

EDITORIAL

CONSCIENCE "MUST BE RIGHT"

With the exception of the word *dialogue*, perhaps, no other word has been more abused than the word *conscience* in these post-conciliar years. Just like other misunderstood notions, conscience has become overnight the supreme norm of all human actions, a sort of magic power to ensure eternal salvation for any individual person who follows the same. That stark simple!

Such mentality is presented as a part of the doctrinal renewal of the Church in the *spirit* of the Vatican II. "Theologians" of a new coinage took upon themselves the business of defining the new privileges of conscience in the name of a *charismatic* and *prophetic* role they so confidently attribute to themselves. They care nothing whether or not one's conscience is in accord with the law of God and the teachings of his Church. They see no distinction between a *right* and a *wrong* conscience. Surprisingly however, while they do not want to extend such presumptuous concept of conscience to the whole gamut of human conduct; they nevertheless are alarmingly interested in forcing it in with regards to the encyclical *Humanae vitae*.

In this encyclical, Paul VI point-blankly ruled out as seriously immoral all acts of artificial contraception. To support this position the Pontiff elaborated on rational motivations both from the fields of natural and supernatural law and from a thorough analysis of human psychology and human frailty as sources of its justification.

This secular teaching of the Church that the Pope solemnly re-stated in his encyclical has, however, been denied by the "theologians" of the new *charism*. According to them, when the spouses are not rationally convinced by the arguments of the Pope, they are not bound to adopt for their individual particular cases the teaching of his encyclical in reference as a norm of Christian conduct. On the contrary, they have the right to disregard the Pope's doctrine and instead should *follow their consciences*, as

the familiar phrase goes. The challenge of the *new prophets* to the Vicar of Christ is thus very evident.

What should be said of the rights of individual conscience? What does conscience really mean? May the individual conscience of any particular person be considered the supreme norm of salutary actions? Or, should the conscience of an individual person necessarily conform itself to a norm that is different from his individual judgment when he acts? In the case of contraception, the norms involved as indicated in the papal encyclical are natural law and the law of the Gospel. Thus, conscience in this case means the practical judgment of the spouses, *here and now* in any possible situation of their married life, concerning the intrinsic licitness or illicitness of the contraceptive practice. May the spouses in such situation disregard the Pope's teaching, or should they, rather, in order to be truly Catholic, adapt their mentality to the Pope's authoritative teaching?

No one who accepts the Catholic faith as defended from Nicea to Vatican II will fail to acknowledge the strict obligation of accepting the Church's teaching as a true, valid objective norm of action in such instances as these. Conscience in itself evidently, cannot be supreme. It should follow a norm. Christ, who spoke in the Gospel and still speaks through his Vicar, will not alter his judgment just because his creatures refuse to follow his norms. Salvation cannot be obtained by arbitrary action at odds with Christ, the Saviour. Paul VI, in his illuminating Address in the General Audience of February 12, 1969, puts it this way: "We must point out that conscience, in order to be a valid norm for human behaviour, *must be right*, that is, it must be sure of itself and true, not uncertain, *not culpably wrong*. The latter unfortunately, may easily occur, owing to the weakness of human reason, when it is left to itself, when it is not educated."

Education of conscience, therefore, is essential in this matter. Education of conscience, however, should not follow the lines of the "theologians" of the new coinage. Only some short quotations from Vatican II will convince the reader that these *charismatic prophets* are truly false prophets: "In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church. For the Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth" (*On Relig. Freedom*, n. 14).

"Deep within, man detects the law of conscience— a law which is not self-imposed but which hold him to obedience... For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths. In wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor." (*On the Church In the Modern World*, n. 16).

"This judgment married people must ultimately make for themselves in the sight of God. Yet they must be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily. They must be guided by conscience and conscience *must be conformed to the divine law; they must submit to the Church's teaching authority* which interprets that law authoritatively by the light of the Gospel." (*Ib.*, n. 50).

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