Courier-Journal - Friday, August 15, 1969

# Humanae Vitae...and My Conscience Tells Me'

The first of five articles on the Humanae Vitae Letter of Pope Paul VI.

#### By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

I wonder if the letters of the Episcopal Conferences of many nations in interpreting for the people the Humanae Vitae, did not commit the "Fallacy of Plunge". This was the error of Nicodemus when Our Lord spoke to him of the necessity of spiritual rebirth by faith and grace. Scholar though he was, Nicodemus plunged from theology to obstetrics asking: "How can a grown man be born again?"

In like manner, when it came to the formation of consciences on the Humanae Vitae, even though theologians were writing for the faithful on a teaching of the Church, there was little or no appeal to the Holy Spirit. Rather a plunge was made from the Divine, the Ecclesial and the Spiritual Order, down to the natural order, or the unillumined conscience. Nicodemus last everything Our Lord promised in his plunge to reduce "birth" to delivery from the womb, so commentators took the directives of the Church, and treated the response of conscience as if "we were never even told there was such a thing as the Holy Spirit."

The conscience of a Catholic has other lights than the conscience of a Communist. This is what the Savior was trying to get across to Nicodemus: that His People have another guide than that of unguarded reason alone.

If the Humanae Vitae did not appeal to Revelation, but limited itself to the natural conscience, then the discussion would be limited to such catchwords as: "Do your own thing". "Everybody's doing it". "Any act which I do which is followed by pleasure is good; any act I do which is followed by pain is bad".

If each person is his own god, and what he decides as good is good, a time must come when the gods will disagree. A Hindu once said to a British Administrator: "Our consciences tell us it is right to burn our widows on the pyre of their husbands". "Yes", replied the officer, "and our consciences tell us we are right to hang you if you do".

#### **Psychology and Conscience**

"All men fall on the side toward which they lean", said Guizot. When moral people live in an immoral society, the direction of leaning becomes important. Mr. Lot and Mrs. Lot were moral people in an immoral society, but they pitched their tent "towards Sodom." As a result, Lot barely escaped the atomic explosion in Sodom, but Mrs. Lot loved it so much that she looked back to its bridge parties; and penance with Sodom. Our Blessed Lord left a solemn warning about adjusting our morals to a sensate world: "Remember Lot's wife." dividual was a tin god, and his own measure of right and wrong? We would have a conflict of contrary and contradictory egos. How can peace be established in such a disorder? When sheep run helter-skelter, a dog chases them. When society becomes a bedlam, some dictator arises to deprive the individuals of their consciences, and substitutes for them the Party-conscience, which is Red Communism, or the Nation-conscience which is Black Fascism, or the Race-conscience which is Brown Nazism. All forms of dictatorship are the forcible reorganization of the chaos created by a false liberalism.

It is very easy for a man to desire what is wrong; after that, he begins to fool himself, saying: "After all, it is not wrong. My conscience tells me it is right." Then if he is chided for stealing another man's wife, he answers indignantly that in his own conscience he felt it was right. It was this kind of thinking that made it possible for the world to accept such evils as child labor, the starvation wages of the Industrial Revolution and American slavery and now brings on abortion and contraception.

Many in the world today would rather take a wrong road that leads to a death, than the right road indicated by a sign set up by the State. If questioned, they often use modern jargon, saying that they were compelled to follow their own will, working out their own "commitment" with "total relevance" to their "maturity" in a "world come of age" and in this particular "existential situation."

#### Norma Do Exist

Do I set my watch according to my estimation of time, or by the sum? I saw a cartoon of an American looking at his wrist watch, then looking up at the Big, Ben on Westminster Tower in London, saying: "One of us is wrong." We take medicines which are prescribed by someone else, but in the world of morality, we consider it contrary to human dignity to do so. We conform to speed laws, health laws and physical laws, because immediate pain and punishment follow-if we do not obey. We reject the Divine moral order, because God's Day is in the future.

Herod followed his conscience, but he beheaded John the Baptist (Matt. 14/9. The collective conscience of the Pharisees agreed that they should not put blood money into the treasury, but they took the Innocent Blood of Christ (Matt. 27/3). Did not Our Lord Himself say that there would come a time when Christians would be killed in the name of a "good conscience" and seeming love of God? David's conscience did not trouble him when he caused the death of Uriah. These consciences were wrong, not from innocent ignorance, but because of the clouding and obscuring which comes from self-respect, lust and egotism. Editor: The COMMENTARY by Mr. Fred Sarkis in the Courier-Journal (7/8/69.) was extremely moving. Therein lies the problem.

