

The Humanae Vitae and Blood-Purified Conscience

Fourth of five articles on the Humanae Vitae letter of Pope Paul VI.

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

The Holy Father's Letter on Love and Life, as he said: "may easily appear to many to be difficult, or even impossible of fulfillment". In fact, he went on to say, "it would not be practicable without the help of God, who upholds and strengthens the good will of men".

In the last chapter, we mentioned the first of these Divine subsidies to conscience, namely, the Holy Spirit. Here we come to the second relief for the natural conscience: the Blood of Christ. Paul VI, in his Humanae Vitae, joins together the "hard sayings" of the Lord and His Church with the redemption: "The Church, while teaching the inescapable demands of the Divine tidings, announces the tidings of salvation". Then he begs the priests who are to bring the merits of Calvary to souls, to be "the echo of the Voice and the Love of the Redeemer".

This beautiful combination of "intransigence in the face of evil and mercy towards individuals", is possible only because of the Blood of Christ. The Scripture teaches: "The Blood of God Who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the Eternal Spirit, can purify our conscience from dead actions so that we do service to the living God". (Heb. 9/14).

An "Informed" and A "Purified" Conscience

In almost all honest decisions of the conscience in the natural order, it is required that it be "informed". But in the revealed order, the moral decision comes from a conscience that is not just informed, but "purified".

The "informed" conscience acts out of knowledge; the "purified" conscience acts in response to a gift of God. A painting may look good artistically and well done under candlelight, but in the light of the sun, the blemishes appear. The natural conscience is often satisfied, because it is a judge in its own case, but the Blood of Christ acts like a detergent on our presumably white consciences. The "purified" conscience cleans away false judgment; it comforts conscience with new norms; it lifts conscience from knowing what is right to returning love for Love revealed in the Cross.

This new relationship to Christ does not put the believer in opposition to his conscience, but makes the relationship more normal. Our old nature feels that conscience is a burden; it carries on with us an unbearable repartee; when it disturbs our sleep, interrupts ease-loving existence, and expresses itself in endless dialogue. We try to drown it, or drug it, or rationalize so that we may continue undisturbed.

But once one recognizes that, thanks to the Lord's love and redemption, we are not foreign, or inimical to Him, our very wounds make us rush to Him as the Physician. Conscience, then, never wills anything that is inconsistent with that Love.

The voice of condemnation pursues us through every path of life until it is hushed before the Cross. The unpurged conscience, on the contrary, is tempted to ignore, to excuse, or to doubt; the "purified" conscience, while never denying the guilt, as the Humanae Vitae states, runs to Christ for cleansing. The searching about for a confessor who tells us we are right when we know we are disobeying the Church, cannot bring easement to the soul; it is quite different from the peace which comes from Christ Who says: "I will not remember your sins".

It is all good and well to boast that we are following a natural conscience, but it could be like the sailors who thought their compass was infallibly right until they arrived in the enemy port where they were seized and made slaves. They did not take into consideration that someone had tampered with the needle. "In the eyes of a fool, the way he goes is right" (Prov. 12/15).

Hence, the Biblical injunction: "Let us be sincere in heart, and filled with faith, our minds sprinkled and free from any trace of a bad conscience" (Heb. 10/22). "Sprinkling" is a metaphor for the Purifying Blood of Christ applied to a "bad conscience"; that is a conscience flattered by the spirit of the world, or by a pride which despises all authority other than self. No one denies that the natural conscience feels really justified so long as it takes swipes at the Pope and slaps the Church. It helped the consciences of the Pharisees to accuse a woman taken in sin, but when Our Lord faced them, they were convicted by their own consciences, and "went out one by one, beginning with the eldest, even unto the last" (John 8/9).

Meaning of Blood

We are rather squeamish today in hearing about blood, and no wonder. What age ever had so much blood shedding, so many world wars! Sin is in the blood. It is in every fibre of the body, every fissure of the brain and every cell of the body. It can be read on the faces of the licentious, in the cruel gaze of the mugger, in the parched and drained complexion of the degenerate.

Because sin is in the blood, the expiation for sin demands that it be poured out. When man no longer invokes the Blood of Christ to atone for his sin, he begins to pour out the blood of his brother in the dirty business of war. Furthermore, since life is in the blood (Gen. 9/14), the greatest sign of love for another is the shedding of our blood for another. "He has proved His love for us by washing us clean from our sins in His Own Blood" (Rev. 1/5).

