



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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FR. CHARLES CURRAN
SOME REAL AUTHORITY PROBLEMS
IN THE CHURCH TODAY
CENTRAL METHODIST CHURCH
DETROIT, MI
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Welcome

Rev. Edwin Rowe

I welcome the Elephants to Central Methodist Church today; and the good news is that many of you have gotten in trouble with many of us long before we ever got here today. I am delighted to be here today with a lot of my friends and heroes; and I'm not going to mention you all, but I can't be in the same chancel with Bishop Gumbleton without just thanking him for what he's done for our church. (Much applause) I guess the next person I should thank is the Archbishop. (Laughter) I've had a couple of opportunities to thank him for events such as this; and I hope it keeps happening, because you honor this sacred space. (Applause) And if you don't mind a little action that's a little bit liturgical, I'm going to light this candle, the light of Christ in honor of this occasion, because I expect this to be an act of worship as well as an act of political, and social, and ecclesiastical obedience. Amen. (Crowd answered Amen also).

There's too many elephants in the room these days. We didn't have room for one which was race. We didn't have room for the elephant of LGBT people not being accepted into full membership in this church; and we as the United Methodist Church, and this United Methodist Church, are in civil disobedience with our own order, because we have an LGBT ministry; and we intend to keep it. (Applause) We're also up to our neck on many other elephants in the room. We still are working on the whole issue of male privilege in the church, and sexism, and all that goes with that; and we are working also on foreclosures, and banks that bale themselves out when they received our tax dollars, to bail out the people who are in our neighborhoods, who are now in our shelters. (Applause) We have the elephant of voter suppression, and all kinds of things that are being put in the way of people. Michele Alexander is going to be our speaker on December 2nd. She wrote a book called *The New Jim Crowe* in which we talk about all of the ways we have a caste system that we as a church need to do something about; so I think we just don't have room for all these elephants, but we're going to have to, in fact, usher some of them out. We tried to get Simone Campbell to be an honoree on December 2nd, but I keep trying for that, but we need to thank her for all that's she done to tell us that the Ryan budget is sin. (Applause) And so we fight to put emergency manager on the ballot so that people can try to decide whether Samuel was right that we don't need a king in our school system; we don't need a king in our city hall. We need a chance to vote at least to see that that's what we want. And we have the fight going on just to get the right to put a constitutional amendment on the State Constitution that would allow fair and collective bargaining for all workers. (Applause)

So I guess with that, I want to thank Fr. Curran for being here. I want to thank him for his witness. I already registered a complaint with your bookstore, who said his book was too old to bring with them. I don't know where that puts the rest of us, but I do want to say one more time, events like this are exactly why this church and this space is sacred, because this is a sacred event. We need to stand together to make the church the church that Christ intended it to be. Thank you again for being in this space. (Applause)

Introduction

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

It's so very nice to be here again and speak in this church that stands so clearly for justice and peace in our world. So we thank Ed Rowe for all the leadership he gives. But now, as I say, I'm very happy to introduce Charlie Curran to all of us. Probably, most of you know him, at least by reputation, and by having read some of his articles and books. But Charlie is coming today to speak to us on a very important topic: Dissent and Authority in the Church. And you can tell Charlie is a teacher, because, as you know, he prepared this great outline for us; and I hope most of you have it. I must say that I underestimated and didn't bring enough copies. We have such a great crowd here today. So if you have the outline, through it will help you to follow Charlie's presentation.

Charlie is a priest of the Archdiocese of Rochester, New York. He did his seminary training there and studied undergraduate theology at that seminary, St. Bernard Seminary, in Rochester. But later, after ordination, he received two doctorates in Theology from Pontifical University in Rome. One from the Gregorian University and the second from the Alfonsiano University, which is one that is sponsored by the Redemptorists; and St. Alphonsus was known as the first modern moral theologian. And at that University, Charlie had the distinct privilege, I am sure he would say, of studying under Fr. Bernard Haring, who is known, he died recently, but has been known as one of the most important modern moral theologians in our Church; and Charlie carries on his tradition. Charlie was a *peritus*,^{1/} even though he was only ordained in 1958 - the Council started in 1962 - he was a *peritus* at the Vatican Council. So you can tell his abilities were recognized very early. In 1965 he was appointed to Catholic University of America; and he immediately began to get in trouble, (Laughter) because by 1967 he was fired from the University; and it was because of his teachings on birth control, a topic back then that was very much in the fore front of the topics the Church was concerned about. But within five days after the faculty went on strike, Charlie was reinstated, and continued then to teach at Catholic U. Later on, when the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* came out, Charlie was a leader among the 600 theologians who signed a document protesting that encyclical letter, and setting forth a different teaching, dissenting, as our subject is today, from the authoritative teaching of the Church.

