



THE OPEN WINDOW

Fr. Louis Hohman

Q. In a recent column on birth control, you said, "I'm worried about the unselfish, spiritual people for whom there is no other way than to accept birth control. Do these unselfish people have two cars, color TV, etc.? It is too bad that your parents didn't have a priest like yourself tell them it was okay to use birth control before they had you, then Christ would have had one less Judas among His so-called followers."

A. Are you saying that if a couple have two cars and a color television that they must have more children to validate that fact? What possible connection can there be unless you are presuming to say that there cannot be any other valid unselfish reasons for not expanding a family? Are you saying that the economic factor is the only one?

It may be my fault, but that line you quoted should technically read, "the unselfish spiritual people who cannot honestly see any other way." There are such people and if you really are

devoted to the Holy Father you must realize that he speaks of these people with the greatest compassion and does not condemn them.

As far as my being a Judas, I am delighted that it will be the merciful Jesus who will decide that. And, really, I am not going around telling parents like my own not to have children. If you think that, you have lost the whole meaning of the discussion.

In all these problems of birth control I am considering only situations where for unselfish reasons couples have come to the conclusion that they should not have another child.

Everyone agrees there are situations in which Catholics really should not have a child. The only thing at issue is how they go about implementing that decision. And I personally do not think that subject is the absolutely closed door that many like you think.



TOWARD TOMORROW

Fr. Henry Atwell

Bishop Fulton Sheen several years ago said the future of the Church lies not in Europe or America but in Africa and the Orient.

He made that prophecy when he was still national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, and years before Pope John and his Vatican Council.

His prophecy seems to be nearing fulfillment.

Despite mighty efforts by many people, the Church, at least in America, is in a mere survival situation. This is true both for Catholics and Protestants. The nationwide Key '73 project has produced negligible results. Congregations continue to dwindle and even specially staged religious spectacles fail to draw the thousands which used to respond to such events.

Many clergy find a bit of comfort in such Scripture statements about the "little flock" or the "faithful remnant" who will preserve the faith as if on an island or in a fortress, and await "the day of the Lord" who will come someday in glory.

There is also the promise Jesus made that he will abide with his Church "until the consummation of the world," that even "the gates of hell" shall not prevail against it.

Cardinal Newman, in his famous sermon "Second Spring," given just about a century ago, pointed out, however, that these promises of the Lord were made to the worldwide Church, not necessarily to the Church in every area or nation. It is possible, and history has numerous examples where it has happened, Newman said, for the Church in one or another nation to diminish, even to disappear.

American Christians may, therefore, be riding in a religious caboose. We are somewhat of an ecclesiastical Saturday Evening Post or Collier's, a left-over of a by-gone era.

All of which brings us back to Bishop Sheen's prophecy, that the Church's future lies elsewhere.

These thoughts surfaced for me when I was recently reading the lovely little special (10¢) edition of Luke-Acts, published by the American Bible Society for Key

'73. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles, in its eighth chapter, tells about an Ethiopian official converted to Christianity by the Apostle Philip.

Ethiopia has preserved the Christian faith from that day to this. Its Emperor, Haile Selassie, traces his ancestry to an even more remote biblical source. He claims to be a descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This nation has also preserved its independence despite repeated invasions from both other African (and Moslem) nations and from European colonial powers.

India also has its own long tradition of faith preserved — the St. Thomas Christians, who claim they trace their Christianity to the Apostle Thomas. They are surrounded by a vast sea of Hinduism.

So also there are numerous other examples where Christian faith survives against incredible odds in Africa and the Orient, hardy plants ready to flower in the Lord's good time.

Another evidence to verify Bishop Sheen's prophecy is a comparison of the bishops who attended the first Vatican Council in 1870 — there were only about 250 total in attendance, not one of them a native of either Africa or the Orient. Hardly a hundred years later, at the second Vatican Council in the early 1960's, there were more than 250 bishops just from Africa and the Orient, all of them native to those areas.

In all of these cases, as Pope Pius XI stressed as so important, the growth and the progress of the faith occurs only when the people themselves accept the responsibility for it. Missionaries by the hundreds can labor zealously and patiently but the final test is the response of the local people themselves.

And that brings us back to America. Our faith here is largely the result of immigrants who brought it to this country. Perhaps we should ask ourselves if we have ever really accepted the responsibility for all that our Christian faith demands, or have we, instead, used it for our own comfort and advantage, and that is why it is dying in our own selfish hands.



The Sounds of Steel

The U.S. Navy Steel Band is slated for a series of performances here beginning Monday, May 7. The 14-member band, which has appeared on national television and has toured throughout the United States, Europe, and South America, uses metal drums as instruments. They will play at Nazareth Arts Center, Monday, May 7, 8 p.m. at Bishop Kearney High School, Thursday, May 10, 10 a.m. and they are also slated to play at Nazareth Academy at 1:30 p.m. May 10.

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