Moving, yes. However, from the standpoint of Christian tradition and human logic, it leaves much to be desired.

No Panacea

Mr. Sarkis writes — "Of all the suffering I have witnessed on this earth, there is nothing more tragic to me than the emotional suffering of a priest who seeks the release of his vow of celibacy".

Really, Mr. Sarkis: In something that at least resembles Christian charity, I sincerely hope your exposure to "emotional suffering" is limited to the priest(s) you allude to

You refer to Jesus as being "uncomplicated" and "simple". You add the view that one need not 'be "versed in theology and philosophy" to understand such problems. Hardly. However, a cursory examination of scripture could shed some light on the subject.

Christ—like the Church He founded—was "complex" (to use your word). He did, indeed, empower the hierarchy of the Church to carry on in His name. I doubt that He was unaware that someday that same Church might peter requests for a release from celbacy to some "cold cubicle" in Rome.

He did, indeed, suffer great mental anguish in His "agony in the garden". However, it's interesting to note that He chose to accept the crucifizion of Good Friday out of obedience to the will of his Father.

Do those suffering young (or old) celibates believe for one moment that their problems will be solved with the acquisition of a wife? Don't they understand that marriage is the beginning of something and not the end?

Has their exposure to even the ordinary problems of married life left them unaware that marriage is no panaces?

I certainly share your anguish for those priests who have difficulty with celibacy. I also am concerned with those single people who — without the benefit of the graces of the sacrament of marriage — must lead a pure life. My comment is, rather, a statement of an existing situation and the posing of questions, both of which are aimed primarily at one very small group; namely, that select group of priests who are wallowing in self-pity over the clerical discipline of perpetual celibacy, a renunciation accepted by them voluntarily, without pressure, and at mature age.

LETTERS

to the editor

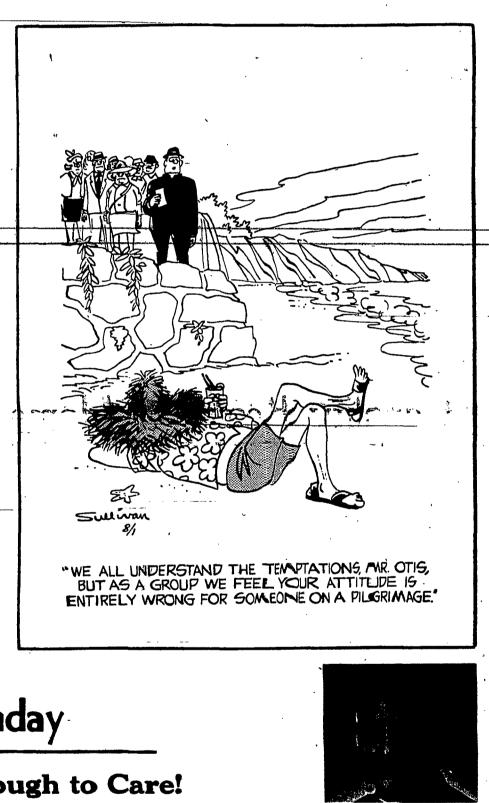
It is a strange phenomenon that celibacy evokes from many either reverence or contempt depending on whether the person whose behavior is observed is a priest or a layman. The celibate priest is treated with an especial reverence and at times with an excessive adulation; the chaste life of the celibate layman frequently wins for him ridicule, verbal harassment, sarcasm, and derision.

That this condition exists is perhaps symptomatic of the false notion that the call of Christ to Christian perfection was meant only for those in the priesthood or religious life; whereas, in fact, Christ intends for all men to pursue perfection in accordance with their state in life and the limitations inherent therein.

To the group of priests I described earlier, I pose these questions:

Is the celibacy renunciation really too much for you? Do you not realize that many members of the laity live celibate lives (either temporary before marriage or perpetual) with all its implications and, unlike you, do not receive reverence for so doing but only contempt and abuse? Yet, they do not complain; why do you?

#### Why do you complain - you whose



opportunities for fulfillment and adwaterment in personhood are usuality so much greater than the celibate layman's because of the built in minissity of service inherent in your vocations?