So Charlie comes to us today with a very strong academic background, but also a background of experience when he speaks about dissent and authority in the Church. I got to know Charlie over the years partly from the work that I was able to do, or privileged to do, with the Bishops committee, writing the Peace Pastoral: *The Challenge of Peace*. Charlie was one of those we consulted to get his insights on moral teachings about war, and especially nuclear weapons, that our country has been so committed to all these years. In 1986 Charlie was again removed from Catholic University, and was declared not fit to teach as a Catholic theologian in a Catholic University, a great loss to our Church in one way; but then, Charlie secured a professorship, and became a tenured professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. And there he teaches many, many Catholic students. There are many that go to that university, but then, Charlie continues to teach within the Church through writings and his lectures, to talks like this today. And he's also recognized among other theologians in our Church as one of the leading theologians in the Catholic Church in the United States. The Catholic Theological Society of America: he's been a member of that for probably since he first became a Doctor in Theology, so for many, many years. And he is widely recognized as one of our most important, most competent theologians of the Church.

I know that we're going to be challenged by what he says; and I think that is something for which we are to be grateful. I ask everyone to be listening carefully, and as we always do, you will have a chance to make comments and questions afterwards. But right now, I ask you to welcome into our midst today Fr. Charlie Curran. (Applause)

Some Real Authority Problems in the Church Today

Fr. Charles Curran

Thank you very much Bishop Gumbleton; and thank you Pastor Rowe for your hospitality. I hope that someone in this room tonight writes a letter to the Guinness Book of Records. This has to be the largest number of elephants ever gathered; (Laughter) and I am proud to be a part of it. In our prayer service, and then again as Tom Gumbleton has mentioned, Bernard Haring was my mentor and my friend. And it was just something to hear those words once again of Bernard, and remember how much I owe Bernard for so many different things. Tom mentioned the strike at Catholic U in '67. I was thinking about that on the flight coming up this morning, because it was 45 years ago that I think I first spoke to a Catholic audience in Detroit; and Jane Wolford Hughes^{2/} had organized one of her super affairs; and I was scheduled to speak sometime, I think it was in May of 1967. But after the strike I called Jane, whom I didn't know well at the time, and I said, "Look, I might be a problem for you. So, you know, I'll just stay away. You know, I won't come." "Oh no, Charlie, you've got to come. And not only are you coming, but the Archbishop is going to introduce you, *O tempora o mores*,^{3/} as we used to say. (Laughter)

So Tom originally asked me to speak about faithful dissent; but I've done that, and I want to sort of extend it a little bit beyond that aspect to talk about some of the real authority problems in the Church today, and what we are doing about it. I passed out these lecture notes. There's six major points I want to do.

- A. There is a problem of authority in the church today.
- B. Why is there a problem?
- C. How do people respond to the authority problem?
- D. What is the reaction of the hierarchical church in general?
- E. What is the reaction of the hierarchical church to falling numbers in the American Catholic Church?
- F. How should those of us working for reform react?

So those will be the six points I hope to cover in our lecture; and then we will have time for conversation afterward. So the first point.

A. There is a problem of authority in the Church today, obviously in moral issues.

In fact, interestingly enough, in 1992 in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II recognized what he called "A genuine crises in the Church caused by the fact that teachers of moral theology, even in seminaries, often disagree with official Church teachings." And he went on to say, "Not only is it theologians, but many other people in the Church also disagree." So he was willing to recognize, very much, that this was a crises and a problem. The aspects are known to all of us, but an interesting study is the one that was done by Bill D'Antonio and a group of Catholic sociologists. They have been conducting polls of Catholics from 1987 to 2011, raising the same questions each time. And one basic question has been: "Who should have the final say about what is right or wrong: church teaching, individuals, or both?"

There were five specific areas connected with this question:

- Divorce and remarriage,
- Abortion,
- Sex outside of marriage,
- Homosexuality, and
- Contraception.

The percentage of respondents saying the Church leaders should have the final decision in these matters have decreased since the poll was first taken in 1987. On most of the questions asked, over 50% of the respondents maintain that the individual should have the final say. So, this is what is happening in reality. So it's not simply a question of theological dissent, but there are many Roman Catholics in practice who disagree with moral teachings of the Catholic Church.

Now obviously, the second point, there are other authority issues in the Church. The list is long;

- The pedophilia problem,
- Celibacy,
- Above all, the role of women in the Church - probably the most heinous and difficult structural problem that we face as a Church, the role of women in the Church.

But it's interesting what we have come to see, and what the elephant stands for, is precisely the fact that here is a group that's come together to try to change many of these things. I mean, your group is sort of living proof of this. And it is interesting that in the last two years, a number of priest groups in various places in the world have ultimately done the same thing.

