

Bishop Bruskewitz:

STRAIGHT TALK ON CATHOLICS, LIFE AND DEATH

To believing Catholic Americans, Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Nebraska is a hero because he is faithful to the Magisterium, he teaches his flock, he encourages the devout life and he enforces Canon Law.

Since His Excellency was consecrated bishop in 1992, he has upheld Catholic tradition. His diocese, for example, permits only young men to be altar servers. While the Church has suffered a crisis of vocations for decades in most U.S. dioceses, by comparison, the diocese of this steadfast bishop suffers no shortage of priests. Furthermore, 31 men are in formation at the diocesan seminary, Saint Gregory the Great.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, Prophet and King, we hope you will enjoy the wisdom of this exemplary bishop.

HIS VOCATION

On a personal note, please tell us why you chose the priesthood and what it means to you.

Strictly speaking, one does not choose the priesthood; it is Jesus Who chooses those with whom He desires to share His priesthood. Through the working of the grace of our heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, the Lord summons those He wants to serve Him and His people as priests. Obviously, there is a certain attraction God puts in a man's heart toward the priesthood and I received this grace, at least in its most preliminary movements, when I was a rather young lad.

My long years in the seminary enabled me to discern that this was God's will for me and also to express to God my gratitude for this call as well as my unworthi-

ness. I think every man who is called to the priesthood, when he realizes that this vocation is authentic, has an impulse to speak as Saint Peter did to Jesus, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." The Lord chooses whom He wills and I am honored and flattered that He chose me despite my obvious unworthiness. So I was always desirous of being a priest. Other things flitted across my mind, of course, and as I grew up, my tendency was to treat these other inclinations as a sort of temptation against the call of God for which I am ever so grateful.

Please tell us something about the joys of your vocation as a priest and as a bishop.

My vocation has filled me with more than 46 years of satisfaction and contentment and whatever

hardships, difficulties or problems I have encountered were trivial compared to the great honor that is mine. As a priest, one stands, as the popes have repeatedly said, "in the Person of Christ," and this is especially true when the priest is confecting the Holy Eucharist, that is, offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, making present Christ's dying and rising and also distributing to God's people the Eucharistic Reality of our divine Savior. This also becomes quite vivid in the life of a priest when he is administering the sacraments and proclaiming the Gospel, in accordance with the very noble and beautiful words that the Second Vatican Council sets forth in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* and the *Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops (Christus Dominus)* and the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Presbyterorum Ordinis)*.

Please explain a bishop's most profound responsibilities.

These are set forth in many different places; for example, in the Code of Canon Law and in the long tradition and history of the Church, based, of course, on the words of Sacred Scripture where Saint Paul, for instance, in writing to the bishops, Saint Timothy and Saint Titus, explained what the role of a bishop is supposed to be. It is in a very sublime way, in the fullness of the priesthood to carry out the work of Christ as a teacher (Prophet), as a shepherd (Pastor) and as a Priest (vehicle and channel of God's



Heading to a ceremony for the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter in Denton, Nebraska

supernatural life to others).

ETERNAL LIFE AND LIBERTY

How did the orchestrated dissent from Pope Paul VI's encyclical On Human Life (Humanae Vitae) in the late 1960s affect the subsequent teaching on this question to the laity, to seminarians and to priests?

There is little doubt in my mind that the dissent from *Humanae Vitae* became the catalyst of a corrosive dissent from many doctrines and teachings of the Church. The dissent from *Humanae Vitae* constituted in those who dissented, a sort of papacy in themselves, giving themselves a kind of ecclesiastical authority and even infallibility which they, of course, do not enjoy. By placing themselves in opposition to the clear and consistent, traditional, authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church, people make the very easy jump to dissenting from whatever it pleases them to dissent from. This kind of doctrinal and moral chaos is rampant and has

been and continues to be the cause of great distress for Christ and it continues to cause great disorder in the externals, at least, of the Catholic Church.

There can be no doubt that in

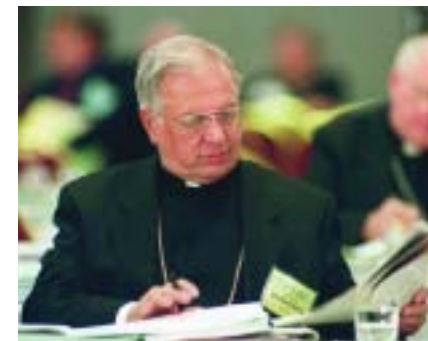
many ways the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* about the evil of artificial birth-prevention is, for many, a defining issue and has been, along with certain other matters, the cause of much tragedy, as well as the cause of the loss of many souls.