The conflict of Calvary was between God's Justice and man's sinfulness. God could have said: "Oh! forget it!" Or, while recognizing evil and sin, He could have said it deserves death, then take the punishment Himself, and let us go free. As a judge who condemns to death a criminal for murder, and then steps down and takes the penalty, so the Savior surrendered His Life to loosen us from fetters and give us the freedom of sons of the Heavenly Father. "Blood is therefore an ex-

cellent word to describe uttermost self-giving" (John 15/13). Humanae Vitae begs priests to link together "intransigence with evil and mercy to individuals". He was begging consciences not to justify their evil, but to enable the Blood of Christ to purify them. Christians are marked with red, as a shepherd marks his sheep with a characteristic dye.

The Gaze of a Battered Face

Let the natural conscience give all the reasons it can for justifying the blindfolding of eyes to shut out the light, the plugging of the ears to prevent hearing music, the propping of the seed cast in the earth to kill harvesting and other mechanical jamming of the communication between love and life; let the man of natural conscience appeal to his honesty, his freedom, his knowledge and his "feeling" of doing no wrong — and then look to the Cross! The sight of that battered Face makes our self-righteousness appear as filthy rags. Pharisee and publican, bishop and swindler, all alike are criminals under that gaze.

Human wisdom does not save! It is ignorance that saves! "They know not what they do". The Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ — yes, Christ nailed to the Cross" (1 Cor. 1/22). Human respectability, majority reports and press approval are nothing but the points where nails are driven into His Hands and Feet. In the light of that Cross, both the self-satisfied "informed" conscience and the "justified" bombing of Hiroshima undergo a purging fire, and come out ashamed.

The truth about our conscience is that we never know it until He shows His thorn-crowned Face. Knowledge that justifies our repudiation of the Shepherd of souls is vain until it becomes true self-knowledge; and no one knows himself until he sees his image reflected on that tree. Jesus said: "Wouldst thou love one who never died for thee, or ever die for one who had not died for thee?" (William Blake).

A Soldier's Conscience

The Roman officer who commanded the soldiers who crucified Our Lord, very likely justified the crucifixion in his own conscience on the grounds that the courts found Him guilty, the people agreed when piloted by Pilate that He should die, and that he as an individual was free to do what he felt was in keeping with the spirit of the times. Inasmuch as he was stationed in Jerusalem, he probably had heard Our Lord speak, saying: "I am the Truth". But none of His words meant anything until he "pierced His side with a lance and immediately there came out blood and water" (John 19/34). The conscience of the soldier was changed! Now he cries out: "In truth this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15/39; Matt. 27/54). The sight of the Blood of Christ changed him.

Judas and Christ's Blood

The confrontation of the Blood of Christ and the conscience was revealed also in Judas. Judas had already justified his doubt about Our Lord when He showed contempt for political theology by announcing the Eucharist. His conscience was further convinced that he should leave Christ and the infant Church, when He showed little interest in sociology and the love of the poor, by accepting rich ointment to announce His redemption.

God cannot be bought, but He can be sold. Judas fixed the price at 30 pieces of silver. Divinity is always sold out of all proportion to its due worth. Then came the awakening and it had to do with Blood. He takes back his gains, throws the coins rolling and jingling over the temple floor, moaning: "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27/4).

The new insight came to Judas when "he saw that He was condemned". He had often heard his Lord say that He must be crucified; now he is filled with horror, and he repents as the Scripture says. But he "repented unto himself", not to the Lord who would have saved Him. His confession was made to his fellow conspirators who could not save. He used Blood to fix his guilt, not to purchase forgiveness.

The Purged Conscience

When a drunken driver faces the corpse of the child he killed, he sees his alcoholism in a new light. When one looks at the Cross, one sees dishonesty, contraception and pride in a new light. "Wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7/24). The arguments written at a desk, or in a university against Humanae Vitae could never be written under a Crucifix.

David Swenson, in his Faith of a Scholar, tells how as a professor of philosophy, with his cowardly evasions and paltry excuses, he came to face up to a sense of guilt. When a colleague told him: "Swenson, you will never bring the American people to a consciousness of sin", he answered: "But if every other American were an angel, and his conscience as pure as driven snow, and if every American except myself were a professor of philosophy, it would still hold true that I stand in need of a religion of pardon and grace, of a religion that offers and effects a relationship to a Divine Reality that can recognize the integrity of the personality."

Forgiveness is not Cheap

What the purged conscience sees is not "I am justified", or "the Church is wrong", but "I have in some way brought Christ to death", by my meanness, my self-indulgence, my hatred and my passion to dominate others.