For example, first of all in Austria, on Trinity Sunday of 2011, a group of Austrian priests, now representing more than 10% of all the priests in Austria, issued a very strong initiative entitled, *Appeal to Disobedience*. That was the title, and they said in the light of what was not happening in the Catholic Church, it was necessary for them to disobey rulings of the bishop and the pope.

- The signers will not deny Communion to people of good will, especially divorced and remarried people, and members of other churches.
- They will avoid, as much as possible, celebrating multiple times on Sunday liturgies, because the bishops think this is the only way to deal with the shortage of ordained ministers in the Church.
- They will ignore the prohibition of preaching by competently trained lay people, including women.
- They will advocate for a married clergy, including women priests.

Obviously this is a VERY STRONG statement. What ultimately will happen here nobody knows?

Second example: The Irish Association of Catholic Priests. They support in a statement at their opening meeting:

- Full implementation of the vision and teaching of Vatican II, with special emphasis on the primacy of the individual conscience,
- The status and active participation of all the baptized,
- The task of establishing a Church, who are all believers, who will be treated as equals.
- In particular they support a number of issues:
 - The redesigning of the ministry of the Church to incorporate the gifts of all male and female.
 - A re-structuring of the governing system of the Church based on service, not on power.
 - Encouraging at every level the culture of consultation and transparency.
 - A reevaluation of Catholic sexual teaching and practice that recognizes the profound mystery of human sexuality and the experience and wisdom of God's people.

The Church in Ireland has come a long way. But it's interesting that both in a sense of what you people did here with Elephants, and now these two groups; it's priests groups who are recognizing the problem. And that's, in one sense, to be expected, I think, because it's the priests who are dealing with their people as they face these problems in everyday life. That's where the tire hits the road, and that's where they have come to the conclusion that existing policies, teachings and structures within the Church are inadequate. Because the priest and other pastoral ministers feel they're caught in the middle, between the needs of their people and the existing teachings and structures in the Church.

So that's the first point; doesn't need much proof. There is a problem of authority in the Church today.

B. Why is there a problem?

Many reasons could be given. I want to spend a few minutes now on one important reason which I think it doesn't always get that much attention. There's no doubt that at Vatican II, and subsequently the Church changed so much of our thinking and our ideas. But the basic problem has been that Church law and structures HAVE NOT changed. And this is precisely then why there is this tension and problem today: that Church structures and law have not changed.

I'm going to develop this primarily with three things:

- The understanding of the Church itself.
- What Vatican II said about the role of bishops.
- The role of lay people in the Church.

1. First of all, the understanding of the Church.

The document on the Church of Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*) was a marked change from the older understanding of the pre-Vatican II Church. We used to say that the Church was a perfect society. I see all those heads nodding. (Laughter) Did I see someone under 50 in this room? No? That says something too. But anyhow, that's another thing to ponder. However, the document on the Church started out by saying the Church is a mystery; the Church is a sacrament. And then it used nine biblical metaphors to understand the Church. The primary emphasis was not on the Church as an institution. In fact, the Church is the people of God! Only later in the document does it talk about the hierarchical structure in the church. That is the teaching! But, unfortunately, the Code of Canon Law that came out in the early 1980's, and subsequent actions, have really gone back to the old model of the Church. Just two people who have recognized that as a lot of people have; one in fact, the Bishop of Lugano and a Swiss Italian canon lawyer, Eugenio Corecco. Corecco very strongly points out that the new Code of Canon Law does not give primacy to what he calls the ecclesiology of communion. This is a communion of all the baptized. But instead more often than not it sees the Church as a *societas*, a society with office holders. Ladislav Orsy, a well known canonist, now at Georgetown, and 91 years old, and going strong, is even stronger in his criticism of the code and contemporary policies for not incorporating the centrality of the communion ecclesiology. Unfortunately today, Church law and structure continues to stress the centralization of power and authority in the papacy; and there has been no structural change.

2. Now, secondly, in regards to the role of bishops in the Church.

What Vatican II rightly did was to stress the collegiality of bishops. All the bishops together with the pope have a concern for the total Church, and a role to play in leading the total Church; and that each individual bishop in one's own diocese is by one's own ordination is not a vicar of the pope, but is truly a bishop of the diocese, who again has solicitude for the total Church as well. So that's briefly what Vatican II did. See, Vatican I taught only about the Petrine primacy and infallibility; and then, when the armies came into Rome in the 1870, they had to call it all off. But then Vatican II rightly stressed that you had to balance it out with the role of bishops in the Church. Unfortunately, however, the canonical legal structures have not put that understanding of Vatican II into effect.

