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Personal

DEA-05-01-02-01-154 61
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4th August, 1976.

Dear Father Baker,

I received your letter on my return from Lourdes yesterday, and I am returning the copy you sent me of the letter to your local newspaper.

First of all, I must tell you that the arrangements for next Sunday have been made without any ecclesiastical approval at all. No leave has been sought or given for the celebration of Mass in the Royal Station Hotel, which is a very short distance from the Cathedral in Newcastle. You have not sought, directly or indirectly, my leave for your celebration of Mass in this diocese. Nor could I give my leave as you decline to celebrate the Roman Mass in the form lawfully approved by Pope Paul VI as the Bishop of Rome.

Secondly, you ask my comments on the argument you have put forward in the first part of your letter to the Press. In short, you claim the right to follow your conscience, tout court. But you seem to have overlooked the corresponding duty of educating that conscience correctly. For example, Henry Davis, S.J., wrote in "Moral and Pastoral Theology", 1938, Vol I, page 68, "since wrongful actions done under the influence of false conscience but in good faith, though not formally sinful are, nevertheless, objectively opposed to the moral order, it is of supreme importance that the conscience should be educated to discern right from wrong". Actually, this is mentioned at least twice in the Bishops' statement of 1968. You quoted the sentence, "Neither this encyclical nor any other document of the Church takes away from us our right and duty to follow our conscience. ~~But~~" But you omit the previous sentence "But we are bound to do everything in our power to make sure that our conscience is truly informed" and the following sentence, "But if we were to neglect the guidance of the Church, morality could easily become merely subjective". You seem at present to be neglecting the guidance of the Second Vatican Council, of Pope Paul VI, of your former bishop, Bishop Grant, and of your present Bishop of East Anglia, Bishop Clark.

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Finally, it seems to me that, even if you cannot bring yourself to accept the authoritative decisions of the Pope and your own Bishop on the form of Mass, you ought to consider very deeply before leaving Downham Market to make others share your personal difficulties and to spread them to other dioceses.

With all kind wishes,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Hugh Lindsay

Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle.

The Rev. Oswald Baker,
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