

# Church-Guided Conscience

Fifth of five articles on the Humanae Vitae

Letter of Pope Paul VI

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

It must occasionally be repeated that what is never doubted is the declaration of the Vatican Council: "A man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully in order that he may come to God for Whom he was created" (Religious Liberty #3).

But "personal conscience" does not mean "one's opinion", nor does it mean making self-interest the "voice of God", nor as Cardinal Newman said, "acting according to one's judgment, or humor without any thought of God at all".

But rather, because the voice of conscience often gets jammed by eroticism, as the Voice of America does by Russia, the faithful Catholics will look to the Church which Christ provided when He said to His Apostles: "He who hears you, hears Me".

God manifests His Will not only through my conscience, but also through the Church; and He does this not to be an opponent of my conscience, but the guarantee of its authenticity.

The Devil has convinced many that the sign of a well developed, or mature conscience is one that is independent of the Church's authority. The good Christian accepts the guidance of the Church because his conscience tells him to do so. The Vatican Council, in the Decree on Religious Liberty, stated: "In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church. The Church is, by the Will of Christ, the teacher of the Truth. It is her duty to give utterance to, and authoritatively to teach that Truth which is Christ Himself, and also to declare and confirm by her authority, those principles of the moral order which have their origin in human nature itself" (#14).

The Church is the third form of Divine assistance to the natural conscience. The first is the Holy Spirit, which is the conscience of the universe; the second is the Blood which reveals me to myself, and the third is the Body of Christ taken from the womb of Israel, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, through which Christ continues to teach, govern and sanctify as He once taught, governed and sanctified through His Physical Body which He took from Mary.

## Even Non-Infallible Teaching Binds

Even though the Holy Father stated that his Humanae Vitae was not an infallible decision it, nevertheless was an utterance of the Church, which is "the pillar and ground of truth" (1 Tim. 3/11). Before it was published, the Vatican Council II stated: "We owe the offering of the religious allegiance of mind and will in a unique way to the authentic teaching of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking infallibly. This should result in a sincere adherence to the judgment in faith and morals which he has delivered, complying with his obvious meaning and intention" (Constitution on the Church #25).

But though the Pope claimed no infallibility in the Humanae Vitae, many of those who rejected his teaching did claim infallibility for themselves. Rejecting the prayer-over decision of Pope Paul VI, they set up their individual consciences as the norm of those whom they taught.

Suppose, however, the Pope had written: "In this new age we must change moral principles to suit the way people live. Henceforth we declare homosexuality is a form of love, contraception is a beautiful divorce of love from life, and along with Pill and Pot it is a response to the erotic drive of the twentieth century." Would not the very negative character of the modern man, which loves to oppose the Church, have condemned him for not following the traditional teaching?

## Not Personal but Ecclesial

Moral leadership is not on the side of those who have the greater armies, and truth is not always on the side of the "learned" theologians, or the well meaning and influential majority, as the Arian heresy proved. Those who had already, in their natural consciences, made up their minds to justify contraception, could not stand being crossed. The Pope to them just had to be "pig-headed", "stubborn" and "manifestly wrong", as some of the protesters put it.

What we need today is not a Church that is right when the world is right, but a Church that is right when the world is wrong.

In the doctrinal part of the Humanae Vitae, the Pope never uses the first person, nor speaks of his teaching. Rather, he is concerned with the teaching of the Church. "We now intend by virtue of the mandate entrusted to us by Christ" (N. 6).

Again and again, it is not Paul VI, but the Church which speaks, for example: "manifested by the teachings of the Church" (N. 10), "the teaching of the Church on conjugal morals" (N. 16), "the teaching of the Church in this field" (N. 17), and "the Church teaches that every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life" (N. 11).

## Sign to be Contradicted

Pope Paul prayed more, studied more and agonized more over this pronouncement than any who rejected it; but more important still, he knew that he would become like the Lord, "a sign to be contradicted". Rising above the natural to the spiritual level, he reaffirmed what the decent people always believed, that contraception destroys a personal act, and reduces marital union to what George Orwell, in his 1984, called an "it".