a. The Synod of bishops. The synod of bishops was the idea that all the bishops of the world would come together to discuss and talk about what the Church needed, sort of a continuation of the spirit of Vatican II. But, unfortunately, when Pope Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops on his own authority in 1965, and later on in the new Code of Canon Law, which develops the structures of the synod in Canons 342-348, the synod has only consultative power; it is not able to have governing power for the whole Church; it is simply a consultative body to the pope, which waters down the whole Vatican II notion,

b. Regional and National Conferences of Bishops. Ultimately the Council itself talked about the importance of these, the various roles they could play. Even the first document on the liturgy, the first one passed talks about the important role of the National Conference of Bishops with regard to the liturgy, and people forgot about that a little while ago with all the translation problems, right? And many things were done. Bishop Gumbleton reminded us of the work that the American Catholic Bishops did in their pastoral letters on peace in 1983 and the economy in 1986. These were documents coming from the bishops' conference; they were very significant for the life of the Church, but also for the life of the modern society. And, by the way, one reason for that was the transparency with which they were written. I mean, they went through three drafts. Each draft was made public; and they wanted people to comment on it. Huh? I mean, up to that time, most bishops documents were written by two people, you know? The bishops themselves probably had never read them, but they all approved them unanimously. Okay! so that these documents, and they also mirrored, in a very important way, how the teaching office in the Church should carry on its functions with openness, dialogue, and transparency.

Also very significant was the work of CELAM, a Latin American Episcopal Conference with their famous 1968 document from Medellin on Liberation Theology, a document that had great importance, not only for the Church in Latin America, but for the Church throughout the world. That, however, after some backs and forth, the pope issued a document, *Apostolicos Suos*, in

1998 and said that the doctoral declarations of bishops conferences must be unanimously approved by the bishops, who are members of a conference, or require the approval by the Vatican of at least two thirds of the bishops have approved. Now even in the one election we have in the Church for the bishop of Rome doesn't require unanimity. If it did, it would probably go on for decades. I mean, it takes all the role of the bishops' conference away. And that is part of the reason why you have seen so little or no contribution from national and regional conferences of bishops in the last 15 years. Individual bishops appointment now is controlled totally by Rome. Interestingly enough, it was only in the 19th Century that the bishop of Rome who had the power to name most bishops of the world; before that time, they were not named by the bishop of Rome. They were always received into communion by the bishop of Rome, but they were not named by the bishop of Rome. The difficulty here is that as many commentators have pointed out the type of bishops appointed in the last 25 years or so are very conservative people, people with a clean record who have never spoken anything against any existing Church policies and teachings; and as a result then, the body of bishops has been closed off from the type of creative thinking which is always necessary for the Church.

So we have a problem there. Let me quickly illustrate this change with regard to dissent in moral matters. In 1967 the West German bishops explicitly recognized, "This teaching authority of the Church can and on occasion actually does fall into errors." That non-infallible teachings involve a certain element of the provisional, even to the point of being able of including error. The United States bishops, with a real help from John Francis Cardinal Dearden, had that in their document in 1968 talked about the legitimacy of theological dissent when three conditions are met. You haven't heard a conference of bishops in the last 30 years make similar statements. Just to indicate the change that has occurred.

3. The role of lay people in the Church.

And with regard to lay people in the Church - I should have put lay people first, I apologize; it should not be done that way. I always criticize those awful prayers of the faithful when they start out praying for the pope, No! No! You pray for the baptized people of God. I mean that's what the Vatican II document said, huh? So here I'm falling in my own trap; sorry about that. I will change it. But we all recognized the changes that occurred, above all, the document on the Church said, "All the baptized share in the priestly teaching and ruling function of Jesus." We talked about the *sensus fidei*, the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faith in all the Christian people. We talked about the fact that documents had to be received by the total Church. There was a significant role here for all the baptized. And we are all conscious of the fact that certainly, for example, roles in the liturgy have changed dramatically, with the people ministering communion, ministering the word etc., etc.. But unfortunately, the Code of Canon Law is very bad on "the role of lay people in the Church."

Canon 129

1. Those who have received sacred orders are qualified according to the norm of the precepts of the law for the power of governance which exists in the Church by divine institution and is also called the power of jurisdiction.
2. Lay members of the Christian faithful can cooperate in the exercise of this same power according of the norm of the law.

Yes, they can cooperate in it, but they don't participate in it. In other words THEY CANNOT HAVE governing power in the Church. I mentioned Ladislav Orsy before, in an article he has pointed out, in his own sly way, that this was an innovation, because, historically, there were many structures that gave lay people power in the Church. Let's face it, the person who did the most for the Church in the first millennium was a Roman Emperor named Constantine. He ruled quite a bit, if you want to use those words. And Orsy goes on to point out, for example, that in the medieval Church the role of abbesses, who had a governing role in the Church and, therefore, as he said in his own sly way, he says the new Code of Canon Law is an innovation, and goes against the immemorial tradition of the Catholic Church. So again the problem. Why? Because the structures that we have do not mirror the thought and the understandings that came through at Vatican II.