Some, perhaps many, Catholics use birth control. Actually it seems that few Catholics know their faith and few read the Catechism. What do you recommend for correcting this?

What is most necessary is dedicated and knowledgeable catechists, as well as priests who have the courage to preach clearly, and with compassion and thought, the moral truth of how this aspect of married life should be conducted.

It is important, I think, also to

the greatest extent possible for dioceses to provide natural family planning arrangements so that couples who have a truly serious reason for limiting the size of their families, such as the health of one or both parents, the financial structure of the family, the care of the children they already have, etc. (not, of course, selfish reasons which are not valid for using NFP).



PUBLIC LIFE AND LIBERTY

Many Catholics vote for candidates who defy the Church's teachings on life and think nothing of it, attending Mass and receiving Communion. What do you recommend for correcting this?

We must help Catholics understand that the doctrines of the Church about the sacredness of human life and the sacredness of human persons must be taken with them, in their consciences and in their hearts, into the voting booth. It is particularly important for them to know that it is wrong to support those who support these positions because this is a type of cooperation in evil.

In this regard, the Holy See has given some interesting and important directives, particularly from the Congregation for the

Doctrine of the Faith, which was under the prefecture of Cardinal Josef Ratzinger before he became Pope Benedict XVI.

During the 2004 presidential campaign, you announced that Senator John Kerry wasn't permitted to receive Holy Communion in your diocese. Former Congressman Bob Dornan says that because many bishops refuse to correct pro-abortion Catholics in Congress and other public offices, the dissidents have no fear of them and no fear of God. Thus they persist in rejecting pro-life legislation and they persist in funding deadly programs.

First of all, pray unceasingly and continuously, for the conversion of those who do not accept the sacredness of human life...

I do concur in the fact that the dissidents have no fear of bishops nor the fear of God and that there are far too many people in positions of authority in our state and federal governments who are not committed as they should be to accepting and promoting the moral principles that come not only from God's revelation and the moral teaching of the Catholic Church, but from the very natural law written in people's hearts.



Photo courtesy of Southern Nebraska Register

Please offer counsel to pro-lifers—is there anything that we, as individuals or groups, can do better?

First of all pray, unceasingly and continuously, for the conversion of those who do not accept the sacredness of human life and especially for those Catholics who dissent from the teachings of the Church and let this dissent echo into their professional and political lives.

I think it is important to proclaim what the Church teaches unequivocally and clearly, but also with the greatest amount of sensitivity, so that we generate in our arguments with others, not just

heat, but light as well.

I would also recommend that pro-lifers, to the greatest extent possible, try not to quarrel with each other. Divisions in the pro-life movement are exploited by the culture of death and are used to the detriment of all. Sometimes it is necessary to clarify issues and also to disagree with others who might share one's views in only a partial way, but in doing this great care should be taken so that pro-lifers do not destroy one another, either as individuals or groups, and in an embrace of death, both go down in flames.

In the next issue of Celebrate Life, Bishop Bruskewitz discusses the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Anita Crane is editor of *Celebrate Life*.

E-mail this article from our web site www.CLmagazine.org.

The Bruskewitz statement of excommunication

All Catholics in and of the Diocese of Lincoln are forbidden to be members of the organizations and groups listed below. Membership in these organizations or groups is always perilous to the Catholic Faith and most often is totally incompatible with the Catholic Faith.

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| Planned Parenthood | Freemasons |
| Society of Saint Pius X (Lefebvre Group) | Job's Daughters |
| Hemlock Society | DeMolay |
| Call to Action | Eastern Star |
| Call to Action Nebraska | Rainbow Girls |
| Saint Michael the Archangel Chapel | Catholics for a Free Choice |

Any Catholics in and of the Diocese of Lincoln who attain or retain membership in any of the above listed organizations or groups after April 15, 1996, are by that very fact (*ipso facto latae sententiae*) under interdict and are absolutely forbidden to receive Holy Communion.

Contumacious persistence in such membership for one month following the interdict on part of any such Catholics will by that very fact (*ipso facto latae sententiae*) cause them to be excommunicated. Absolution from these ecclesial censures is "reserved to the Bishop."

This notice, when published in the *Southern Nebraska Register*, is a formal canonical warning. By mandate of the Most Reverend Bishop of Lincoln, Reverend Monsignor Timothy Thorburn, Chancellor March 19, 1996.