

## **CHRISTIANS AND DOUBTS**

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*My wife and I made the "Cursillo" nearly two years ago and soon after we joined the CFM. In the course of these two years we have come to meet many of priests and welcome them in our humble residence, after we joined the CFM. Indeed we have gained light and strength from this association. Present day problems of all kinds are the subject matter of our informed conversations; of late the letter of the Holy Father on "The Regulation of Births" and the various reactions all over the world to this papal document have been frequently the subject of our talks. My wife has noticed that as time goes on, some few priests choose to be non-committal, many seem to be uncertain as to here they ought to stand, and lastly one of them expressed his personal view which to us Catholics were plainly disturbing,—'contraception, he said, is not a sin, why so much fuss about it.*

*May we construe this fact as meaning that the strong reaction of opposition to the "Humanae Vitae" Encyclical has succeeded in opening new vistas, new aspects to this problem previously unknown to us, new insights and doctrinal development, on the strength of which a Catholic may reasonably entertain the just mentioned attitudes of some of our priests?*

Our answer to our consultant is quite simple and brief. Six months have past since the publication of the "Humanae Vitae," and too much has been said and written against this papal doctrinal document. In going thru the literature on this matter available to me, I have failed to discover new vistas, aspects, insights, doctrinal development. I believe I can make my own today, the statement of Denis O'Callaghan, two years ago, "a good deal of this discussion is being carried on at a

very superficial level, where prejudice has masqueraded as fact, and individual experience as philosophical principle (Clergy Review, Nov. 1966, p 840.) The traditional doctrine of the Church as re-stated by Paul VI, on July 25, 1968 in the "Humanae Vitae" Encyclical stands as firmly established as ever, whereas the opposition has failed to show *any valid reason* justifying its stand. Those who advocate contraception, however limited in its application, will have to offer *new* arguments for it, instead of merely *querying* the traditional argument against or the authority supporting the traditional doctrine. This is not the place to test and evaluate the supposed to be valid reasons standing on the path of accepting the Church's doctrine as stated by the Sovereign Pontiff. We offer to our readers one presented, in a take-it or leave-it way, by seventy-six lay English Catholics who signed the following statement: They hold that—

- a) the adoption of a method of birth control of the rhythms inherent in the generation function *is as artificial*, as the use of a chemical or mechanical device (hence),
- b) the choice of method is one to be made by husband and wife, not in an arbitrary manner, but in the conscientious exercise of their responsibility before God to uphold and foster a creative love;
- c) the choice thus conscientiously made is not a matter for confession.

"We feel bound in conscience to make this statement and to advise in the above sense any who look to us for counsel."

*It is superficial, writes B. Haring<sup>1</sup> to maintain that the practice of periodic continency (or rhythm) is as unnatural as the use of artificial means, or that it demands constant and accurate calculation and destroys the spontaneity of love. Such expressions have been heard in the last few years even from Catholic doctors. The answer to this is, among other things, that working out the days when no conception will occur — or in the case of a couple who want a child, when conception may occur — is just one of many considerations such as whether one can accept responsibility for an increase in the family or not, which*

<sup>1</sup> *Marriage in the Modern World*, the Mercier Press, Cork, 1965. p. 335.

precede intercourse. No considerate husband expects intercourse with his wife during her monthly period. He has to take these periods into account just as he has to take many other factors into account; such loving thoughtfulness is not the negation of spontaneity in love but the negation of lack of control of his instincts.

"In accordance with the will of the Creator, sexuality in married life has two connected polar motives, a strong and a weak. The "strong" preferable motive is the maximum of fertility; it is the most intimate mutual giving in a common desire for a child. The infertile days are to a certain extent "weak" motive, the other pole, which devotes mutual intimacy in grateful recognition of loving devotion. Once husband and wife have recognized the meaning and intrinsic finality of the motive of fruitfulness in generous readiness to serve life, then their union even in infertile times acquires the same dignity through its polar unity with the "strong motive," through the will of creative love to engender "trinity." Thus, self-controlled love in renunciation and in fulfilment is an enduring and deliberate assent to the overall meaning of marriage, and also to the meaningful rhythm of nature.

