



## *Introduction*

This study concerns a normative organization's struggle to maintain stability while accommodating to the exigencies posed by a social problem. I will examine the response of the Roman Catholic church in the United States to the AIDS crisis, particularly as this disease has affected gay men. Gay people with AIDS (PWAs) present the church with a dilemma of status (Hughes 1945) in that they are simultaneously "sick" and "sinners" (Albert 1986). Church officials must respond in a manner consistent with the organization's "charter," that is, its official values and goals (Dingwall and Strong 1985).<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, Church leaders want to care for the sick, a traditional Christian ministry. In addition, they accept a scientific definition of AIDS as a viral disease, rather than a supernatural definition of the illness as a sign of God's wrath on a "sinful" lifestyle. On the other hand, the hierarchy wants to firmly maintain its traditional prohibition against homosexuality. To appear to accept homosexual relationships would represent an accommodation to social forces pressing for change, a compromise in what official church teaching maintains is divine law.<sup>2</sup> Such a compromise would threaten the hierarchy's authority in that it would give the appearance of yielding to pressure from interest groups within the church, as well as external forces. In hierarchical pronouncements, and

through pastoral ministry to individual PWAs, the institutional church seeks to maintain organizational stability by steering a middle course in its response to AIDS and legitimating that response with reference to values mandated by its official charter.

This study, therefore, will examine the attitudes of American Catholic bishops who have made statements concerning the AIDS crisis, with particular attention to the bishops of California. I will examine bishops' attitudes on care for the sick, AIDS education, and discrimination against both PWAs and gay persons. I will also examine the attitudes and self-reported behavior of priests who have been involved in AIDS ministry or who expressed an interest in AIDS ministry. I will draw on interviews with priests from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles for this data.

For several reasons, my discussion will focus on statements on AIDS from the bishops of California, as well as the response to AIDS from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. California has one of the highest rates of reported AIDS cases in the United States. The state also has two cities with large gay communities—San Francisco and Los Angeles. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles is an important focus, not only because it is the largest Roman Catholic archdiocese in the nation, but because it has experienced a great deal of controversy surrounding the church's proper role in the care of PWAs and in AIDS prevention. Finally, since Los Angeles has a large gay community, many priests there have had an opportunity to minister to gay PWAs. Thus, California, and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in particular, provide a fertile setting for discussing the church's responses to AIDS and PWAs, particularly with regard to gay men.

No study on religion and AIDS to date has focused exclusively on the experiences and attitudes of priests or higher clergy. Seidler and Meyer (1989, 66) note the importance of focusing on priests and bishops when studying the Catholic church, since they are "pivotal figures" occupying key positions and performing key organizational functions. Fichter

(1968) notes that the opinions of priests are especially important because they are on the front line of pastoral care to Catholic people on an everyday basis. Researchers have focused on clergy responses to AIDS from various Protestant denominations, however. Beckley and Chalfant (1988) studied the responses of Protestant parish clergy. While Bohne (1986) included a small sample of priests in his study of hospital chaplains, he also dealt with clergy from several other Christian denominations and did not deal with responses to AIDS on a denominational level. The present study will deal with the Catholic hierarchy and priests who minister in a variety of contexts (parishes, hospitals, administrative posts, etc.).

By focusing this study on the responses of the church to gay PWAs, I do not intend to single out one social group as the bearer of this disease. Indeed, anyone who has blood-to-blood contact with any other individual carrying HIV can contract the virus. However, this focus presents an opportunity for examining organizational “impression management” (Goffman 1959) in the institutional church. Impression management is used to mediate the conflict between adherence to traditional teachings and a desire to have relevance in the modern world.



#### THE CHURCH AS A COMPLEX ORGANIZATION



This study examines the Roman Catholic church in the United States as a complex normative organization (Etzioni 1961). The Catholic church, like other institutional religious organizations, exists as an “open system” (Benson and Dorsett 1971; Scherer 1980), in that it is an organization constantly responding to changes within its host environment. Various elements within the church differ in regard to the proper response to external social forces, alternatively embracing the attitudes and behaviors of the larger society or denounc-

ing them (Harris 1969). Thus, forces both within the organization and outside it act as agents of institutional change. From this perspective, the church is seen as a “transformation process” (Scherer 1980).