The result of all of this, then, is a continued centralization of the Church in the papacy. John O'Malley from Georgetown, a brilliant historian of many things in the millennium, he wrote an article that said, "What has been the greatest change in the Church in the second millennium of its existence?" And his answer was, "Without any doubt, it was the papalization of the Church." He pointed out in the year 1000, he would doubt if more than one half of one percent of Catholics knew the name of the bishop of Rome. He was a regional person. He was also more a temporal ruler than he was a spiritual ruler. That what has changed so dramatically is the papalization of the Church. Now I believe there is an important role for the Petrine ministry in the Church, but unfortunately, it has become exaggerated; and it has been seen apart from all the other parts of the communio, which is the body of the Church. All right that's B, the second point, why is there a problem?

C. How do people respond to the authority problem?

How then have people responded to this? Basically, three ways:

1. First of all, with regard to moral issues, there is what has been called the internal forum solution, or the solution of conscience. Let's face it, the vast majority of Catholic women practice contraception in marriage, but they and their husbands have made up their minds they can do this, and still be loyal Roman Catholics. And who knows the difference? The same thing is happening, in many cases, in regard to divorced and remarried people. The same thing is happening, in some places, with regard to gay marriage and gay people. You know, even with Catholics, there was a study by Dr. Ackerman a few years ago of two churches in Pasadena, one was a Catholic and the other was a Presbyterian. He said, "There was just as many gays at the Catholic Church, but nobody talked about it; but in the Presbyterian Church, they talked openly about it; but, nonetheless, everyone lived with it." So, people that have decided in their own conscience they can disagree with Church teaching and still consider themselves loyal Roman Catholics. I wholeheartedly support that understanding; but it does create a credibility problem for the Church. How can your teaching be credible in many of the other areas, when many of your own people don't go along with it in other areas? Creates a problem!

2. You can't solve structural problems in the internal forum. Structural problems have to be solved by putting a new structure in place - women priests, married priests, whatever it might be. You can't solve that in the forum of conscience. Some people can try, but then the Church authorities will say, 'Well, you're no longer in the Church.'" But you see the problem: you can solve the internal moral issues in the forum of the conscience; you can't with regard to the structural problems. All right? So the first thing is, then, the moral problems can be solved this way with some tensions involved in it. Secondly, everybody can, and I think, should work for change. Again, notice the many reform groups of the Church:
 - The priests groups we talked about.
 - The Call to Action in the United States.
 - The We Are the Church Movement in all parts of Europe, etc. etc.
 So that there are people working for change in the Church on these and other issues.

3. But there's a third option how people react; and that is to leave the Church; and this has been pointed out in the famous Pew Study, the Pew Research Center; their study, which was published about 2009. Basically, what they said was - and this is a well acknowledged objective research center - and their conclusion of their in-depth study was: one out of three people born and raised in the Catholic Church is no longer a Roman Catholic today. One out of ten people in the United States is an ex-Catholic. Quite a figure! They did a further study, the Pew Research Center, when they tried to talk about why do people leave the Church? Why is it that the Catholics have left the Church? And what they did here - this was a revised study that came out in 2011 - they broke the former Catholics into two groups:
 - Those who now joined Protestant Churches, and
 - Those who were religiously unaffiliated.
 I won't go into all the statistics, but in both case, about 50% said they left the Catholic Church because they did not agree with its teachings. So it was about the same for the unaffiliated and those who went to the Protestant Churches. Those who went to the Protestant Churches were a

little higher in saying that the Catholic Church didn't respond to their spiritual needs; but nonetheless, at the very minimum, then, I think, there's ample evidence that a number of people have left the Roman Catholic Church because they disagree with the Church's moral teachings on a number of issues.

By the way, with regard to the - I should have said it - with regard to the number of Catholics in the United States, the bottom line number has remained about the same over the last 20 years; but that's because of the Hispanic growth. You see, we've lost in terms of the numbers I just gave you, one out of three who was born a Catholic is no longer a Catholic today but the bottom line number has stayed about the same because of the influx of Latina and Hispanic peoples. Okay so that's the reaction that people in the Catholic Church have to this.