"Intercourse in the so-called infertile periods becomes a real fulfillment of the meaning of marriage provided there is at bottom a common devotion to God's creative love in the form of assent, ready to make sacrifices, to the service of life. Here, too, we see the real meaning of the Church's teaching that children are the primary purpose of marriage; everything in marriage receives its ultimate fulfillment, its final form and supernatural spirit from the divine love, from a common, loving submission to God's will. But this necessarily included, or presupposes rather, loving submission to God's creative love.

"The knowledge we now have of the fertility cycle has not removed all the difficulties from married life, particularly since recourse to the choice of times is not available to women whose periods are irregular and who may have good medical grounds for not wishing to undertake another pregnancy. New and more accurate ways of determining the time of ovulation by the basal temperature method already constitute an extension of the possibilities of this recourse. It appears that the most recent scientific advance by a Japanese gynecologist provide a sample reagent test of the saliva or urine to determine whether

ovulation has or has not taken place and this makes it possible to determine the infertile periods with certainty."<sup>2</sup>

We are told that much of the doctrinal confusion existing in our midst seems to originate from the reading of several pastoral letters of the Conferences of Bishops in other countries, published in Catholic periodicals.

In the light of these pastoral letters, one is led to believe that the individual should solve problems or conflicts arising in this matter under consideration, ultimately as his conscience sees it proper and right, "Pastors, write the German bishops, will respect in their work, especially in the administration of sacraments, the decisions of consciences of the believers made in the awareness of their responsibility." The bishops of Belgium, England, France, etc, write along similar lines.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to make three remarks in this connection:

a) The Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines issued a Pastoral Letter on the "Humanæ Vitæ" Encyclical, on October 12, 1968. It is they, the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, whom Divine Providence has placed over this portion of the vineyard of the Lord, to lead us His people, priests and lay people alike, to the green pastures of eternal life, suffering first with Christ that we may be glorified with Him (Rom. 8, 17). The conscientious reading of this Pastoral Letter will undoubtedly dispel many a doubt from our minds, enlightening and strengthening the life of faith within us;

b) The Pastoral Letters of the Conferences of Bishops in other countries are *not primarily* doctrinal, *but pastoral*, aiming at or concerned with the preparation of the minds of priests and lay people

<sup>2</sup> The "R.C. Formation Pill" which Prof. Carley has developed in Australia is very promising in this respect.

<sup>3</sup> We owe to the Catholic periodical "Homelife" English translations of these important documents.

to accept the authoritative teaching of the Sovereign Pontiff.<sup>4</sup> They do not consider so much the doctrine to be laid down, as its application in difficult circumstances. There is no clear evidence in these pastoral letters of ethical situationism. Catholic minorities in Northern Europe and USA live together and share the same culture of the *majority* i.e., the Protestant culture and mentality. The Protestant mentality and attitude towards contraception is well known, particularly since 1930 when at the Conference of Lambeth, the 15th resolution approving of the practice of birth control, under certain circumstances, was carried by a vote of 193 vs. 67. Catholic understanding of the moral divine law and its application, in the words of Barry<sup>5</sup> is "*theological ferocity*"; ethical situationism pervades Protestant moral theology. Influenced by this mentality, some Catholics accept the rulings of the Church's Magisterium, in this field of sex, as indications of the targets to be aimed in one's conduct, and indeed as factors to be taken into consideration in assessing the concrete situation and conflict, and arriving at one's own *completely personal* decision, but they regard this decision, *not any general norm or moral principles, however authoritatively* declared, as the final and real determinant of the morality. In other words, it is not the objective morality of an act that counts, but the sincerity of one's personal response to the concrete and existentially unique situation. This concept of conscience is presented as a mark of maturity, or sign that the Christian has become of age. The Pastoral Letter of Catholic Hierarchy has spoken so well and, at great length on this matter that we feel our reader would do well to re-read *part II* of said official document.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Austrian bishops are, in part, an exception. Are they misinformed? Ignorance of one kind or another can become incredibly daring! We fail to see any basis in the "Humanae Vitae" Encyclical warranting the Bishop's statement. Do we seek the truth that pleases or what else?