Yet, as John Seidler (1986) maintains, organizational change within the church occurs as “contested accommodation.” He states that the church has attempted rapprochement with the wider culture but also seeks to maintain social distance. While social forces pressure the church to change, other forces within the church resist accommodating to the host environment. It is conflict, Seidler argues, that initiates reform and compromise (see also Simmel 1955; Weber 1947, 132–35; Harris 1969; Foucault 1980b). Seidler mentions the shift toward democratic structures within the church as an example of institutional change. Priests and laity have gained a degree of organizational power through their participation in advisory groups such as priests’ senates and parish councils. Yet countermodernizing forces in positions of power (e.g., the Vatican Curia) have resisted change, resulting in only a slight movement toward democratic structures within the church.

Seidler argues that change occurs in different segments of the church’s structure and teaching at different times. While the inertia of the institution favors the status quo, the social environment, key events, or prophetic personalities, all may turn the tide in bringing about institutional reform. Seidler cites the Second Vatican Council as an example of a dramatic change brought on by a key event within the church.

Official Church teaching on sexual morality has certainly not been an area where change has occurred within the church, despite the changes initiated through Vatican II. Traditionalists, both clergymen and laypersons, uphold the traditional teaching of the church, as well as the hierarchy’s claim to expert knowledge in moral matters. However, groups within the church have clamored for change in official teachings concerning issues such as birth control, abortion, and homosexuality. The AIDS crisis has the potential to

act as a variable adding momentum to the forces of change in the American church's understanding of homosexuality or, alternatively, reinforcing the status quo. That is, there is a variety of positions the hierarchy may take to deal with the issue of homosexuality and gay men in the face of the AIDS epidemic. First, church leaders may see the Christian lives led by gay Catholic men, listen to their stories, and possibly be more open to a new understanding of homosexuality. A second possibility is that the hierarchy may see the disease as a reinforcement of a natural law theology that insists that homosexual activity results in disease because it is contrary to the natural purposes of sexual acts. Both of these positions have been advocated among church officials, as I will note in the following chapters. A third alternative is to allow limited accommodation in order to enhance organizational stability. I argue that this last alternative has chiefly characterized the response of church officials in the United States. In this case, accommodation represents an effort to rein in the forces of change and to keep modernizing elements under the control of the existing power elite.

In this regard, Philip Selznick (1948, 1966) notes that organizations attempt to maintain internal stability and continuity in policy and leadership in the face of external social forces that might threaten the organization. Selznick describes organizational behavior as motivated by a "prestige-survival motif" (Selznick 1948, 30). That is, organizational officials must not only try to survive in their social environments, but also save face and maintain social prestige. In other words, an organization must manage "multiple identities" (Cheney 1991) and convey a coherent image of the organization to both constituents and the environment. In short, it attempts to manage impressions both inside and outside the organization.

In his discussion of impression management, Erving Goffman (1959) notes that actors may perform as an impression management "team," with different actors taking various parts in order to achieve an overall effect. Pruitt and

Smith (1981) note a similar division of labor within organizations. They hold that organizational leadership must often remain firm when confronted with potential compromises. Firmness achieves two effects. It mitigates criticism from constituents who do not want organizational compromise, and it serves as a bargaining tool in negotiations with forces favoring accommodation, since firmness on the part of high-level management may help the other negotiating parties to accept less of a compromise than they originally desired. At the same time, the organization must appear trustworthy. It must show a willingness to collaborate with constituents seeking compromises (see also Magenau and Pruitt 1979).

One way to carry out this dual image of strength of position and willingness to dialogue is through a segmentation of personnel (Pruitt and Smith 1981). Higher-level officials wear "black hats," in that they maintain a hard line on organizational doctrine. Lower-level officials wear "white hats" and act as "conciliatory intermediaries." The organizational charter must be sufficiently vague about actions of lower-level officials in particular cases, so that effective informal negotiation may take place. In the present study, in most instances, the hierarchy wears "black hats" by publicly holding firm on church teaching, while priests wear "white hats" and negotiate the official teaching on the individual level.

