



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC LETTER
ISSUED 'MOTU PROPRIO'

SACRAMENTORUM SANCTITATIS TUTELA

OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF
JOHN PAUL II
BY WHICH ARE PROMULGATED
NORMS ON MORE GRAVE DELICTS
RESERVED TO THE CONGREGATION
FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH*

The Safeguarding of the Sanctity of the Sacraments, especially the Most Holy Eucharist and Penance, and the keeping of the faithful, called to communion with the Lord, in their observance of the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, demand that the Church itself, in her pastoral solicitude, intervene to avert dangers of violation, so as to provide for the salvation of souls “which must always be the supreme law in the Church” (*CIC*, can. 1752).

Indeed, Our Predecessors already provided for the sanctity of the sacraments, especially penance, through appropriate Apostolic Constitutions such as the Constitution *Sacramentum Poenitentiae*, of [Pope Benedict XIV](#), issued June 1, 1741[1]; the same goal was likewise pursued by a number of canons of the *Codex Iuris Canonici*, promulgated in 1917 with their *fontes* by which canonical sanctions had been established against delicts of this kind[2].

In more recent times, in order to avert these and connected delicts, the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, through the Instruction *Crimen sollicitationis*, addressed to all Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, and other local Ordinaries “even of the Oriental Rite” on March 16, 1962, established a manner of proceeding in such cases, inasmuch as judicial competence had been attributed exclusively to it, which competence could be exercised either administratively or through a judicial process. It is to be kept in mind that an Instruction of this kind had the force of

law since the Supreme Pontiff, according to the norm of can. 247, §1 of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* promulgated in 1917, presided over the Congregation of the Holy Office, and the Instruction proceeded from his own authority, with the Cardinal at the time only performing the function of Secretary.

The Supreme Pontiff, Pope Paul VI, of happy memory, by the Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia, *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, issued on August 15, 1967[3], confirmed the Congregation's judicial and administrative competence in proceeding "according to its amended and approved norms."

Finally, by the authority with which we are invested, in the Apostolic Constitution, *Pastor bonus*, promulgated on June 28, 1988, we expressly established, "[The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] examines delicts against the faith and more grave delicts whether against morals or committed in the celebration of the sacraments, which have been referred to it and, whenever necessary, proceeds to declare or impose canonical sanctions according to the norm of both common or proper law"[4], thereby further confirming and determining the judicial competence of the same Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as an Apostolic Tribunal.

After we had approved the *Agendi ratio in doctrinarum examine*[5], it was necessary to define more precisely both "the more grave delicts whether against morals or committed in the celebration of the sacraments" for which the competence of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith remains exclusive, and also the special procedural norms "for declaring or imposing canonical sanctions."

With this apostolic letter, issued *motu proprio*, we have completed this work and we hereby promulgate the *Norms concerning the more grave delicts reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, which Norms are divided in two distinct parts, of which the first contains *Substantive Norms*, and the second *Procedural Norms*. We therefore enjoin all those concerned to observe them diligently and faithfully. These Norms take effect on the very day when they are promulgated.

All things to the contrary, even those worthy of special mention, notwithstanding.

Give in Rome at St. Peter's on April 30, 2001, the memorial of Pope St. Pius V, in the twenty-third year of Our Pontificate.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

* This unofficial translation is based on a translation of the *motu proprio* by the USCCB and revised by Joseph R. Punderson and Charles J. Scicluna. The translations of the canons of the *CIC* and the *CCEO* are from the translations published by the Canon Law Society of America in 1999 and 2001 respectively.

[1] Benedict XIV, Constitution *Sacramentum Pœnitentiæ*, June 1, 1741, in *Codex Iuris Canonici*, prepared at the order of Pius X, Supreme Pontiff, promulgated by the authority of Pope Benedict XV, *Documenta*, Document V in AAS 9 (1917), Part II, 505-508.

[2] Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici anno 1917 promulgatus*, cann. 817; 2316; 2320; 2322; 2368, §1; 2369, §1.

[3] Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, On the Roman Curia, August 15, 1967, n. 36, AAS 59 (1967), p. 898.

[4] Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor bonus*, On the Roman Curia, June 28, 1988, art. 52, in AAS 89 (1988), p. 874.

[5] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Agendi ratio in doctrinarum examine*, June 29, 1997, in AAS 89 (1997), pp. 830-835.