<sup>5</sup> "Christian Ethics and Secular Society" London, 1966, p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> For the benefit of those who have no copy of this document, I feel a brief comment is in order. To the mind of Pius XII ethical situationism is a mark of *immaturity*, a flight from reality, or failure to take account of the theological truth and fact that every generation of the sons of Adam, however culturally developed, begins and pursues its journey thru life under the burden and

c) "It seems to be overlooked, writes a layman, Dr. K. M. Pole — that as with any other moral precept, the sin is condemned, but not necessarily the sinner. The Church is "intransigent with evil, but merciful towards individuals" and the assessment of personal guilt or otherwise is and always was a matter for the conscience of the person concerned and for the priest in the Confessional."<sup>7</sup> Of course, the priest in the Confessional is not Mister So and So, but a minister representative of Christ, of the Church, and ought to act in perfect accordance with doctrine of the Church. Agit in persona Christi. We must be on the alert lest the naturalistic, hedonistic *contraceptive civilization* which permeates certain areas of the West penetrates and ruins the moral fiber of our people.

Some Catholics are particularly bewildered by so much opposition, by so much unwillingness to heed the teaching of the Church as formulated by the Pope, opposition coming from within the Church, from bishops, priests, theologians, Vatican Council II periti — according to reliable press reports.

Our bishops are well aware of the disturbing ideas creeping up in our Catholic milieu, hence the Pastoral Letter mentioned above. They say: "While the sentiments of loyalty to the authority of the Holy Father, and the sincere acceptance of his teaching on the part of the great majority of his flock have scarcely been mentioned in the international press, the adverse comments coming from a relatively small portion of the faithful have been played up. And there is danger that this adverse publicity might affect the filial attitude of respect and re-

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handicap of original sin. Furthermore, it shows a strange blindness to the *historically demonstrable* fact that even intelligent and conscientious men, left to themselves, reach the most diverse and often disastrous conclusions. Of course God wants due attention to be paid to the particular circumstances of the concrete situation; often enough they determine its morality. God wants us to respond sincerely to the *complete* data of every situation, and one of these data may be its *objective morality, the demands of reality* the existing moral order manifesting God's holy will, the objective order of right and wrong. He has established, and of course God is not indifferent whether or not our actions conform to that order. Cfr. Catholic Medical Quarterly, Oct. 1966, p. 112, L.L. McReavy. The Irish Theological Quarterly, vol. XXXIII, 1966, p. 346.

<sup>7</sup> Catholic Medical Quarterly, Oct. 1968, pp. 112-113, Dr. K. F. M. Pole.

verence of our people toward the person of the Vicar of Christ" p.1). Hence their Pastoral Letter aimed at offsetting or at least minimizing the ruinous moral effect of such publicity on our people, deserves our reading and meditation.

I shall not comment on the unbecoming reaction of some *very few* bishops abroad. On the attitude of *priests and moral theologians* I have this sympathetic observation to make. We suffer from a very serious scarcity of Moral Theologians! "In France, for example, writes J.M. Pohiers, there are approximately *four* professors of Holy Scripture and of Dogmatic Theology for *one* in Moral Theology, and to make the situation worse, the latter is quite frequently less well trained and prepared, often times is transferred from his assignment in Moral Theology, easily accepting other subjects such as Canon Law, or other activities rather than engaging wholeheartedly in research work in his Moral Theology field. Biblical, patristical, liturgical renewal has been introduced in Dogmatic and Pastoral Theology, far more deeply and effectively than in Moral Theology."<sup>8</sup> My experience though limited, leads to believe this sad situation exists not only in France, but it is common to other countries. Indeed, we suffer from a chronic scarcity of well trained, developed Moral Theologians!... Then *current basic* textbooks or reference books are unpedagogical and not up-to-date, as a rule. No wonder if parish priests, and priests engaged in ministerial work do not feel too sure as to where they stand on moral problems coming up to-day. Many pit-falls, grave errors can be avoided only by accepting the directives of those in authority over us, our bishops, the vicar of Christ. We see no alternative. No wonder if so many priests to-day are misled and are misleading!

Some of the Vatican Council II periti present a *more complex problem*, which I can not deal with at full length here. I shall try to be brief, clear.

According to reports in the secular and Catholic press, some twenty theologians from eight countries met last September at the invitation of the Faculty of Theology in Amsterdam, Holland, to

<sup>8</sup> "Psychologie Contemporaine et requêtes de la foi", La Vie Spirituelle, Suppl., Sept., 1967, p. 406.

discuss the Enc. "Humanae Vitae." In the words of clergyman Schillibeeckx, Pope Paul "has become the prisoner of five or six cardinals. Because of their one-sided information Pope Paul has been convinced of the necessity for a "hard line." Everybody knows who these cardinals are. *They are really blind.* They are the ones who are destroying the Church." It is most regrettable statements of this nature undermining the very foundation of our trust and respect for the visible Head of the Church, the Vicar of Christ, meant possibly for home consumption, but finding factually a far and wide echo, in the press, secular and catholic, of other countries, were ever made by a clergyman of the theological tradition of Schillibeeckx! It is a senseless thing to assume that the "Pope is in prison" in order to *escape* the responsibility inherent in the rejection of the Pope's teaching!