D. What about the reaction of the hierarchical Church?

How has the hierarchical Church dealt with this fact of the number of people who have left the Church? With regard to moral issues Church authority is obviously aware of the practice of some Catholics. You can't not be aware of it! But this authority strongly rejects public dissent by theologians - might leave the door somewhat open for quiet dissent; but also there's been no change whatsoever in regards to these teachings. And, in fact, they have continued to be repeated. But even more so, in a number of these areas, the Catholic Church hierarchical teaching office has maintained that what the Church teaches on these moral issues should also be incorporated in civil law, even on the example of contraception. For example, in the Philippines right now, there is a strong reaction to the Philippine bishops against a policy of the government to provide family planning for citizens of the Philippines. That again is where again, even in the United States, the whole brouhaha over Catholic universities, colleges, hospitals, charities etc. providing health insurance for contraceptive purposes for employees. And the whole brouhaha with the Administration with regards to that. But, I mean, in a certain sense, then, not only are they still teaching the moral teachings, but they are insisting that they should be made into civil law. Now again, you know the best of our tradition, going back to Augustine and Aquinas, both of whom said, "You know, look, we're not in favor of prostitution, but we'd probably be better off by allowing public prostitution. It would save a lot of problems." You know, you accept reality where it is. I mean, John Courtney Murray, the great American Jesuit theologian once said, "Protestants never really totally understand Catholics." He said, "You know, we have this very rigid code; and yet," he said, "you know, at the Council of Trent, there were more prostitutes than there were bishops." (Laughter) "Now," Murray said, "we're not proud of that fact, but that's what it was."

I mean, there was always the recognition of human frailty; the fact that people will never live up to the fullness. In fact, this is what has really been a horrendous effect of putting all this emphasis on the law, because you distorted an important part of the Roman Catholic tradition here, and that is the forgiveness of God for the sinner. We are all sinful people; and to the credit in the best of us, we recognize we are all sinners, but God is willing to forgive us. The law is a blunt instrument: it's got no place for forgiveness. But, as I say, we have gotten into this thing now of insisting that civil law incorporate our moral teachings on disputed issues. And it seems to me that that is creating all sorts of unnecessary tensions within the Church. If we say we disagree with it, but it's not hurting anybody. I remember a great cartoon in the *New Yorker* when the debate on same sex marriage first came out; and typical *New Yorker*, two women of a certain age and of a certain financial status talking with one another, and the one said to the other, "Hey! Gays aren't the problem in my marriage; it's that bimbo over there that's the problem." But we have just unfortunately made the matters worse by insisting on the law must incorporate these moral issues. Now, obviously there are differences in each case - we can't go into all of those - but that is what it is. So with regard to the moral issues, the Church is continuing to repeat these issues in teaching, and also is now insisting they become part of civil law.

Then the question is raised, "Why are church authority, why are popes, unwilling to change on issues such as contraception?" I mean if 98%, the Goodmaker Institute says, of good Catholic married people practice contraception," why is the Church unwilling to change? And we have to deal with this issue. And I'm sure that power is part of the whole thing; but I also think it is important that we try to recognize what is the strongest argument that those of us who disagree can propose? So what is the strongest argument that can be proposed as to why the Church and the pope should not change Catholic moral teachings? And, actually, Pope Paul VI more than hinted at this, eluded to it, in the document on *Humanae Vitae* in

1968. He said that, "Yes, people are proposing all of these arguments; but I couldn't change the teaching, because this has been the constant teaching of Church authority."

Now you could develop that a bit more and put yourself in that mindset, I mean, at least, to see the force of the argument. Put yourself in that mindset. You believe that the Holy Spirit guides you in your teaching office. Now, would the Holy Spirit ever allow you to be wrong? So that instead of helping people, you were hurting. I mean, is it possible to believe that the Holy Spirit would allow pope and bishops to hurt people rather than help them? It's a strong argument; and I think we have to recognize the force of that argument, because, I think, that is the best argument there is why the pope does not change on any moral issue. Okay!

How do you respond to that argument? Well there's a number of points could be made.