### *Hierarchy in the Organization*

In the Catholic church, bishops hold formal institutional power. Nevertheless, in the pluralistic American context, hierarchical authority rests on the "consent of the governed" (Scherer 1980). In the United States, churches exist as voluntary organizations. The Catholic hierarchy, therefore, can hold no authority if the Catholic people do not accept it and participate in the organization. Laity and even lower clergy, whose authority is derived from bishops, may exercise informal power within the organization through negotiation, or through participation in advisory groups, as noted above.

Yet this informal power is precarious (Kim 1980). As Winter (1968) states:

Catholic organization can have an almost unlimited flexibility in the instrumentalities which it may use, so long as direction and control are in the hands of those to whom it was entrusted by the apostles. (108)

The hierarchy may, therefore, give a degree of autonomy to the laity, and to the lower clergy as well, but this power is ad hoc, informal, and contingent on the ultimate control of organizational structure and doctrine by higher administrative officials. It is the hierarchy that determines the organizational charter and thus determines what are “legitimate” organizational beliefs and actions. Formal authority within the institution is legitimated not by consent of the governed, but through the line of apostolic succession. That is, legitimate authority and church teaching can come through only those who succeed the apostles in leadership, namely, the pope, bishops, and priests as the bishops’ representatives. In Weber’s (1947) typology, the church fits a “traditional” legitimation of authority.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the hierarchy attempts to maintain the stability of the organization, and its power within it, by allowing compromise and negotiation on the local level and by making use of normative means, such as traditional teaching, or the knowledge of “experts” both in theology and the natural and social sciences (Weber 1947; Vaillancourt 1980; Blau and Schoenherr 1971). However, it is important to note that such expert knowledge is selectively cited to reinforce and legitimate the hierarchy’s teaching. In the present study, by maintaining a scientific understanding of AIDS and calling for ministry to the sick, those in the church hierarchy try to (1) maintain prestige in the host environment, (2) hold the allegiance of gay men, gay PWAs, and liberal Catholics who still retain church membership, and (3) attempt rapprochement with disaffiliated gays and gay PWAs. At the same time, they

maintain continuity in policy and leadership by vigorously upholding both church teaching and their expertise as the only authoritative teachers in the church, thus solidifying their organizational power and maintaining their bond with conservative membership.

### *Priests in the Organization*

I have noted that individuals in the hierarchy attempt to ensure the survival and prestige of the organization, as well as their power within it. Yet they also seek to maintain control over the lower clergy on the local level. The organizational authority of the priesthood is “franchised” to individual priests by the hierarchy, which has “proprietorship” (Maduro 1982) over priestly power. In discussing bureaucratic control within complex organizations, Blau and Schoenherr (1971) note:

Power is rooted in the organization. No individual has it, and individuals merely make decisions through which this power is exercised as incumbents of positions in the formal structure. (352)

In the organization of the Catholic church, priests’ professional identity is located not in themselves, nor in their professional expertise per se, but in the organization, which has the power to legitimate their ministry. At the same time, Blau and Schoenherr’s point is overstated in that they leave little room for individual agency. Priests are not simply bearers of the official directives of the organization; they also exercise their ministry in the context of individual pastoral experience—an experience that often calls for compromise and negotiation.

Selznick (1966) notes that, in the face of pressure, delegated authority may often use discretion in carrying out organizational directives. Reynaud (1988), in his study of employee and management relations, states that employees negotiate between prescribed (*prescrit*) official directives and their



actual (*reël*) experience of the situations in which such directives must be carried out. Maduro (1982) discusses negotiation between, and within, two divisions existing within religious organizations.<sup>4</sup> The first is the division between laity and clergy, and the subordination of laity to clergy. The clergy have a monopoly on the control of religious production, and the laity seek to have their religious needs met. This is a potential source of conflict if the clergy will not extend their services to groups of the laity, or if the laity seek to appropriate the means of religious production themselves. Second, there is the internal division involving subordination of lower clergy to higher clergy. This situation may also result in conflict if the lower clergy attempt to gain a larger share in the power of religious production than they are allotted by the higher clergy, who attempt to maintain control. The interests of each of these groups need to be at least partially satisfied if the religious system is to maintain unity.