"We find to our dismay, that the Enc. 'Humane Vitae' does not respond to the expectations that had been created by the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World," so runs the press statement of the aforementioned theologians and 'periti.' "In fact, they continue, the Encyclical places marriage in a perspective that in the judgment of a great many *experts* does no justice to reality. . .

"We cannot agree that, in a moral evaluation, there would be any real difference between making use of the infertile periods of the woman, and making use of other methods, that for determined periods prevent fertilization. Any of these methods can be used for good or for evil intentions. . . Though we do not wish to sow any doubt on the *principle* of Church authority, we must state that the faithful do not know what to do with this Encyclical. We wonder, if the way this encyclical came into being, and its publication, contrary to the opinion of the great majority of experts that were consulted is in agreement at all with the manner of exercising authority *that is demanded by modern civilization*, in the name of human dignity, and by the task of all the faithful in the people of God, that is, the Church."<sup>9</sup>

I have given the *full text* of the statement as known to me and given in the Catholic press of England, that any one may value it in its merits.

<sup>9</sup> *Catholic Herald*, Friday, October 4, 1968, p. 2, cls. 3-5.



It takes a superdose of sense of humor to go thru it, analyze it and take it seriously. The "Humanae Vitae" Enc. to these critics is a *very disgraceful document, in every respect*. That's all. I refuse, at this time and place, to be dragged back into the petty discussion outside St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, when in 1963-1964, the question of "juridical coliegiality" was up in the air. *We are now in 1969*. To-day what Vatican Council II teaches us all in ch. III, in the "Lumen Gentium" Const. aa. 12-29 is well known to the Pope's critics. We accept wholeheartedly the Magisterium of the Church. This is not a scientific magisterium, but a *magisterium of authority*. The Pope is the supreme teacher of the faith, interpreting authentically the moral divine law and teaching that its observance binds all the faithful. It is a certain theological doctrine that the Holy Spirit assists the Church in interpreting the moral divine law. The Pope has not the monopoly of theological wisdom, but he has, the Church has the promise of Christ that He would be with it, — not with theologians or periti in V.C. II. A divinely established and inspired Church cannot be ruled by a *majority vote*. I see no valid reason for some theologians trying to perpetuate a "false" notion of *collegiality*, which Vatican Council II *did not approve*. The Vicar of Christ has, by virtue of his office, a full, supreme, universal power that he can always exercise freely. It has taken Pope Paul an act of truly "apostolic courage" to speak to the world — the way he did. The "Finger of God" was there. We are grateful to the Holy Spirit for the light and strength given us thru him.

There is no desire to minimize the work of true theologians, but in telling us to limit assent to those moral truths, which the Pope not merely teaches but demonstrates to their satisfaction *they are not correct*. In effect, this seems equivalent to make the reasoning faculty of the individual the *ultimate arbiter of moral truth*. It overlooks also the very deficiency in the moral reasoning of *fallen man* which made the provision of a teaching authority *morally necessary*. It finally overlooks the fact that our Lord's command to His Apostles was not "Go ye and demonstrate," but "Go ye and teach." Theologians admittedly seek to demonstrate, as best they can, the truths, which the Church teaches, but the validity of the truths themselves cannot be

measured by the success or failure of the theologians in their task. Not even an Aquinas could hope to satisfy everybody.<sup>10</sup>