Suppose the majority of Catholics put blind-folds over their eyes, the Church would say: "Your eyes were made to see; you know that! Even nature tells you. Open your eyes to light!" Immediately, protest groups would be formed in the name of the "League of Hedonism"; placards would be carried reading: "The Pope is against Eye-Control".

Suppose the Catholics plugged up their ears, the Church would publish a letter entitled Hu-

manaе Aurea, proclaiming: "Take out those mechanical plugs! Have you no reason? Is it not natural for the ear to hear"? What an army of conscientious dissenters this would create. The press would publish the names of those who left the Church, because they could not accept the Church's Decree against Ear-Control.

In degenerate Roman days, those who loved to eat would tickle their throats, then go to a vomitorium, and disgorge the food in order to eat more. The Church opposed the practice, saying that there must not be any artificial interruption of eating and digestion, just as it says today something similar in forbidding an interruption in mating and generation. No vomitorium! The pathway of life must be kept open!

Certainly, some oppose the Humanae Vitae, even some priests, but it is now becoming clear that what troubled them was not the Humanae Vitae, but the Humana Vita.

## The Glory of the Humanae Vitae

The Humanae Vitae has this great glory: obedience to it enables us to unite our faith and our morals, and not keep them in separate compartments. The Vatican Council II put them in organic relationship. The Church "endowed with the authority of Christ, preaches to the people committed to them the faith to be believed, and the morals to be put in practice" (Constitution on the Church #25).

We might just as well face the fact that poor, weak mortals have more difficulty with the morals than with dogmas. We justify our bad morals with dogmatic difficulties, as did the woman at the well. When told she had five husbands, she changed the subject, and introduced the theoretical problem of whether to worship on a mountain, or in a temple.

If we do not live as we think, we soon begin to think as we live. The delinquent who starts robbing, generally ends up with justifying robbery. Our behavior is more the real reason than any reason we say is "real".

The Vatican Council and then Pope Paul try to keep us honest by keeping faith and morals together. He who accepts the Humanae Vitae in faith, must accept its morals; he who rejects its morals, must impugn his faith.

## Time of Testing

The Copulation Explosion of a decaying civilization deafens ears to the call of the Shepherd. But, on the other hand, like a litmus paper, it tests our faith; it divides us between Christ and Baal. "The sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd; one by one He calls His own sheep, and leads them out. The sheep follow, because they know His voice; they never follow a stranger, but run away from him; they do not recognize the voice of strangers" (John 10/1-5). During a lifetime, we have only two or three moments of great decision which affect our lives for decades, or maybe for eternity. This Letter from the Church is one of them. It is beautifully challenging! It comforts both in body and soul.

These are great days in which to live. We have to stand up and be counted! "Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails can be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt. 3/10). Up until now, Christians could float in the current of so-called Christian civilization; now they have to swim against an erotic civilization. Before, they were on the reservation, and paganism was off the reservation. Today, paganism is on, and Christians are off. Up until now, love for Christ in His Pleroma, the Church, would be shown by an affirmation; in this hour it is shown by a negation — the repudiation of all that is non-Christian.

The Church is living in an hour when the words of Our Lord come in "loud and clear: "He who is not with Me, is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me, scatters" (Matt. 12/30). One wonders if any Christian after the first century ever thought that the dividing line of Christians would not be the Creed, but the Commandments, and not the first, but the sixth, not the second, but sex.

If the defense of what is natural continues against such attacks as we witness today, it is not impossible that in some distant future, Christians will have to die for the truth that grass is green in the springtime, and God did make little green apples.

We are forced to stand "here", or to stand "there". It gives us that opportunity to join that small army of Gideon after God told all the cowards to leave; it enrolls us in the "Faithful Remnant", which survived wandering in the desert; it demarcates more clearly between Church and the Secular Society.

## Pope on the Losing Side

Any leader signs his death warrant who tells a Freudian age: "Blessed are the pure of heart". Try to save a drowning man, and he will fight the rescuer. Let Pope Paul try to save the Church for Christ, and he will have more brickbats thrown at him than others receive praise. One day, our Lord took eight flimsy catchwords of the world: "Security", "Revenge", "Fun", "Popularity", "Getting Even", "Sex", "Armed Power", and "Comfort", and turned them upside down in the Beatitudes. From that moment, as with Pope Paul, the distance from the Hill of Beatitudes to the Hill of Calvary is about as far as a man can throw a newspaper clipping.

