

MORE ON ARCHBISHOP CHAPUT, JOHN F KENNEDY & THE AMERICAN BISHOPS

Sacred Scripture warns that he who fails in little things shall fall little by little. This applies not only to the will, but to the intellect. The intellectual drift away from principle is likely, then, to occur gradually. Such a drift is demonstrated in the 1948 pastoral letter of the American Catholic bishops, *The Christian in Action*. For the bishops there endorsed two principles, *separation of Church and state* and *religious liberty*, which had been repeatedly condemned by the Church in her social teaching.

That the American bishops sought to colour the endorsement of each principle with an appealing gloss did not affect their commitment. Give qualified endorsement to a principle and the qualification does not matter: the commitment is made. Once admit a principle and the consequences flow. Here the consequences included, i) that religion should be totally excluded from the operations of the state; and, ii) that each man should be free to acknowledge any religion, or no religion, as he chose.

Christ's Holy Church in her wisdom had foreseen these perils and had condemned the principles giving rise to them as *Masonic* in origin.¹ She had, moreover, warned America's bishops about the dangers inherent in the unbridled enthusiasm for democracy and the liberal spirit towards religion which characterised their nation—

“[I]t would be very erroneous to conclude that in America is to be sought the type of status most desirable for the Church, or that it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and Church to be, as in America, dissevered and divorced. The fact that Catholicity with you is in good condition, nay, is even enjoying a prosperous growth, is by all means to be attributed to the fecundity with which God has endowed His Church, in virtue of which unless men or circumstances interfere, she spontaneously expands and propagates herself; but she would bring forth more abundant fruits if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favour of the laws and the patronage of the public authority.”²

But in *The Christian in Action* the American bishops chose to ignore her warnings; chose to be silent on the essential issue that the institution established on earth for man's eternal salvation is the Catholic Church, *and no other*; and chose to neglect to make it clear that while America may have flourished in large measure under the influence of Protestantism, it had done so because Protestantism was underpinned by Catholic principle.

The American bishops said nothing of the perils attendant on the Protestant distortion of Christianity; nothing of that particular evil amounting to idolatry, itself a product of Protestantism, whose adherents had exercised great influence in America's founding—Freemasonry; nothing of the perils that would flow to the

¹ Leo XIII, *Humanum Genus* (20.4.1884); *Immortale Dei* (1.11.1885); and *Libertas praestantissimum* (20.6.1888).

² Leo XIII, *Longinqua oceani* (6.1.1895), n. 6. See also the same Pope's warnings to the American bishops of the incipient heresy called *Americanism* in *Testem benevolentiae* (22.1.1899).

American people from the continued toleration of Masonic influence in the running of the country. Again, the bishops chose to ignore the Church's repeated warnings.³ Nor did they mention that, far from harming the operations of the state, the involvement of Christ's Church in those operations could not do otherwise than assist in achieving the welfare of its citizens and, even more, could marvellously enhance the achievement of that end.⁴

Had the American bishops followed *Catholic* teaching in *The Christian in Action*, they would never have made the mistake of endorsing *Masonic* principle in its stead; and their objection to the ruling of the US Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education* written by the Mason, Justice Hugo Black, the previous year would have had a logical foundation. As it was, their characterisation of Black's assessment of the doctrine of separation of Church and state as "the shibboleth of doctrinaire secularism" was rodomontade. Notwithstanding their assertions, they had themselves embraced secular principle.

Archbishop Charles J Chaput praised this 1948 pastoral letter in his address to members of the Houston Baptist University on 1st March 2010, for its strong endorsement "of American democracy and religious freedom". His Grace's praise was, with respect, misplaced. He criticised John Fitzgerald Kennedy for remarks he made in his Speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in September 1960. That criticism was also misplaced. If the American bishops had deemed it appropriate to ignore the Church's teaching on such important issues, why should a member of the laity do otherwise? Here is the ground for John Kennedy's endorsement of *separation of Church and state*. He was simply spelling out the implications of the American bishops' commitment to Masonic principle. Let the reader test the thesis for himself: see if he can find any criticism by the body of the American Catholic Bishops of what Kennedy said in his 1960 Houston address.

Regrettably, the Church's repeated warnings to America's bishops had failed to bear fruit. There were to be grave consequences. Fourteen years after the appearance of *The Christian in Action* they took their preoccupation with *Masonic* principle to Rome where they exercised a profound influence on the determinations of the Second Vatican Council.

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May 1st, 2010—*St Joseph the Worker*

³ Clement XII, Bull *In Eminenti* (28.4.1738); Benedict XIV, Constitution *Providas* (18.3.1751); Pius VII, Constitution *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo* (13.9.1821); Leo XII, Apostolic Constitution *Quo Graviora* (13.3.1826); Leo XIII, Encyclical *Humanum Genus* (20.4.1884).

⁴ *Immortale Dei*, nn. 19 and 22; *Longinqua oceani* (6.1.1895).