Priests attempt to remain faithful to hierarchical teaching and carry out their ministry to the sick, satisfying the interests of the higher clergy, yet make compromises to satisfy the interests of a group of laity whom they believe are dissatisfied and alienated. The freedom of negotiation priests experience in their pastoral ministry also helps to partially satisfy their desire to appropriate control over religious production. In the specific context of AIDS ministry, and perhaps in the Roman Catholic system generally, priests become mediating agents for the preservation of unity between higher clergy and laity, effecting compromises in the fulfillment of often disparate group interests and thus maintaining the relative stability of the organization.

Thus, the position of priests within the church is not simply that of "organization men" (Whyte 1956; Fichter 1974) who take orders from the hierarchy and apply them in their particular careers. In their study of priests' career satisfaction, Hall and Schneider (1973) note that the higher the level of autonomy priests experience, the more they feel challenged and successful in their careers. Indeed, lack of autonomy or

“inner-directedness” is a major source of clergy disaffection and resignation (Schoenherr and Greeley 1974; Seidler 1979). Priests in the present study expressed autonomy through their ability to negotiate their interaction roles with PWAs as both pastors and official representatives of the church.

A priest's role as the church's official representative confines his actions in pastoral ministry. Yet his interaction roles with PWAs should not be understood as thoroughly scripted, or totally circumscribed by structural constraints. His actions are determined not only by organizational directives, but by his own inner-directedness, as well as by the role expectations placed on him by PWAs.

Callero (1986) states that an actor takes the role perspective of the larger community but expresses it through his or her individual perspective and experience. To carry out the theatrical metaphor commonly used in symbolic interactionism, an actor uses conventional roles (Shibutani 1961, Hewitt 1979) and improvises on them. In this study, priests use their inner-directedness to determine the extent to which they can compromise on hard-line church teaching in order to fulfill their conventional roles as pastor and counselor.

Coser (1979), in her study of resident psychiatrists in a mental hospital, noted the “structural ambivalence” (Merton and Barber 1976) inherent in the “dual mandate” under which residents dealt with patients. On the one hand, they used their authority to control patient behavior; on the other hand, they were involved in patient therapy—a relationship based on trust between patient and practitioner. This relationship is not unlike the negotiational situation noted earlier, where conflicting parties use the strategies of firmness and trust to achieve compromise.

In the present study, structural ambivalence also exists in the ministry of priests. They are called upon to uphold the magisterium's sexual teaching—a position of authority. At the same time they must minister to the sick, which often involves the counselor or therapist role—a position of trust. By proclaiming the views of the magisterium in public contexts

while attempting to negotiate and compromise between PWAs and official church teaching in private contexts, priests work to mediate this ambivalence.

*The Church in the World:  
The Quest for Stability and Relevance*

I have noted the strategy of limited accommodation that the church has used to preserve its relevance or survival and prestige in the modern world. However, in the nineteenth century and continuing through much of the twentieth, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, particularly the papacy, sought other ways to protect the church from the social forces of the modern world, which threatened its stability from without. Such forces included the rise of democracy and pluralism and the increasing prestige of the natural and social sciences (Seidler 1986; Lyng and Kurtz 1985; McSweeney 1980; Vaillancourt 1980; Ellis 1969).

McSweeney (1980) notes three stages of hierarchical responses to modern Western society. The first stage lasted from the French Revolution until the death of Pius IX in 1878. During this period the hierarchy called for detachment from the modern world. The church was seen as a fortress, protected from the attacks of the modern age. The church's goal was to preserve the deposit of faith unscathed through the crises of modernity (see Dulles 1978). Since the church was thought to be under siege, dissent in the ranks would not be tolerated. It is important to note that in the United States during this period, Catholicism was largely a faith of European immigrants not yet assimilated into the American mainstream (Varacalli 1983). The ghetto mentality of the Vatican was therefore reflected in the life experience of the American church.

The second stage McSweeney discusses began with the pontificate of Leo XIII (1878) and lasted through the Second Vatican Council (1963–65). While continuing to remain antagonistic toward modernity, Leo advocated a policy of

infiltration. Catholics, especially intellectuals, were called upon to understand secular views in order to bring a Catholic influence upon Western society. During this period, unrest from within also threatened the stability of the church. Catholic theologians and intellectuals increasingly believed that church teaching should be informed by advances in the sciences and saw the need to accept the religious pluralism and democracy of the modern West. Catholic intellectuals sought to make the church relevant to the modern world. At the same time, as Catholic laypeople entered the mainstream of American life and as ethnic ties began to lose their hold, democracy and religious pluralism became normative concepts for American Catholics.

