the Theologians

In response to the 2nd International Conference on Moral Theology held in Rome in November, 1988, in which "Humanae Vitae" was examined from the philosophical, theological and anthropological points of view, Bernard Haring published an article which has received a great deal of publicity. In this article, he called upon John Paul II to consider a worldwide conference of bishops, theological faculties and certain lay organizations to re-examine the Church's position on artificial contraception. He also bemoaned the fact that the Vatican has drawn up lists of reliable moral theologians and he personally attacked the organizer of the conference, Msgr. Carlo Cafarra.

I was invited to this conference and was edified and strengthened in my faith by the participants, by the profound arguments in favor of the validity of "Humanae Vitae" and by the evident joy, holiness and convictions of those who are following the Magisterium and John Paul II.

It is a sad commentary that Bernard Haring chose to attack John Paul II indirectly by attacking Carlo Cafarra. It is as if he hasn't learned anything about the developments in moral theology since John Paul II issued "Familiaris Consortio" or gave his allocutions on the theology of marriage. Haring's position, as those of the dissident theologians, is a modern scandal to the faithful. His position, which advocates artificial contraception, is a complete rejection of magisterial teaching. "Humanae Vitae" is an exercise of magisterial teaching and no longer a subject for debate.

Following hard on the heels of Haring's unfortunate article is the so-called "Declaration of Cologne", in which 163 theologians from Germany, Holland and Switzerland take issue with Pope John Paul II about the way he conducts himself as the Supreme Pontiff. They accuse him of abusing his power as teacher, they complain about the persons he appoints as bishops, and rankle about the discrimination in regard to appointments to teaching faculties. They picture the Pope as an autocrat, unresponsive to local needs and customs. It might be noted that the most notorious dissenting theologians who signed this document include Haring, Hans Kung, and Edward Schillebeeckx.

What are we to think of these divisive theologians who sow discord among the faithful and undermine the Pope? Their actions and writings are a scandal and are in direct opposition to the magisterial teaching. They do not represent the Church. Instead of elucidating the magisterial teaching, they undermine it.

In my own mind, I think these theologians should fold up their notebooks and put away their pens, go out into the desert to pray, fast and meditate upon their behavior. They should contemplate their intellectual hubris and their intellectual arrogance. On bended knee, they should ask God for forgiveness and humbly apologize for all the difficulties they have caused God's Church.

When Christ issued a difficult doctrine, such as that of eating His body, He made no apologies nor made any effort to explain it. He simply stated, "Take it or leave it." Many found this a hard doctrine and difficult to accept. And, as the gospels say, "Many no longer walked with Him." He then said to Peter, "Will you also leave Me?"

Peter, who in that great profession of faith probably did not understand Jesus either, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

And so it should be with all of us. The Pope, the successor of Peter, the Rock, has the words of eternal life and has been guaranteed this by Christ. Most of these disputes in the Church boil down to faith and trust. Whom better to believe, the theologians or the Pope? I stand with God's Vicar on earth, Pope John Paul II, for it is to him that God gave the charism and duty to guard and guide His flock.

— John P. Mullooly, M.D.