But, "What does the argument of theologians matter, whether the Pope has spoken with all the requirements to make it an infallible pronouncement?" asks a British doctor.<sup>11</sup> Are they infallible? And here is his answer. "Who, believing in the Holy Spirit as protector of the Church can accept as a possibility that God would allow the faithful to be misled so seriously by the Church? If we were to accept only what has been taught with all the solemnity of an infallible pronouncement, very little of the Church's teaching would remain that was not open to doubt; the hunt for loopholes would go on. Eventually as Henry VIII ended with *six wives*, once he had persuaded himself and many other (including some authorities in the Church) that it was legitimate for him to take a *second wife*, so we would end up with having surrendered one moral law after another. To-day John Fisher and Thomas Moore are honoured by all, not only by Catholics, for the stand they made. It is the belief in a divinely established Church, with eternal objective standards, against the concept of a man made Church that is at stake in the present crisis. Pope Paul has called for *obedience* not only because of the reasons adduced in his Encyclical, but rather "because of the light of the Holy Spirit." "Of course the Church will always be abused and ridiculed as often before as Christ has been, but would the world's comments have been kinder if the Pope had appeared to concede "situation ethics"? The Church will always be opposed as a "*sign of contradiction*."<sup>12</sup>

Speaking on Oct. 5th, 1967, Pope Paul said this: "What is the greatest need of the Church at the present time? We shall give to-day a most simple answer which you can understand and accept because you are good, faithful and fervent: *the Church is in need of obedience. And more than a passive and enforced external obedience, she needs an inner spontaneous spirit of obedience.*"

<sup>10</sup> *Catholic Medical Quarterly*, October 1966, p. 113; L.L. McReavy.

<sup>11</sup> *Catholic Medical Quarterly*, Oct. 1968, p. 113.

<sup>12</sup> *Catholic Medical Quarterly*, Oct. 1968, p. 113.

Indeed, this seems to be true today as it was over a year ago, and perhaps more so. Many of us entertain a certain sense of personal dignity which holds us back from obedience to legitimate authority, civil or ecclesiastical. Pope Pius XII in an address to a group of Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops gathered in Rome, Nov. 2, 1954 analyzed this problem and gave us a few words of wisdom. Pope Pius XII said in part: "Those points We have just mentioned in connection with the jurisdiction of Bishops, who are shepherds of the souls committed to their care in all those matters which have to do with religion, moral law and ecclesiastical discipline, are subjected to criticism, often not above a whisper, and do not receive the firm assent they deserve. Hence, some proud, modern spirits provoke serious and dangerous confusion, traces of which are more or less clear in various regions. The awareness, daily more strongly insisted on, of having reached maturity produces in them an agitated and febril spirit. Not a few moderns, men and women, think that the leadership and vigilance of the Church is not to be suffered by one who is grown up; they not only say it, but they hold it as a firm conviction. They are unwilling to be, like children, "under guardians and stewards" (Gal. 4,2). They wish to be treated as adults who are in full possession of their rights, and can decide for themselves what they must, or must not, do in any given situation.

Let the Church — they do not hesitate to say — propose her doctrine, pass her laws as norms of our actions. Still, when there is question of practical application to each individual's life, the Church must not interfere; she should let each one of the faithful follow his own conscience and judgment. They declare this is all the more necessary because the Church and her ministers are unaware of certain sets of circumstances either personal or extrinsic to individuals; in them each person has been placed, and must take his own counsel and decide what he must do. Such people, moreover, are unwilling in their final personal decisions to have any intermediary or intercessor placed between themselves and God, no matter what his rank or title.

Two years ago, in Our allocutions of March 23 and April 18, 1952, We spoke about these reprehensible theories and We examined

their arguments (*Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, vol. 14, 1952, 19 sq., pp. 69 sq.). Concerning the importance given to the attainment of a person's majority, this assertion is correct: it is just and right that adults should not be ruled as children. The Apostle speaking of himself says: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away the things of a child" (1 Cor. 13,11). That is not a true part of education which follows any other principle or procedure, nor is he a true shepherd of souls who pursues any other purpose than to elevate the faithful entrusted to his care "to perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4,13). But to be an adult and to have put off the things of childhood is one thing, and quite another to be an adult and not to be subject to the guidance and government of legitimate authority. For *government is not a kind of nursery for children, but the effective direction of adults toward the end proposed to the state.*

Since We are speaking to you, venerable brothers, and not to the faithful; when these ideas begin to appear and to take root in your flocks, remind the faithful: (1) that God placed shepherds of souls in the Church not to put a burden on the flock, but to help and protect it; (2) that the true liberty of the faithful is safeguarded by the guidance and vigilance of pastors; that they are protected from the slavery of vice and error, they are strengthened against the temptations which come from bad example and from the customs of evil men among whom they must live; (3) that therefore they act contrary to the prudence and charity which they owe themselves if they spurn this protection of God and His most certain help."