The third stage, McSweeney notes, was brought about by Vatican II, initiated under the papacy of John XXIII. The council fathers, and the theologians with whom they consulted, sought to bring an end to the antagonism between the church and the world. As John XXIII noted, the church needed to open its windows to the world and begin a process of *aggiornamento*. In the post-Vatican II period, the church has adopted, at least in theory, a strategy of dialogue with secular society, addressing social problems and making use of the findings of the social and natural sciences in theological inquiry. This new strategy has been an attempt to increase the relevance of the church to a modern world. In advancing this strategy, church hierarchy seeks to preserve and enhance its prestige.

Seidler and Meyer (1989) understand Pope John's *aggiornamento* as the legitimation of a spirit of openness to democratic structures and pluralism within the church. The groundwork for this had been laid in the decades preceding the council both in the United States and in Europe. Seidler and Meyer also note that the council mobilized the forces for change. Additionally, in the years since the council the forces of change have sought to implement the modernization legitimated by the council. Yet, as I have noted above, this has been a contested accommodation.

Priests have also sought to advance the church's openness to the world. Many priests have entered other professions, while maintaining their status as priests, in order to enhance their ministry (see Fichter 1974). During the post-Vatican II period, the priesthood itself has increasingly been defined as a profession, not unlike the medical or legal professions, in which a particular expertise is gained and a service offered (Fichter 1974; Geany and Ring 1971; Fischer 1987). Such professionals, due to their expert training, maintain a degree of autonomy in professional decision making when dealing with "clients." In fact, Struzzo (1970) found that priests' image of themselves as professionals results in their dissent from church authority in conflict situations. Notions of autonomy and professionalization, while certainly present in the American church at least since the Second World War, have flowered in the post-Vatican II era.<sup>5</sup> As part of the professionalization of the ministry, priests have taken on new roles, such as those of administrator or therapist, in addition to the more traditional roles as sacramental functionary and pastor of souls.

The role of the laity has changed in the post-Vatican II church as well. One of the models of the church that emerged from Vatican II was that of the laity and clergy as "people of God" (see Dulles 1978). While this theological point existed in the church's theology before the council, it was certainly not emphasized. Rather, the clergy played all the official roles in the church with the laity standing by as spectators. In the postconciliar church, laity have assumed several ritual tasks once the domain only of priests. For example, laypersons read the Scriptures and distribute communion during mass. I have noted above, however, that the laity have received no real structural power. Yet laity have received more of a hearing from church officials than they previously had. In the "Pastoral Constitution on the church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*), the laity are instructed to take up an active role in the church. The document states:

Let it be recognized that all the faithful, clerical and lay, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about matters in which they enjoy competence. (Abbott 1966, 270)

This openness to lay opinion, along with the council's view that laity have a function or "apostolate" within the church, has encouraged more Catholics to study theology. Indeed, as Varacalli notes, a "new Catholic knowledge class" has emerged as an interest group within the church in the years following Vatican II. This segment of the church is made up of educated, liberal laypersons who are theologically literate and committed to carrying out the changes in the church envisioned by the council as they see them. Changes these Catholics envision include structural decentralization and advocacy for the rights of the poor, the underprivileged, and the disenfranchised, such as women and gays.

McSweeney (1980) notes the emergence of several interest groups within the laity in the American church after Vatican II; among these are Catholics seeking to make the church politically relevant, inward-looking charismatic or pentecostal Catholics, and traditional Catholics, whom I discuss below. Although not mentioned by McSweeney, gay Catholics are another interest group within the church. Especially in the United States, groups such as Dignity press for acceptance of not only gay persons within the church, but of monogamous gay unions as well. These varying factions vie for a voice in the church and are at times in conflict.

Despite the changes I have noted, the pre-Vatican II intransigence of Roman Catholic teaching may hinder the church's quest for legitimacy in the modern world (Kim 1980). When an organization changes a position to which it has previously committed itself, it threatens the organization's legitimacy among its constituents (Pruitt and Smith 1981). Within preconciliar Catholicism, as Gleason (1979) states, the majority of Catholics saw the church as theologically inviolable.