The second fact that rings out from the Cross is I need the kind of forgiveness He gives. Forgiveness is no bargain. There is no inexpensive grace. I can wash myself with the waters of self-justification as did Pilate, but the cleansing of this faulty nature of mine is not bought dirt cheap like merchandise stuffed in an outdoor counter. It hurts someone. For me to go on reading only that which agrees with me, makes me an easy-going, comfortable worldling, but it does not give me peace. The moment, however, I bring myself

(Continued on Page 9)



Cardinal Danielou: Press Undermining Church Authorities

Rome (NC)—A "massive offensive" against religious authority is unrolling in the press, according to Jean Cardinal Danielou of France.

"Never before has the Church's authority been the target of so many violent attacks as today," said the Jesuit theologian, dean of the Paris Theological Faculty and a cardinal since April.

These attacks are carried out by "small and well-identified groups that are striving to make their particular point of view prevail," said Cardinal Danielou in the September issue of the Italian monthly magazine "Famiglia Mea" (Family Month). He did not, however, name these groups.

He cited publicity given to ecclesiastical measures against the then Msgr. Ivan Illich of Cuernavaca, Mexico, and to attempts to have Auxiliary Bishop Matthias Defregger of Munich extradited to Italy on charges of authorizing a wartime massacre.

He said the "polemical fireworks" surrounding these and other cases "have further convinced me of the existence of a massive offensive under way to exploit the religious occurrence and discredit, dishonestly, the authority of the pope and the bishops."

Cardinal Danielou called a systematic policy of silence "detestable." He

said open discussion on matters of vital interest to the Church was healthy, but added: "I think that the problem revolves on the honesty of journalists, their duty to give an objective picture of the facts, furnishing all elements of information. Too often many of them are inspired by polemical designs, and present events in a partial perspective, one-sidedly."

He added: "Today, only contestation seems to have a right to mention in the religious news columns. Contestor-priests and contestor-laymen in the Catholic Church are few, and in no way representative of their categories as a whole. Yet people get the idea that they are legion. Actually if you ask the People of God as a whole you will see what trust and love there is today for the Pope and his teaching."

Several times in his long interview Cardinal Danielou spoke of a need for outspokenness on the part of the Church's magisterium—its teaching authority.

He said various polemics in the Church today give rise to "the need of a clear and solemn pronouncement on specific matters." Elsewhere he called for "a definite stand on questions of principle." Finally, he said that press campaigns against ecclesiastical authority will bring forth a "clear pronouncement" from the magisterium.

Such a pronouncement "will be hailed with joy by the great mass of Catholics and also one can well believe by many Christians who do not belong to our confession."

Sex Education Revision For the Right Reasons

The following editorial is reprinted from the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle of Aug. 27, 1969.

Roman Catholic diocesan school officials have revised the sex education program, and for the right reasons.

They have not discarded the program, which would have been the wrong move for the wrong reason.

This is the program that some overly prudish parents objected to vigorously. But contrary to some impressions, they did not represent a majority. According to a diocese poll of more than 3,000 parents, more than 86 per cent approved.

Retention of the program means that Catholic school officials are standing by their promise to give children an early, solid understanding of human values and functions.

The changes, such as slowing down the introduction of the sex vocabulary, reflect a year's experience in the sex education program. This is not a backdown in the face of some strong dissent. The result should be an improved course of study.

But diocesan officials went further. Polls show that up to 80 per cent of youngsters get no instruction on sex at home. Why? There are various reasons but probably the most common one is that parents don't know how to go about counseling their children.

To this end, the diocese is prudently preparing a manual that will help parents explain sex. This is an intelligent move. It lets parents, by communicating with their children, identify with the program at school. It can make them partners in education.

There is no indication, as far as we know, that the sex education course will be any less frank in the sense that it will deliberately omit pertinent information. In this or any other school instruction, timidity is unrealistic.

Making children wiser, at an appropriate age, robs them of nothing. The unfounded fear of "premature knowledge," voiced so often in published protests a few months ago, assumes that children would neatly and

obediently block out all "improper" questions until it's the "proper" time to answer them.

Too many parents duck their responsibility in acquainting their offspring with the intimate biological and social functions of human life.

The schools can help make it unnecessary for young people to get their sex "education" from pornographic sources or clandestine, back-of-the-barn teachers.



"ONCE THE PEOPLE GET USED TO IT, IT'LL BE A NICE CHANGE OF PACE FROM THE GUITARS."

Word for Sunday

Christ Is Answer for Youth

By Father Albert Shamon

One of the loveliest stories in the Gospel will be read next Sunday. It is the story of the Son of the widow of Nazareth restoring to life the son of the widow of Naim.

Our Lord came to Naim on His way south to keep the Passover. The day before, He had healed the centurion's servant at Capernaum. And now, having walked 18 miles since early morning, He was toiling slowly up the steep slopes leading to Naim as the sun was setting.