In an age when all means of communication tend to debase sex to an erotic technique, when the stage seeks to affirm man's pristinic innocence by nudity, he who talks of marriage from the background of the Cross is going to find himself nailed to it. Without God, there would be no one to complain to. Without God, the world would not be worth complaining about. Without the Church, we would have no one to whom we could say: "Come down and we will believe".

But Christ did not come down; Peter did not come down and Paul VI does not come down to

(Continued on Page 9)

# LETTERS to the editor

## Respect Our Priests

Editor:

The Vatican Council set forth with significant emphasis—the beautiful scriptural concept of the royal priesthood of God's people. Unfortunately, some who have pondered on this doctrine of the Constitution ON THE CHURCH, have thought that its intent was to demphasize the ministerial priesthood:

To make of the ministerial priesthood a mere function of the common priesthood, differing from it only in degree. To make of the ministerial priesthood even something delegated by the people of God, as a sort of mandate—democratically conferred.

The letter of Mrs. Raymond McCormack (COURIER-JOURNAL, August 29) appears to me to be based on a conception of this sort.

If the bishops of the Council had actually taught thus, it would certainly have been something to raise eyebrows. For the hierarchy would then have been acting on its hierarchical authority to phase out the hierarchy. But they did nothing of the sort, of course.

Although they stressed the "servant" aspect of the priesthood, they carefully maintained the traditional distinction between the common priesthood and the hierarchical priesthood.

In section 10, the Constitution ON THE CHURCH declares: "Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated." And the document goes on to show the nature of this interrelation, in which the ordained priest acts, not in the name of any popular mandate, but "in the person of Christ".

In the decree ON THE MINISTRY AND LIFE OF PRIESTS, the Council says "priests are indeed set apart in a certain sense" (par. 3).

But to accept a sacrament which, through the institution of Christ, lifts a man "a step above the common layman" does not at all imply a downgrading of the sacrament of Matrimony. Each of these sacraments consecrates a special state of life with special graces.

The sacrament of Holy Orders is a nobler sacrament not because of the grace it confers but because the state of life it consecrates is more immediately concerned with God and eternal life.

That God has seen fit to institute such a sacrament and lift up men into the awful role of acting "in the person of Christ" is the sacrament of His Word, and consecrating the Body and Blood of Christ, is something we may puzzle over but can scarcely criticize.

And Catholics fully accept this distinction in practice. We do not call a newlywed couple "reverend"; but we do apply the term to a newly ordained priest. Why? Because we revere, and hold worthy of reverence his very special office.

We do not kneel and ask the blessing of newlyweds, saintly though they may sometimes be. But we do know and ask the blessing of a newly-ordained priest. Why? Because we know that at ordination he was con-

secrated "to make offering, to bless, to preside, to preach, and to baptize."

Although the Catholic can make a distinction between the worth of the office and the worth of him who possesses it, it goes without saying that the priest should strive to resemble in character the Master he represents, by "imitating Christ the Lord." It is in this context of the imitation of Christ, and never removed from it, that the matter of priestly celibacy should be discussed.

Members of the ministerial hierarchy, from pope down to cleric, must remain humble servants of God. The rest of the royal priesthood of the faithful can and should contribute to their humility.

But we priests today are not going to profit spiritually by being reminded we are "ordinary." We are painfully aware of that. What we need most is to be reminded that our task is extraordinary, for that is what we are most prone to forget.

Call us "Father", show respect for the priesthood we possess, however unworthy, and you will be doing a real service to us and to the whole Church.