After Vatican II, it appeared to many Catholics that the whole structure of the church was called into question. In an effort to retain legitimacy in the eyes of traditional-minded Catholics, the hierarchy had to choose the middle course of opening the church to the modern world while still remaining faithful to traditional doctrines and holding on to established structures. As I have noted above, the church's response to the AIDS crisis is an example of its attempt to retain legitimacy among diverse constituencies as well as to appear relevant to the modern world.

❁  
THE LOCALIZATION OF POWER  
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Examining particular and localized expressions of power is necessary to an understanding of the whole structure of power within an institution. Therefore, I have based broader theoretical statements about the larger church organization on experiences of lower-level organizational officials, as well as on statements by upper-level officials with regard to one particular issue, the AIDS crisis.

Foucault (1980a) discusses the methodology of using local expressions of power to examine the structure as a whole. He states that structural power is expressed in localized and particular instances of discourse and that it is in these localizations of power that we can gain a perspective on the larger picture. Foucault discusses a method for analyzing relations of power. First, one must examine the "local centers" of power and knowledge. Foucault gives as an example the relation between penitent and confessor, where official knowledge is localized and power over the penitent is enforced. Second, Foucault notes that since power relations are not static, it is important to see how power is appropriated and transformed in its localizations. Third, he notes the importance of seeing how these individualized expressions fit into the "overall strategy." Inversely, the overall structure of the institution is supported by the local expressions of

power. Fourth, Foucault notes that there are conflicting elements of discourse that act in tension even on the local level and these must be examined. He states:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (Foucault 1980a, 101)

Thus, there are not simply two separate discourses, one emerging from the empowered and one from the powerless, but elements of both appear in expressions of discourse on the local level and even in the official discourse of those in power. It is these elements of discourse that help to bring about transformations of power. Foucault notes that these differing and sometimes conflicting elements must be objects of analysis as well.

My analysis utilizes Foucault's methodological cues for examining the power of institutions by looking at local centers of power within the hierarchical organization of Roman Catholicism. I also examine how relations of power are transformed on the local level, and how such transformations can serve the existing organizational power structure.

❀  
THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS  
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The organizational goals of preserving traditional teaching and allowing for pastoral accommodations are based in the Roman Catholic church's theological self-understanding. The church sees itself as interacting with society, not separated from it. In Troeltsch's (1981) sense, it represents the "church"



type rather than the “sect.” While eschewing the sinfulness found in the world, the church still affirms the goodness of the world and human culture and participates in it.

The church has within its membership both “saints” and “sinners.” It takes a gradualist approach to conversion, unlike the sect, in that it accepts the fallibility of its members who have not yet reached Christian perfection. It is possible, then, in Catholic theology, to make pastoral accommodations in the objective teaching in order to achieve limited, imperfect good in an imperfect society and with an imperfect church membership.

Haring (1970, 140) addresses this gradualist approach when distinguishing between moral theology and pastoral counseling. As Haring states, “Pastoral prudence looks not only to the general principles, but also to the art of the possible.” In this regard, Haring discusses the “law of growth,” whereby one gradually comes to live out the church’s objective moral teaching. A person who may not be able to live out objective moral teaching, he notes, is in a state of “invincible ignorance.” This concept does not refer simply to an inability to understand the church’s position on moral issues, but refers to all the real-world circumstances in which a person finds him- or herself and that impede the person from fully carrying out objective norms in her or his life.

Similarly, Curran (1984) notes that the pastoral minister is often confronted with the issue of dissent from church teaching in counseling situations. The pastoral minister, Curran writes, experiences the tension between authoritative church teaching and the conscience of the individual. The conscience should be formed by the gospel, and the Christian must live out the gospel’s demands in “truth and practice.” This commitment may lessen tension between the individual conscience and the church’s teaching, but such a tension still appears in pastoral counseling situations. Curran states that while a “privileged place” must be given to the hierarchical magisterium, it is possible for a faithful Christian to dissent from it.

An important distinction needs to be made at this point. On the one hand, the Christian may see her- or himself as not reaching the ideal. In this sense she or he is growing in the faith, and pastoral accommodations may be made to compensate for human weakness. However, an individual may also dissent from the church's teaching on a particular point. He or she may have an ideal at variance with official teaching. Even in this case, Curran notes, the pastoral minister should respect the conscience of the individual.

