

**INSTRUCTION OF THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE  
WITH INDICATIVE NOTES**

(Unofficial Translation)

**SECRETARIAT OF STATE**

From the Vatican, 6 August 1976

N. 311157

To the Most Excellent Pontifical Representatives  
(with attachment)

Most Reverend Excellency,

The United Nations through its Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has taken an interest for some time in the grave problem of the abuse of the invasive psychological methods and of other procedures, when they are used in various arenas to violate the privacy of the human person, without the free and informed consent of the interested party and without respect for the obligatory and rigorous secrecy which their use entails.

The affected aspects are several: violence against political adversaries (psychological laboratories and political mental hospitals), pressure in the business arena, fault-finding argumentation to demonstrate the superiority of one race or sex, extortion of military secrets or of another type in the context of police intimidation, and finally manipulation in education and in the determination of one's calling; an aspect, especially, which interests particularly the Church, due to the various abuses pointed out in many places, above all in the area of admission and continuation in Seminaries and Novitiates.

This Secretariat of State, after having dutifully consulted experts from American and European Universities, has asked the Reverend Vittorio Marcozzi, S.J., professor of anthropological psychology and of scientific anthropology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, if he would prepare, for *La Civiltà Cattolica*, an article which expresses and synthesizes the position of the Church in a question of such delicacy.

With respect for your venerable responsibilities, I am sending you a copy of the aforementioned article, so that you might share it, in the name of the Holy See, with the Episcopal Conference, in the desire of providing them with an understanding of the working principles in the area of religious education and seminary training in their nation.

In the letter of transmission, it would be well for Your Excellency also to indicate that it is necessary to be attentive to the criteria of respect for the human person expressed by Father Marcozzi, namely, that:

1) It is not licit for anyone, either a religious or diocesan superior, to enter into the psychological or moral privacy of a person without having received from that person a prior, explicit, informed and absolutely free consent; in this sense, therefore, of considering illicit all invasive psychological or other practices, which are in fact used during the admission or continuation in Seminaries or Novitiates, if the prior and free consent of the interested party is lacking, which cannot be extorted in any manner.

2) Moreover, without the free consent of the interested party, a psychologist must not manifest to a third person, whatever the authority may be with which the person is invested, whether religious or political, knowledge which he may have arrived at concerning the interested party's private life, both psychological and moral.

3) An analyst is obligated, in turn, to respect the known principles of morality concerning secrets to which one is held (the natural secret, the professional secret and the committed secret).

By now, after ten years of experience and discussion and in a climate of general sensitivity for the respect of the human person, above all after what the Second Vatican Council has said on the subject, it now seems necessary to break down with firmness all such abuses actually present within the Church, by also permitting the Holy See to take a position in favor of the respect for privacy in the international debate, which I have referred to above.

With a well founded assurance of the your cordial collaboration and in anticipation of the courteous gesture of your response, I take this occasion by confirming myself with a sense of distinct esteem,

Your Excellency's devoted servant,

s/ G. Card. Villot

INDICATIVE NOTES

of the state of the question on the abuse of  
projective psychological methods and other practices

At this time, the Secretariat of State is following the development, at an international level, in the sphere of the United Nations, of the discussion on the theme of the use and abuse of psychology, above all in connection with the question touched on in article 12 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, "no individual can be subjected to arbitrary interference in one's private life."

Within the various documents developed by the United Nations on the matter, one stands out for its importance and depth relative to the "Respect of the private life of the individual and of the integrity and of the sovereignty of Nations" which bears the number E, CN.4 116, with four attachments.

The document, prepared following a request of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1968, insists opportunely on the right to privacy in the face of the invasions of the privacy of the person with methods of assessment and evaluation of the personality, varying types of tests, physiological exams, for purposes not specifically medical and therapies imposed against the will. Furthermore, "in the measure in which these various aspects embody a threat to the privacy of the individual, they risk violating many other rights which respect for privacy protects, among them notably, freedom of thought, of conscience, of religion and of opinion..." (page 78); "when a 'personality' test or 'lie detector' test is presented as a necessary pre-condition or even is simply 'recommended' or said to be 'desirable' for recruitment or for maintaining a position or getting a promotion, there is evident doubt whether the person who undergoes such tests does so voluntarily..." (page 78).

Moreover, the document presents a panorama, albeit somewhat limited, of the various national legislation and jurisprudence, with special allusion to a series of points to insert in a formal declaration of the United Nations on the subject.

One cannot but note how this entire complex question and modern problematic involves the essence of the person and, thereby, the moral law.

As noted, the most grave abuses, frequently hidden, can be perpetrated at all levels, social, business, educational, racial, political, military and, it is necessary to say it, even if with distress, religious.

The Church, then, is keenly interested in an actual problem which touches profoundly in such a way personal and social life and concerning which the nations are involving themselves actively in this important instance. And, in fact, as has been noted, the Holy See has intervened in the matter many times. It is sufficient to remember the Discourse of His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, of happy memory, of 10 April 1958, the Monitum of the Holy Office, "*Cum Compertum*," dated 15 July 1961, the Instruction of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, "*Renovationis Causa*," of 6 January 1969, "*Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis*," of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, dated 15 June 1970 (cf. N. 39).

Also, canon 530 of the Code of Canon Law is concerned with a question connected with the manifestation of conscience, in the sense of a defense of privacy for the subjects of Religious Superiors. Many, in fact, are the abuses, above all in novitiates and seminaries, in

order to obtain a manifestation of conscience with projective psychological methods or by other means.

It is well noted, in fact, that not only is it attempted by many parties to disregard already existing norms, but since this norm is limited indicating a law for the subjects of Religious Superiors, there are attempts to subject persons to projective psychological and other types of tests and to related therapies in the stage preceding entry into religion, that is to say, in the stage of admission to the religious life; curiously, some arrive and are made to agree to signed declarations which permit, even after their admission, the use of knowledge of the privacy of the person known earlier.

Similarly, in many Seminaries and in the stage of admission to them, the same abuses manifest themselves, however more openly, there not being an express canon which prohibits this; some Dioceses are found even to impose such exams and therapies on all of the diocesan priests, with psychological forms, pressure, the leakage of records and whatever else one can imagine.

Naturally the tolerated spread of such abuses within the Church does not permit raising one's voice against the grave abuses of the use of psychology in the political, social, business, or racial arenas, through which the restoration of a climate of respect within the Church is also a necessary premise for any initiative for the defense of the dignity of man which has been trampled on outside of the ambit of the Church.