At the gate of the village, He met a funeral procession, a widow grieving over the death of her son.

"When the Lord (this is the first time Luke calls Jesus "Lord" — a title Jews reserved only for God) saw her He felt sorry for her." The Greek word used here by Luke to express a feeling of sorrow is the strongest word in the Greek language to express this emotion. It is used again and again of Jesus.

What a staggering revelation this must have been to the ancient world! The revelation that God is One who can feel sorry for man.

The Greeks had two schools of thought about the gods. The Stoics believed the gods were incapable of feeling. They argued that if a person could make another happy or sad, it meant that at least for that moment he was under the influence of that person, and therefore not superior to him. Since no one is greater than the gods, no one can influence them. To the Stoics, therefore, the primary attribute of the gods is apathy — complete detachment from all things human.

The other school of thought was that of the Epicureans. They held that the gods lived in perfect happiness and blessedness and were totally indifferent to man. Tennyson pictured them in the "Lotus Eaters" as "lying beside their nectar seas in golden houses . . . smiling in secret, looking over wasted lands, blight and famine, plague and earthquake."

The basic idea of the Greeks regarding the gods was either detach-

ment or indifference. The basic Christian idea of God is identity. The meaning of the Incarnation is that God came to us to be one with us in all things but sin — sharing our sufferings, even death itself (cp. Heb. 4:15).

At Naim when Christ saw the bereaved widow, "He felt sorry." As always, He made the first move. Tenderly, He said to the widow: "Do not cry." Then He stopped the procession; and He who in the beginning had said, "Let there be light," now said, "Let there be life!"

"And the dead man sat up and began to talk" — probably to his mother. Generously, Christ gave the youth to her; and unostentatiously, He passed on. Who could not love a God like Christ — so sympathetic, so powerful, yet so kind and self-effacing; One who in an instant can transmute darkest sorrow into deepest joy!

One further point: remember the dead man was a young man. Pallbearers were carrying him out of Naim. Youth is easily led, he is constantly being carried along: either to death or to life, to the grave of sin or to Christ.

How often the pallbearers are their own peers! For instance, there is generally one reason why teenagers smoke, drink and try drugs: it is the pressures to conform applied by the peer group.

These pressures are capused in curt expressions. "Don't be a square" which means you don't have to be a lady or a gentleman. "Don't be a party pooper" which means it's all right to get drunk. "Don't be chicken" which means it's all right to race a car at breakneck speed and join the 1,700,000 Americans who died for nothing. "Everybody does it" which means it's all right to "go all the way."

At the gate of Naim, who stopped the pallbearers? It was Christ. And it still is He alone who can put youth, headed toward the grave, in the path of life. If ever a person needed Christ, it is today's youth. Youth needs the understanding of Christ, His love, His kindness and His power. It is up to parents, priests, and teachers to give them Christ.

Please God, may they become not the pallbearers of today's youth, but their bearers to Christ.



St. Joseph

One year ago the men of the parish in Gates converted a dairy barn and silo at 4100 into a church.

This year they're busy adding a 100x40-foot structure to the church, to be used for instruction and other parish activities (see top photo).

The addition will contain a hall and kitchen with facilities to divide the hall

Irondequoit Augustinians

The Rev. Mr. Arthur J. Chappell, pastor of Irondequoit will be celebrating Augustinian Father at 3 p.m. Friday, Sept. 6, in St. Martin's Church.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen will preside at the ordination ceremony.

The ordinand, son of Mr. Arthur B. Chappell Jr., 19 Drive, Irondequoit, a 19-year-old Aquinas Institute, will celebrate his first Mass at St. Martin's Church, Sept. 7, in St. Martin's Church. The homily will be given by Father George P. LaPlante, chairman of the department of religious studies, Merrimack College, North Andover, Mass.

Father Chappell attended the University, where he was a student organization, president of the university program director of the Irondequoit "American Universities" National Arts Honor Society, graduated with honors in philosophy and was valedictorian of the class.

He entered the Order of Augustinians, an order of priests who staff several of the schools and parishes throughout the country. He is completing his master's degrees in theology at Catholic University, America.

Active in inner-city work with the deaf in the Irondequoit area and with so-

Correction

Last week's Courier-Journal incorrectly reported that this page regarding the Father Teach-

The program is designed primarily for the parish teacher; but teachers' classes are also invited.

The teach-in, sponsored by the Office for Christian Education in conjunction with the Paulist Press, will be held on Thursday and Friday, Sept. 19 at the Notre Dame House, Canandaigua.

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