

# Humanae Vitae... and The Two Consciences

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

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

When the Humanae Vitae was explained to the faithful by Episcopal Conferences, conscience was too often treated as if it were only that of the natural man, unilluminated by faith, and un-aroused by the Holy Spirit. But the conscience of a man without faith, and the conscience of a man with faith is different.

Take two examples: David looking out from his penthouse saw on the opposite roof a beautiful woman taking a sunbath. Sending messengers, he discovered she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Inviting her over to see his etchings, or some similar excuse, he sinned with her. She found herself with child.

David's conscience did not bother him particularly; he probably agreed that sex morals were changing in his day, but the pregnancy did worry him. Under the pretext of finding out how the war prospered, David sent for Uriah, her husband, gave him a banquet and a few "Davidic" cocktails, and sent him home to sleep with his wife. But the plot to lay the blame for the pregnancy on the husband, failed. Uriah refused to leave, saying it was improper for a soldier to have ease while others were in the battlefield.

David's conscience was unmoved by such devotion to duty. He sent a letter to General Joab: "Station Uriah in the thick of the fight, and then fall back behind him, so that he may be struck down and die." Uriah was killed.

David's natural conscience had no scruples up to this point. Why should there be an interrupted transmission of the love of Uriah and his life? After all, the Humanae Vita is not that sacred. There seemed to be nothing wrong since his conscience was "free" to use the sword to split love and life.

## The Lord and the Natural Conscience

But Scripture makes another judgment: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." Now comes the illumined conscience: "The Lord sent Nathan to David" (2 Sam. 12/1). The Lord enters the scene with His Truth. Then follows a parable full of pathos and power, told by Nathan. David, hearing it, becomes a defender of social justice, because a poor man had a little lamb stolen by a rich man. Defense of social justice, in some instances, may not be inspired by a true love of the poor, but by an unconscious desire to compensate for want of personal justice. Nothing saves a bad conscience like blame of another.

The conscience of David is now reborn; he no longer projects guilt against "structures" and "establishments" and "violators of civil rights"; "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12/13). His conscience was no longer judged by his own standards, but by the Lord Who spoke through a man. On this string, he harps the psalm he penned in his Misereatur: "Against Thee only have I sinned."

While David was doing "his own thing"; while he was his own reference in the bout with conscience, he could not see he was doing anything wrong. Conscience is a guide, but it is only a good guide when it becomes captive to God. That captivity frees a person from self-justification with all its jargon of the peculiar moral situation involved in every "penthouse view". After all, was he not free? Does not freedom mean casting off inhibition in order to grow to maturity?

But when the Lord spotlighted his "infallible" conscience, he saw its fallibility. He was stabbed into an awareness that conscience can move on two levels: The ego-level and the Lord's level.

In the first phase, David's conscience was sovereign, and "the king can do no wrong". In the second phase, his conscience is submissive to the King of Kings. In the first instance, the Humanae Vita, or the human life of Uriah amounted to nothing; in the second instance the Humanae Vita of Uriah was everything.

## Paul's Two Consciences

Another example of the difference between the natural conscience and the Spirit-illumined conscience, is provided by St. Paul. The conscience of Paul did not bother him in the least as he participated in and gave full consent to the murder of Stephen (Acts 8/1). No one ever opposed the teaching office of the Church with a greater sense of doing what was right. No one today ever struck the Bride of Christ with greater assurance than Paul's conscience bade him to do: "As for me, I thought it was my duty to use every means to oppose the Name of Jesus, the Nazarene" (Acts 26/9).

He voted against the faithful; he signed petitions of condemnation of those loyal to Him; he even brought pressure to make those who were true to the Church "blaspheme".

Our Lord forgave His executioners: "They know not what they do." Paul said he knew what he was doing; he had an "informed conscience"; he had thoroughly thought out the matter, and accepted rebellion against the Church as a "duty". "I tried many of the saints into prison... I tried to force them to renounce their faith; my fury against them was so extreme, that I even pursued them into foreign cities" (Acts 26/10-11). There were no newspapers in those days to publicize his protest against the faithful members of the Church, so he looked to the road to nullify it.