Do you feel that in this age of ecclesia-stical aggiornamento the eschatological argument for priestly celibacy is no longer valid, that it is enough for us to promote the welfare of earthly society, and that we are no longer in meed of a sign as we journey as pilgrims toward the Heavenly City which "is not of this world" and wherein there will be no marrying or giving in marriage?

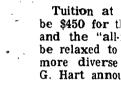
If this is the way you feel, then what is your answer to the tearful pontiff, a man of vision and great spiritual depth, who, upon hearing of your desire to do away with mandatory celibacy, asked "Would they destroy the jewel of the Western priszthood?" What is your answer, as "another Christ," to Christ, our Celibate Lord, when He asks, "Will you also leave Me?"

> -Arnold B. Morrison Jr. Rochester.

## Sarkis Backed

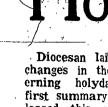
Editor: Mr. Fred Sarkis' remarks in the Courier-Journal (7/8/69) were good to read. They impressed me as an extraordinary announcement of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

-John R. Dassh, Pittsford, N.Y.



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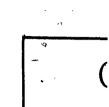
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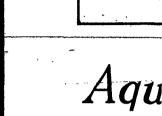


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#### "Do Your Own Thing"

Suppose we just limit ourselves to the popular expression: "My conscience tells me I am right." It must be remembered that conscience does not always decide what is intrinsically right or wrong; what it does is to prompt us to act on what we believe to be right or wrong.

For example, the cannibals in New Guinea told missionaries that their consciences told them they must kill and eat other men. Why? "Because", they answered, "they come from another world, and have-no-business here." The cannibals acted on what they subjectively believed was right, but objectively, their norm, or standard was wrong.

What is commonly called an erring conscience, is not so much an error on the part of conscience, as on the part of the norm, or standard, or knowledge of what is right or wrong. A grocer is in good conscience when he changes a certain price for two pounds of meat, but his scales may be wrong without his knowing it. Even though he truly does not know his scales are out of order, nonetheless, the scales are out of order; later he must compensate his customer for the loss.

Though those who reject the Humanae Vitae may have honest reasons, they will be without excuse if it is proven that their norm is wrong. "Officer, my speedometer is wrong. I did not know I was traveling at 80 miles an hour."

#### The So-Called Infallibility of Conscience

Conscience is infallible as a prompter to action on the basis of man's knowledge, but it is not infallible as regards the norm or standard. An archer shoots his arrow at the target, but suppose when told to hit the "Bull's-eye", he directs his arrow to the eye of the bull. He believed that he was doing right, but he did not understand the meaning of a true target. A musician in an orchestra may justify his discords on the grounds that his instincts and his "feelings" prompted him to play sour notes, but there is still a score outside himself which decides the tune he should have played.

#### A Tricky Conscience

Conscience can play tricks on us. As Nietzche said: "One may strain one's conscience so that it kisses when it /bites." Judas trained his conscience to do that. Has it ever been noticed that today conscience seems to be that something "which tells me that I am right"? But how few do you ever hear saying: "My conscience tells me that Lam wrong." The assumption here is that

the conscience is "mine."

This mystique by which the pendulum is without the clock, and planes are without radar, makes the individual supreme. Because "I feel it in here", without reference to a measure outside myself, I make myself immune to authority; in fact, I have made myself creative of authority. I refuse to have an umpire in baseball, a director If the ego-conscience is the ultimate in authority, one eventually reaches a point where conscience "no longer troubles. An Indian once described conscience as a "three cornered thing inside me. When I do wrong, it turns around and hurts me very much, but if I keep on doing wrong, it turns so much that the corners become worn off, and it does not hurt any more."

#### Conscience Can Be Killed

Conscience never reacts when we cease to feel an obligation. This is why lawlessness is one with God-lessness. "God-is-dead" means "conscience-is-dead." Not even the embrace of Christ in the Garden could arouse "my-conscience-tellsme-it-is-right" of Judas.

St. Paul, taking up the theme of man in an immoral society, reminds the Ephesians: "They live blindfold in a world of illusion, and are cut off from the life of God through ignorance and unsensitiveness. They have stifled their consciences, and then surrendered themselves to sensuality, practicing any form of impurity, lust can suggest. You have learned nothing like that from Christ."