The tension between the magisterium and pastoral practice also appears in papal teaching. In his hotly contested encyclical *On the Regulation of Birth (Humanae Vitae)*, Paul VI strongly states his opposition to all forms of artificial birth control, but then focuses his attention on "pastoral directives." In addressing both married couples and priests, the pope emphasizes what Haring terms "the law of growth." Christ, the pope states, "was indeed intransigent with evil, but merciful toward individuals" (Paul VI 1968, 21).

The pontiff does not discuss those who dissent from church teaching. Rather, he confines his remarks to the issue of those who fall short of the ideal. A plurality of positions is not acceptable. In fact, priests are called upon to expound the teaching of the magisterium "without ambiguity."

John Paul II (1981) is also insistent on the need to maintain church teaching as the ideal. In his encyclical *On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)*, he notes that even though pastoral practice should allow for gradual growth, church teaching itself is not negotiable. The pontiff asserts that married people are to follow the natural law as set forth in the official magisterium of the church. He notes that Christian love and forgiveness must nurture married people as they attempt to follow the church's teaching. Nevertheless, John Paul admonishes the faithful:

[Married people] cannot, however, look on the law as merely an ideal to be achieved in the future: They must

consider it as a command of Christ the Lord to overcome difficulties with constancy. And so what is known as 'the law of gradualness' or step-by-step advance cannot be identified with 'gradualness of the law,' as if there were different degrees or forms of precept in God's law for different individuals and situations. (John Paul II 1981, 32-33)

In John Paul's theology, therefore, as in his predecessor's, there is little room for a plurality of moral positions.

While the possibility of dissent is not emphasized in papal teaching, respect for the well-formed individual conscience, as well as allowances for growth in conforming one's life to church teaching, is very much a part of the Catholic theological tradition.<sup>6</sup> This theological position gives freedom to the pastoral minister in counseling situations. It also allows for the church's organization to operate more effectively in the modern world.



#### AIDS: THE MEDICAL, SOCIAL, AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT



The church's response to AIDS has not occurred in a vacuum. Rather, the church responds to upheavals in its host environment as well as from within its own ranks. Thus, it is important to discuss the disease itself and the ways in which the broader society has dealt with it as a social problem. I also will examine how other Christian communities in the United States have responded to AIDS. The diversity of these responses reflects the diversity of American Catholic responses to the AIDS crisis.

#### *The History of AIDS in the United States: A Brief Note*

In the spring of 1981, doctors at the UCLA Medical School discovered several cases of a rare form of pneumonia, *Pneu-*

*mocystis carinii* (PCP), occurring in young and otherwise healthy gay men. At approximately the same time, several cases of a rare cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma, were diagnosed in New York, again among young gay men. Both of these discoveries were reported to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta.<sup>7</sup>

While more cases continued to appear among gay men, in the fall of 1981 other cases were found among heterosexual men and women whose common link was the use of intravenous drugs. A few months later, similar cases were found among Haitian immigrants. In early 1982, the CDC discovered that three hemophiliacs had contracted PCP.

In 1982 AIDS received its first name from the medical establishment, Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID)—a “homosexual stamp” firmly affixed to the disease (Liebowitch 1985, 3). Several of the early theories of the disorder linked it to gay lifestyle. Some researchers believed that the use of amyl nitrites, or “poppers,” by gay men was linked to the disease. Others held that the sickness was the result of an overload on the immune system due to the high rate of sexually transmitted diseases among gay men. Still others postulated that the introduction of sperm into the bloodstream during anal intercourse accounted for the depletion of the immune system and thus susceptibility to the rare forms of infection that had been reported. These theories, however, could not account for the cases of the disease among drug users, Haitians, and hemophiliacs.

Eventually researchers began to believe that the disease was transmitted through blood products. They then began to propose the presence of a viral agent as the cause of the illness. These discoveries also brought about the renaming of the disease from GRID to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Investigators endeavored to find the AIDS antigen as soon as a viral connection became clear. In 1984 a team of researchers in Paris headed by Dr. Luc Montaignier and another team in the United States under Dr. Robert Gallo iso-