## Change of Heart

During one of these journeys, he was converted, and his conscience illumined. Instead of rebellion against the Church, there was now obedience to it. But even then, while suffering for the Church, he would never once claim even for his Christ-illumined conscience, that some infallibility and cock-sureness had claimed his conscience before his conversion. "Not that it makes the slightest difference to me whether you, or indeed any human being, find me worthy or not. I will not

even pass judgment on myself. True, my conscience does not reproach me at all, but that does not prove that I am acquitted; the Lord alone is my Judge" (1 Cor. 4/3, 4).

No inner glow, or self-righteous feeling proves that a person is righteous: "If anyone wants to boast, let him boast in the Lord. It is not the man who commends himself that can be accepted, but the man who is commended by the Lord" (2 Cor. 10/17, 18). The Light of Christ, and not the opinion of protesters, or the will of the majority is the final test of what is right. The Lord's judgment will surprise both those who are conscious of this virtue and those who are conscious of none. (Matt. 25/36, 46) What God looks for in us is what He alone can give — the desire for goodness which is kindled and fed by the love of Christ.

## The Conscience of the Spirit

This is the Christian conscience: "The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8/1). What a distance Paul had traveled since the day that his conscience told him it was a duty to attack the Church.

The natural conscience needs a vision, such as Jacob had at Bethel, which changed him; such as Moses had at the burning bush, which turned him from a shepherd in flight to a liberator of his people; such as Isaiah had in the temple; the vision which must come to every man when the glory of God shone about him. This was the vision Paul had on the road to Damascus, and his conscience sees something which ordinary eyes may never see at all.

The conscience which was described in many commentaries on the Humanae Vitae, was the conscience of Paul before his conversion, and of the Samaritan woman before meeting Him "who told me the story of my life". If the Christian conscience has no Bethel, no Damascus, no Temple, no Christ at the well, it might be directed as Seneca, or Cicero, or the Stoics might have been. But there are other lights than candles, and a Christian measures up to his calling when he has said: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Act. 26/19).

## Hard Today to Form Spiritual Conscience

The natural conscience relies for its decisions on its own honest judgment, based on limited knowledge. But too often it justifies the way one lives by what the spirit of the world approves, or on what statistics reveal to be the common practice.

The right attitude of conscience is very difficult even for a Christian to form, who reads 78,406 pages of print to one page of the Scripture. Even our best deeds of sacrifice, prayer and almsgiving can be worthless if done from a wrong attitude of heart (Matt. 5/23, 24; 6/1-6). Because a man cheats his wife, or his grocer, or refuses to practice natural, honest love, but acts toward his wife as he would to a harlot, he is not thereby justified because "my heart tells me I am right".

The natural conscience is not always that straight: "It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and make a man unclean" (Mark 7/21). Human nature so often suits its creed to the commandment it breaks.

Man too often considers his moral life only as a natural and earthly vocation, instead of also as a supernatural and eternal vocation. The conscience of the heathen was in a separate class from the conscience of the Israelite (Romans, Chap. 1-2). The difference was due to the revelation of God which Israel received, and the heathen had not. Despite this difference, they are both alike in being sinners.

The Christian in turn, has still further illumination than Israel. Hence, the question of contraception is not to be decided as if a person were never baptized, nor called to the supernatural vocation in Christ Jesus.

The Holy Father made precisely this point in his Humanae Vitae. It is not founded on the natural law alone, as some critics pretend, but on the natural law illumined and enriched by the Divine.

## The Three Heavenly Visions

In passing through a long tunnel, the distant light at the far end becomes brighter as one approaches the exit. In the middle of the tunnel we can not see writing on the wall, but farther on, we can read it well. A good natural conscience has a little light, like being in the tunnel, but it can faintly discern right and wrong. But a Christian conscience has extra lights which are given by God through His Church and through His Spirit. We have the same eyes at night as in the day, but we cannot see at night, because we lack the light of the sun. So the natural conscience, or the heart of a worldly man lacks three lights which are open to those who have faith.