Pascal has wisely reflected that we never do evil so effectually as when we are led to do it by a false principle of conscience. An example of this would be the Nazis making lampshades out of the skins of Jews they later sent<sup>8</sup> to the furnace. Stanley J. Sharpless, in his satirical verse, shows how by appealing to the ego as a standard, we can eliminate the seven capital sins:

> Seven deadly sins of old the Good Life tried to fix, Freud stood surety for Lust, Then there were six, Six deadly sins danced A-bri**sk satanic jive** Stratchey banished Gluttony, Then there were five; Five deadly sins pursued Their soul-seducing war, Covetousness? Good for business, Then there were four; Four deadly sins bestrode The world with devilish glee, Envy-whom-there's no one left, Then there were three; Three deadly sins planned What evil they could do, Sloth? It's lack of vitamins, Then there were two, Two deadly sins enjoyed a Spot of fiendish fun The dollar loan abolished Pride, Then there was one: One deadly sin-by Beelzebub! the last Anger's simply gland secretion. Sinner-danger's passed!

Everybody's Doing It This criterion marks an advance, by not making myself the standard, but by appealing to a social norm. "Everybody's doing it"—therefore, it is I sympathize even more with those married people who each day carry their crosses in following the dictates of the Holy Father regarding artificial birth controls

-Kevin P. Doran Hornell.

### Self-Pity Assailed Editor:

Prompted by Father Tormey's article (Courier-Journal, July 18), I would like to comment on the celibacy issue. Although it may at first glance seem so, my comment is not an attempt to pose and answer the question, "Whose row is hardest to hoe?" Father Cuddy, with splendid honesty and customary candor, has already done that (Courier-Journal, July 11).

## Word for Sunday

## Love People Enough to Care!

Kitty Genovese scream for help as

she was being stabbed to death. No

one bothered even to call the police.

When it was all over, all 38 went

back to bed. "How can people be so

Americans probes the horror of non-

involvement. The first reason given is

mobility. Our society is so mobile to-

day, people cannot settle down, can-

not strike roots in a particular com-

munity. As a result many people feel

they don't belong - not belonging,

A second reason is anonymity. A

person can easily get lost in the

crowded city, can become what W. H.

Auden called "the unknown citizen."

If he shirks his responsibility, who

Conformity is another reason. Edu-

cation, economics, society-all tend

to standardize people like a Ford.

Bradbury's satiric novel Fahrenheit

451 carries this tendency to its ex-

treme of thought-control. Inadvertent-

form that it is almost a heroic act to

dare to be different. As a result ev-

erybody waits for everybody else to

ly, people are being so drilled to con-

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#### By Father Albert Shamon

"Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" There you have our modern heresy of activism — pelagianism dressed up. "What must I do?"—"I" and "do", as though eternal life depended totally on me and my actions.

Our Lord did not directly answer this question to the lawyer in Sunday's Gospel. Instead He met it with another question. "What is written in the Law?", He asked.

Teachers of teenagers need this lesson in pedagogy from Christ. So many religious teachers use the deductive method. They treat the mind like a pitcher to be filled with facts. The human mind needs to be exercised. Its function is to search out truth. That is why Christ in His teaching always used the inductive or discovery method. By skillful dizlogue and questioning, He educed from the lawyer the answer to his own question.

His answer is significant. The lawyer had asked, "What must I do?" "The answer was "Love-love God and neighbor." Eternal life is not a matter of doing but of loving That is the point of the Good Samaritan parable.

The thieves harmed the man because they did not love him, and the priest and the Levite passed him by for some reason. Their crime was heartlessness. The Samaritan stopped because he had a heart. Action is the expression of love. We do nothing if

The theme of the play, Hair, is heartlessness. One of the songs in it is "Easy to Be, Hard."-

"How can people be so heartless?" How can people be so cruel?"

The song answers its own question: "Easy to be hardbegin before doing anything. Like the centipede trying to cross the street — he never got across, because each foot was waiting for the other to start.

Arad a last reason for "detachment" is specialization. Orurs is a bureaucratic society, we have agencies for everything. Consequently, if someone needs help, we justify our neglect by the thought, "That's what the police is for," — or the welfare agency, and so on.

Co-llege President Lawrence M. Gould said: "I do not believe the greatest threat to our future is from bombs or guided missiles. I do not think our civilization will die that way. I think it will die when we no longer care. Arnold Toynbee has pointed out that 19 out of 21 civilf zations have died from within and none by conquest from without. There were no bands playing and flags waving when these civilizations decayed. It happened so slowly, in the quiet and the dark when no one was aware."

To save civilization today, we must begin being Good Samaritans: men who love people emough to care!

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