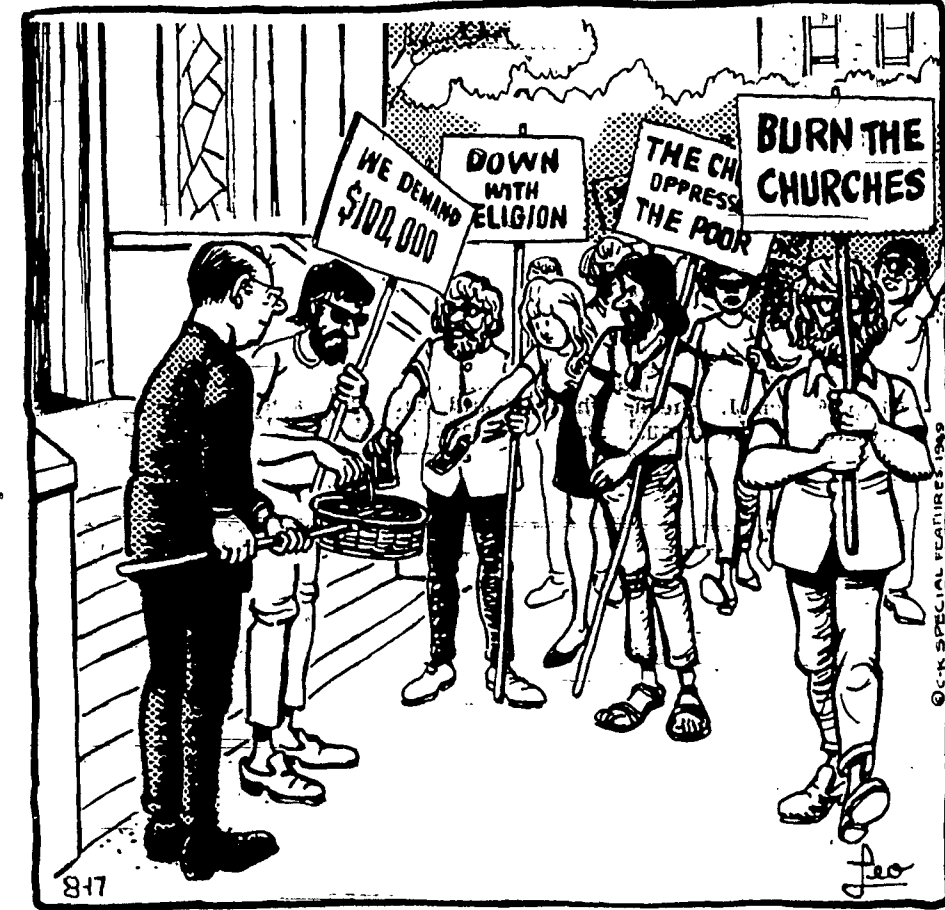
—Robert F. McNamara, St. Bernard's Seminary.

## Sisters Praised

Editor:

In our present period of criticism of the Church and her clergy it would seem beneficial to members and non-members alike if you would bring to light the wonderful Christian work done by the Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph and their staff at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma, Ala.

When I visited this institution a few weeks ago I was very much moved by these Christlike people. There, in Selma, is the "Spirit." The



## Word for Sunday

### We Venerate the Cross... Why?

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. What a paradox! To venerate one of the most frightful instruments of death in the ancient world! "Exaltation" means "to exhibit." Originally the feast commemorated the discovery of the true cross by St. Helen, the mother of Constantine the Great. On the feast day the cross was exhibited at Jerusalem for veneration. In the ninth century the feast memorialized another historical event about the cross; namely, its recovery from the Persians in 629.

Why an exaltation of the cross? Because Christ used this instrument of death to save the world. In the beginning of His public ministry, Christ told Nicodemus, "The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in himself" (Jn. 3/13).

This incident referred to by our Lord happened near the end of the wandering of the Hebrews to the Promised Land (Num. 21). God's chosen people had had many discouragements. When the King of Edom would not let them pass through his borders, it was the last straw. They murmured. Aaron and Miriam were dead at this time. Moses alone remained. As though it were not enough to taunt him, the people spoke against God—"Would that we had died in the wilderness," they prayed. God heard their prayer. Fiery serpents appeared of a sudden and stung the multitudes. Death came quickly and terribly. Terrified, the people cried out to God and Moses prayed. God heard them.

