

## **Unearthed: 1968 Vatican Letter to Bishops Sent with Pre-Release Copy of Humanae Vitae called for Unity**

By John-Henry Westen

OTTAWA, July 29, 2008 (LifeSiteNews.com) - During the tumultuous years of the 1960's Pope Paul VI published a controversial encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, which addressed the issue of birth control in light of the arrival of the birth control pill.

Today LifeSiteNews.com is publishing a recently unearthed letter which was sent to Bishops with a pre-release copy of the encyclical. The letter, dated July 19, 1968, is signed by the late Amleto Giovanni Cardinal Cicognani, who was then-Secretary of the Vatican Secretariat of State.

The outright defiance of many priests and even bishops to Pope Paul VI's encyclical - which restated and reinforced the Church's long-time opposition to artificial birth control - is even graver in light of the carefully worded letter the bishops received specifically pointing to the urgent need for unity on the matter.

The letter begins: "When directing me to transmit to Your Excellency the enclosed document, publication of which is imminent, His Holiness strongly recommended that I draw your attention to its importance, and to the necessity of a concerted effort on the part of the entire Catholic Episcopate."

In the letter the Pope can be seen to plead for the world's bishops to stand with him on the matter, which is described as "one of the most delicate questions of Catholic morals."

Regarding the Pope, the letter says, "And now He turns to His Brothers, the Bishops of the Catholic world, asking them to stand beside Him more firmly than ever in this circumstance, and to help Him present this delicate point of the Church's teaching to the Christian people, to explain and justify its profound reasons."

The letter adds, "The Pope counts upon the attachment of His Brothers in the Episcopate to the Chair of Peter, upon their love for the Church, upon their concern for the true good of souls."

Beyond the disunity amongst many of the hierarchy over the encyclical, the most glaring failure of the Catholic Episcopate was their unwillingness to transmit the teaching to the Catholic faithful. Yet in the letter a specific request to do so was made of the bishops.

"Finally," concluded the letter, "it is necessary that both in the confessional and in the pulpit, in the press and by other means of social communication, every necessary pastoral effort be made that no ambiguity exists among the faithful or in public opinion concerning the Church's position in this serious matter."

In many cases the Catholic hierarchy has completely ignored this instruction, with the result that many, if not a large majority, of today's Catholics have not been instructed on the Church's longtime teaching on the grave immorality and practical negative consequences of the use of artificial contraception. However, with the 40th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* this past Friday, have increased hopes that a renewed effort will finally begin to instruct Catholics in the true teaching and benefits of the encyclical.

See the full letter online here:

<http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2008/jul/08072905.html>