- The Church has claimed too much certitude for its positions. If it only said every time it taught it, this is a non-infallible teaching. And, even then, non-infallible is *circa locuta*. What does it obviously mean? Fallible! Problem solved. We claim too much certitude for it and now we are suffering. We did not properly label what that teaching involved.
- Church authority has changed its teachings on a number of moral issues. I mentioned before that, in my judgment, the role of women is probably the most significant difficult internal issue today. But in the history of the whole Christian Church, there is nothing worse than our teaching accepting slavery. It was really only in the 19th century that we finally came to say that slavery is wrong. For 19 centuries we didn't do that; and look at the horror that it caused so many people. So, we have been wrong on many other issues as well.
- We admitted that we had to change our teaching on religious freedom.
- We admitted long ago that we changed our teaching on usury. In fact the Catholic Church condemned usury, which is taking interest on a loan. We condemned that for 16 centuries, and, unlike artificial contraception, had a scripture quote to prove it. Luke says, "Lend, expecting nothing in return." And, you know, I'm enough of a traditionalist to say you know there is still an important part of that we still have to learn. I mean, so much of our interest rates today are God awful, huh? But what happened really was the concept of money changed. But still, the old thing was, you cannot enrich yourself at the expense of the poor people who have to borrow from you, huh? And I don't want to make that into an absolute law, but I do think it's something that we have got to keep in mind. But anyway the Catholic Church changed. In the 16th century there were three papal documents saying usury is a sin, taking interest on a loan. A century later everybody was doing it.
- We changed our teaching, for example, with regard to the meaning of marital sexuality and the criteria for marital sexuality. The early Church, with Augustine for example, said that there was always venial sin involved with sexual intercourse; but then, interestingly enough, we said so the only thing that justified sexual intercourse was procreation. But then we gradually realized that there was another end of marriage: love, union, and that sexual intercourse helped those two ends of marriage: procreation and love union. But then, interestingly enough, that innovator, Pius XII, comes along and says not only do you not have to intend procreation, but you can even try to prevent it by using the rhythm system. Now that's a huge development; a huge change.
- We changed. We changed in the 12th century; the defendant did not have a right to silence. The Catholic Church knew no 5th amendment. If you were guilty you had to confess; and if you didn't we could torture it out of you.
- We have changed on a lot of moral issues. Third, and I will come back to this in a minute, in another context, but I think we could appeal to the big heartedness of people. I remember when the problems with *Humanae Vitae* came up at Catholic U. A lay colleague friend of mine said, "Charlie, you know, look, my wife and I have gone along with the Church teaching against artificial contraception, and it hasn't been easy; but I sure hope that the Church changes, because I don't want my kids to have to go through the same things we did." Now, to me, that's a big hearted response, you know?

And if we could sort of appeal to that, but again, we have to get a different understanding of the Church, again with something like the family relationship. You know much better than I. You know that kids, till they're 10 years old, think their parents can do no wrong. Between 10 and 20, they can do no right. And somewhere after that, there is a maturing feeling that can appreciate the good they've done, but also recognize some of the weaknesses and problems. And that should be our attitude toward the total Church

as well. My point here is though that we really need to recognize how strong that argument is against change, and that it certainly is there; for example, that everybody in the Church admits the law of celibate priesthood is a human made law; and human laws can change. Everybody admits that. Now, I think, one of the primary reasons why Church authority is afraid to change it is, because, if you change on this issue, you're going to have to change on other issues; and you're going to open the door - Pandora's box.

E. What is the reaction of the hierarchical Church to falling numbers in the American Catholic Church?

One would expect in any other organization - if your organization, your business, your group, whatever - it was lost one-third of its members, wouldn't you try to do something about it? The American Catholic Church has barely mentioned the problem, let alone done anything about it. Amazing! Simply amazing! If a business lost a third of its members, they'd be doing everything possible. They'd be going out of business, or saying, "We gotta do something about this." We have done nothing about it in the American scene specifically. On a worldwide scene, including the American scene, they do recognize there's a problem. In fact, no one has recognized the problem more than Benedict XVI. Benedict XVI, from the day he became pope, and much sooner, pointed out the problems of Europe: that the Catholic Church was dying in Europe. He wasn't denying the facts. He recognized them, and pointed out the problem, as we've got to do something about it. That's why he even took the name Benedict, because what Benedict had done for civilization in his time, we now had to do for European civilization in his time. So, to his great credit, he has recognized the problem, and has tried to deal with it. Unfortunately I don't think he has dealt adequately with the problem.

In 2010 the pope announced the formation of a new department - if you want to call it that - in the Roman Curia: the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. And Benedict is the last one to start a new bureaucracy, because, as you know, he is opposed to most bureaucracy, but he thought it important to start this new council for promoting the new evangelization. Its task is to promote a renewed evangelization in the countries where the first proclamation of the faith has occurred long ago, but are now "experiencing a progressive secularization of society and an eclipse of a sense of God." He blames the whole problem on secularization. Now, a year later, he addressed the participants of the plenary assembly of this new pontifical council and repeated the same basic themes: "The crisis comes from those countries that were long ago evangelized, but now are losing many of their members." And, in fact, in 2012 there will be a 13th Ordinary Synod of Bishops on this precise topic of the New Evangelization.

And in preparation for it, the Vatican has sent out a working paper - they call it an *instrumental laborus*, but it's a working paper of what they should discuss. But, here again, the primary problem is secularization; and this is a huge problem. So most of the documents say the problem with the Church losing numbers is the secularization out there. Now even in this *instrumental laborus* draft working document, they give one paragraph of about seventy talking about, "Well there might be some internal Church problems causing it, and they are:

- Weak faith,
- The imperfect witness of Christians and bureaucratic structures,
- Routine liturgical celebrations, and even,
- The counter witness of some Christians.