Instead of destroying the serpents, God ordered Moses to forge a bronze serpent and hang it on one of the banner poles dominating the camp. All who looked at the serpent were saved.

Why did God do this? The Old Testament and the New are one book. It is wrong to insist too much on the distinction between them. As St. Augustine said, "The New is concealed in the Old, and the Old is revealed in the New." Thus, the way of salvation in the Old is the same as

that in the New. Salvation from the serpents was a free gift of God, but given only to those who looked at the bronze serpent. Salvation today is a grace, God's free gift; but given to those who look on Christ's death with the eyes of faith.

The poison of the fiery serpents boiled in the blood of the Israelites; the poison of sin, caused by the bite of the infernal serpent, ferments in the hearts of all men so that Christ could call His generation "a brood of vipers." The Israelites, bitten by the serpents, were to be healed by a serpent lifted up on a cross. The bronze serpent had no poison in itself; the Man, Christ, had no sin in Himself—thus He crushed the serpent's head. The Israelites were healed, not by politics or salves or drinks, but by looking at the bronze serpent. So man is healed from sin by faith in Christ's death.

Thus Christ made the preposterous claim: "If I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw all men to myself."

"I — not my holy life, not my doctrine, not my power—but Me, a Person."

dynamism, the sincerity, the love shown by these sisters overwhelms anyone who comes in contact with these people. Ask the patients.

Ironically, they can use our help. The hospital, which administers to the blacks specifically, is \$100,000 in debt. This debt is due mainly to the inability of the people to pay their bills. (For this reason the black people are not welcome in the white hospitals of that area).

I'm sure the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester could find a solution to this problem. Any sacrifice, to me seems small, if we can keep this oasis of love, this model of Christianity alive as a witness to a desert of sterility and hatred.

—Gerry Wahl, Rochester.

## Red Wing Thanks

Editor:

Although it will be a few weeks before exact figures can be known, I believe it is safe to say Rochester Community Baseball had a reasonably good 1968; this despite the fact we had more than our share of poor weather. Our overall unofficial attendance is up 25,000 over 1968 which is a tremendous tribute to the people in this area. As an example, we drew more than 35,000 the last six days of the season even though our playoff chances were slim to nonexistent by that time.

I believe it is a tribute to people who have the best interests of the community and baseball at heart. For this, I am most grateful. Thank you very much.

We were especially pleased with the turnout on Courier-Journal night which contributed to our success.

Bob Turner  
General Manager  
Rochester Red Wings

CATHOLIC YOUTH ORGANIZATION  
35th Annual Meeting  
Campagna  
Sept. 12-14

My Dear People:

Let's close the gap! Almost every closed from the top down. This top means there are a few extra in their pocket. The bottom those who rarely "breaks."

From the 14th to 15 September 250 volunteer Catholic Youth Organizers will help—

Give athletic facilities 4,000 boys and girls in crowded neighborhood.

Find jobs for 400 boys in the coming year.

Provide weekly phycation for 3,500 of our school children.

Send 1,500 children to camp.

Enable 2,200 girls civate in cheerleaders and.

2,000 boys to play Basketball and Leagues.

If you are old enough to remember that you had a chance to join a sports and recreation are young enough to that you did, thank them of others, then.

Please Check You dates. Remember

Sincerely  
+ FULTON

## Adult Cl

Twenty-four courses the Adult Religious Program to be conducted from late September to be in five diocesan co

The courses, held o week, are scheduled in parishes and also Geneva, Ithaca and Elm

Handling details for formerly known as thology Program, are 1 priests—Father Leopold OFM, Cap., and Father C QFM, Cap., who are staculate Heart of St. Geneva.

Information may be writing the office of Religious Education Prog 251, Geneva 14458, or ing 315-789-1991.

Included on the seven priests, two Sisterly. Bishop Fulton, J has participated in the gram, is scheduled to in Elmira on Nov. 20.

## RECESSIONAL judges and lawyer

J. Sheen (right) at

St.

Parishioners of St. Church, North Chili, hammer and saw to basement of their two classrooms and a

The frame rectory, and Union Street was contractors in June, parishioners are now basement rooms. The first parish building, i

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