As a telescope is to the eye, so the heavenly lights of faith are to the awakened conscience of the faithful. These three heavenly visions to illumine and aid our natural consciences in arriving at informed decisions are:

- 1. The Spirit-Illumined Conscience
2. The Blood-Purified Conscience
3. The Church-Guided Conscience

Three separate chapters will bring the light of faith to the understanding of the Letter on the Sacredness of Life.

Fulton Sheen

# LETTERS to the editor



## On Celibacy

Editor:

In the CCD doctrine course for the adult laity in the Rochester Diocese, the text used is called "Worship and Witness."

It teaches that to transform a good Catholic into a genuine Christian, he needs only to direct his gaze away from himself and center it on Christ. His outlook will change. He will begin to place himself at the service of the Person rather than merely accept the truth of what He says.

He will never cease to ask how much more he can do to please Him. The question of obligation never arises. A genuine Christian not only keeps the commandments, but goes far beyond them in living a life of love.

Our clergy are experiencing a crisis in faith. We all owe them our prayers. Can they possibly believe that a woman can do more for them (in any way) than Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother, etc. If they are humble?

Chastity (firm and convinced) is a necessity for the married as well as the unmarried. I would warn any woman that if a man can't love God totally, he's a poor candidate for marriage and parenthood.

I suggest the clergy begin setting a humble example of submission to the will of God in a spirit of sacrifice for the millions of women without men through the lack of numbers or war or alcohol or desertion.

Mrs. Betty Zielski, Dansville.

## Reason to Rejoice

Editor:

After reading Father Cuddy's column "Priesthood: The Most Prized Gift" (Aug. 8, 1969) I was moved to utter a fervent prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of the "skirts" of the world that Paul J. Cuddy has chosen to remain celibate.

Catherine E. Samuelson, Rochester.

brought myself to that place where I could stand before man and God "stripped of my garments," the garments that cover my innermost thoughts and desires. We have too many man-made priests, nuns and laity. Christ desires more God-made followers.

Kathryn Wall, Hornell.

## Time to Reflect

Editor:

I have read and considered with some sadness the words of Bishop Sheen in his column of Aug. 8, "Pope Pays a Bitter Price."

Sadness because it reflects office again the "teaching authority" calling attention to its great suffering while not seeing the suffering of the individual who may be most affected by its teaching.

It seems appropriate to ask: How about sincere Christians who honestly reflect upon the teachings of the Church but find themselves caught between the repeated commands of the teaching authority and the reality of their existence?

What of the suffering Christian who silently struggles between the dictates of his conscience and the repeated admonitions of the Church?

Perhaps it is time to reflect on the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he said, "It is infinitely easier to suffer in obedience to a command than in the freedom of one's own responsibility. It is infinitely easier to suffer publicly and honorably than apart and ignominiously."

Arden J. Wolterman, Apalachin, N.Y.

## Surrender Self

Editor:

"The world can never be definitely united with you, Lord, save by a sort of reversal, a turning about, an excentration, which must involve the temporary collapse not merely of all individual achievements but even of everything that looks like an advancement for humanity."

This is a quote from Father Teilhard de Chardin's Hymn for the Universe which I believe has application to the Church today.

Perhaps the Church, as the world, has many individual achievements which must collapse before a union with Christ is possible. So many people strive for perfection on their own merit instead of a surrender of self and a perfecting of self from within by Christ and the Holy Spirit.

This is true of our laity as well as of our religious. I am but a housewife and the mother of four small children. However I could not possibly begin to believe that I could transform myself nor my Church into anything sublime unless I first

## Whose Rights Hurt?

Editor:

Whenever a film is seized here in Rochester the battle begins anew on whether this is infringing upon someone's rights. May I give an opinion on how the people in the neighborhood where these theaters are located feel about our rights?