But there is nothing wrong that the hierarchical Church has done. And that's the problem.

I think we have to recognize secularization is certainly a problem, and I don't want to deny that fact, and it's probably much more of a problem in Europe than in the United States. I mean, the reason, you know, why two thirds of my nieces and nephews are no longer in the Catholic Church is not secularization. In fact, things are being phrased to say it's secularization that has even invaded the Church; and that this is why Catholics dissent and disagree with Church teaching. Cardinal Ratzinger made this point in his famous interview for his book, *The Ratzinger Report*, in 1984. I quote, "Looking at North America, we see a world where riches are the measure, and where values and style of life opposed by Catholicism appear more than ever as a scandal. The moral teaching of the Church is seen as a remote and extraneous body, which contracts not only with the concrete practices of life, but also with the basic ways of thinking. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to present the authentic Catholic ethics as reasonable, since it is so far distant from the American ethos. Consequently, many moral theologians believe they are forced to choose between dissent from the society or dissent from the magisterium." So that is the secularization, then, that has also influenced why Catholics disagree with moral teachings of the Church. Now again, I

don't think that's accurate. All right. So that's been the response of the hierarchical Church to the falling numbers.

F. How should those of us working for reform react?

Now, in conclusion, what about those of us who are working for reform in the Church? There are no easy answers. I will suggest to recognize again the Church is mediation. To me, one of the greatest of Catholic theological traditions is its emphasis on mediation, the divine is mediated in and through the human, and at its best, the Catholic was human. I mean, compare a Calvinist church in New England with a baroque cathedral in Europe - white walls with nothing on them compared with ornate statues and bare-arsed angels all over the place. (Laughter) The divine is mediated in and through the human and therefore through the human society of the Church, with all its warts, with all its problems, with all its problems, with all its difficulties. But in a certain sense it's a willingness to appreciate and accept the human, with its problems as well as its greatness.

In other words, the best of the Catholic theology said, "I don't belong in the Church because I like the minister, because I like the music, because I like the people. I do it because this is the way God has come to me through a community, and I am to go to god through this community." And that's why one belongs to the Church.

See, we're a pilgrim Church, a pilgrim Church that's never going to be perfect, that's always going to fall short. We are a pilgrim people at a pilgrim Church; and all of us are a pilgrim people too. None of us are perfect.

Don't forget the positive things the Church does. I mean, even what we are talking about here are structural things and moral teachings. These are not the basic teachings of the Church. Those are more important. Those are more significant. And they can sustain us and give us life and hope. And that brings up the importance of hope, that Christians are people who live by hope. Andrew Greeley said in his sociology, once pointed out that hope is a distinctly Christian virtue; but, as Paul reminds us, "If you see it, it isn't hope." Hope is when you don't see it. And there have been many other periods in Church history where things looked worse. I mean, who in 1950 would have ever thought there would have been a Second Vatican Council? Very, very few. But some did; and some worked for it; and what this also points up is as much as I want to emphasize the importance of Vatican II I think at times we can over exaggerate it. There never would have been a Vatican II if it were not for the grass roots working in the late 19th and 20th centuries;

- The biblical movement,
- The liturgical movement,
- The ecumenical movement,
- The catechetical movement.

These movements were there and working. They were elite movements. Most of the people in the Catholic Church didn't even know about them, but they were there; and ultimately they came to the surface. And so this recognition that change does come from below. And, so what I've tried to do, then, in the talk this afternoon, is to talk about this question of dissent and authority in the Church:

- A. There is a problem.
- B. Why is there a problem?
- C. Church peoples response to it.
- D. The reaction of the hierarchical church.
- E. The reaction of the hierarchical church to falling numbers.
- F. What should those working for reform continue to do?

So, Elephants, keep on moving. (Standing Applause)

Transcribed by
Bew Parker
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- 1/ A peritus is a theological adviser.
- 2/ Jane Wolford Hughes was appointed by Cardinal John Dearden as Executive Director of the Institute for Continuing Education on Holy Saturday 1966. She was the first woman in the U.S. Catholic Church to hold a position in a diocesan chancery. She paved the way for other women to follow. She was an organizer for the 1976 Call to Action Conference held in Detroit, MI. She has written two books: *Partners in Catholic Education* and *If You Listen Really Hard God Will Tell You Stories*.
- 3/ Oh! The times. Oh! The customs. (Cicero)



Rev. Edwin Rowe



Bishop Tom Gumbleton



Fr. Charles Curran