Back in January my husband and I, working with our neighbors, protested the policy of the Coronet Theater. We were later joined by people from all over the county, some of whom now work with the Citizens for a Decent Community which was formed following our action.

I ask those persons who are so quick to call us censors: what would you do if a theater in your neighborhood began a continual policy of showing these exploitation films? It does pose a danger for your neighborhood.

Another argument arises that these films are not harmful. Let me tell you of an informal survey done near the Coronet area. The Coronet opened daily at 12 noon. We had an alarming number of cases of school children being approached by men exposing themselves — more cases than average, and occurring in early afternoon. We were increasingly concerned by the type of person this could bring into our neighborhood.

Since the theater's change of policy, we have noted a remarkable decline in this type of crime. We are pleased with the Coronet's new policy, and for their respect for our concern and for our community standards.

Mrs. Robert Mulhern, 627 Post Avenue, Rochester 14619

## Word for Sunday Of Gratitude and 'The Nine'

By Father Albert Shamon

Once again a Samaritan steals the show in the Sunday Gospel. Last Sunday, the Good Samaritan showed what love of neighbor is. This Sunday he shows what love of God is — namely, gratitude.

Ten lepers came to Christ; all were cured — only a Samaritan returned to say, "Thanks." First of all, consider the tameness of their cure. There was no fanfare, trumpet-blowing, dramatic scene. Our Lord made no oration; He simply said, "Go — show yourselves to the priests." And on their way, they were made clean.

God deals thus with all penitents. One clothed with the leprosy of sin needs only go show himself to the priest. So easy is it all that many, like Naaman the leper, are loathe to use the healing of the Sacrament of Penance.

After the cure, why didn't the nine others return? It could have been they refused to associate with the Samaritan. Once the common misery was cured, the old animosity could have flared up again.

Or perhaps the nine reasoned this way. God is everywhere and so everywhere He can be thanked. No need to express it; enough only to feel it in one's heart.

Christ apparently was not of this mind: "Were not ten of them made clean?" It is true God is everywhere. He may be thanked in the silence of one's heart. But such thanks is not enough. Not enough, not because God wants praise, but because love and gratitude grow in proportion as we express them — the exteriorization of a sentiment deepens it.

Also, it becomes man to express his gratitude to God, not in one's heart only nor in nature only, as the Romantic poets did, but with other men. That is why the Mass,



"I TOLD IT LIKE IT IS, AND THEY ALL YAWNED LIKE IT WASN'T."



ADORATION SOCIETY Mass and break County Sept. 7 committee chair standing — Fra...

## Nocturnal To No

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and Bishop James J. Conboy officiate at the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Adoration Society of Mount St. Mary's, Sept. 7, in...

Bishop Kearney will Mass and preach at Joseph's Church. Bi address society mem at the Flagship Hotel

More than 20 charts be presented and breakfast.



"DISTANT" COMMUNITY with Our Lady meeting in Rock Hill, S.S.J., who month for the Miss Marie Wil who is serving i...

## They At Bo

Three members of the Perpetual Help Church are what might be cousins.

Two cousin graduates of the School who entered orders nearly 40 years ago engaged in similar month: missionary work.

But they'll be at one in Seoul, South in Selma, Ala.

They are Sister Anna Marie, now in Korea, and Sister Teresa Willig, St. Joseph who will Elmira and who will Selma in September.

Another cousin visited some time in Willig, 83, 12 Borchtor — a parishioner of...

Sister Anna Marie cign missions since entered the Good St Peckskill in 1930.

Sister Catherine, serving at St. Joseph of Nursing for serving religion to nuns recently volunteered the Sisters' hospital

Sister Anna Marie sionary work in China where she helped a God Shepherd of China. During the World War II their

## Widowed Pa To Resume I

The Catholic Wid will hold its first season at 8:15 p.m in St. Theodore's port Road. Father C creator, will address

Persons interested obtain informal Meehan, president Francis Hickey, via 8222.

COURIER-JOURNAL advertisement with contact information for Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and other staff members.