

# Dad, What's A Conscience

by MARYA MANNES

Unlikely question. Poor Dad. Poor teacher. Even doctors can't find it. It's not an organ, a bone, a tissue, a gland, a cell or a fluid.

It could be something like an appendix: vestigial, no longer needed. No longer functioning.

Perhaps Webster's definition of conscience should be preceded in brackets by "archaic": "knowledge or sense of right and wrong, with a compulsion to do right." It even adds "moral judgement that opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle and that leads to feelings of guilt if one violates such a principle."

Aha! The key word is "previously." Implying "not necessarily valid now," and omitting "recognized by whom?"

Rogert's Thesaurus edges closer. To Conscience it adds words like "grace" and "inward monitor."

Call it perhaps a spiritual muscle which, like all muscles, slackens and withers away when unused. It is abundantly clear now that in the current absence of ethical principle, tens of thousands of Americans find nothing wrong in stealing anything from hotel towels and ashtrays to the private files of psychiatrists and the vaults of public confidence. The ripoff is now a social staple. Rape an old woman for 75 cents, grab a buck from a kid.

## RIPOFF

And now the horrible escalation of the ripoff in the abduction of innocent human beings - for huge ransoms, and by hallucinated bandits with manic or "social" causes.

And what else than a ripoff is the soaring profit of certain huge corporations in the face of scarcities, or inflation-depression? Or the doctored income-tax returns of citizens, joined by their President?

Where then has this "inward monitor," this "ethical principle" vanished in so many of us, rich or poor? When was it exiled along with "grace" and the concepts of "discipline," "right" and "wrong"? It is one thing for liberal dogmatists to sneer at the word "permissiveness" (the middle-class bad sister of good-brother "law and order"). The sneer nevertheless bypasses the fact that neither home, school nor church has managed to instill or strengthen either ethical principle or conscience in a host of Americans ranging from white collar to hard hat to blue jeans to black skins to the schoolchildren and adults in the towns and cities of this nation.

Certainly, honor and honesty do exist. The invisible muscle, the soundless voice still function in thousands of unnamed men and women everywhere. More often, one might suggest, in

those past middle age who were punished for their betrayal of conscience in childhood either by verbal thunder or silent treatment. Where love existed, neither was cruel or unusual punishment. They were the natural reactions of parents who practiced what they preached; a code of ethics where none could take from another what was his or hers, whether goods or a good name.

## EXCUSES

In schools, in their time, mischief could be tolerated - but not malfeasance; high spirits, but not low deeds. Now, in big city schools, it is the very brave (and very endangered) teacher who punishes malicious abuse, theft, lying or even total unwillingness to learn.

The excuses for tolerance are manifold, beginning with simple preservation of one's own life and ending with the familiar litany of social causes; poverty, ignorance, discrimination, environment. Broken homes, dullness of school routines and - perhaps more pervasive - the daily TV and movie diet of violence and violation, pornography versus love. And always, in the endless commercial pitch, the lust for Things. Sprinkle with cynicism ("Everybody does it") and serve to the public's taste.

To withstand these, the muscle of conscience, the inward monitor once called "the still small voice," must be trained in earliest childhood. How to distinguish between what is good and bad (let the cultural critics sneer); how to recognize and honor certain immutable standards and traditions in conduct and creation; how to recognize beauty and reject ugliness.

The trouble now is that street and screen have to a large extent superseded home, drowned out family talk through gangs and gunfire or the massive electronic bombardment that commands the eyes, envelops the growing ear and stifles the inner voice.

How can this voice compete, let alone exist? Has the physical damage to the eardrum (widely acknowledged by qualified observers of the effects of prolonged amplification) its moral equivalent; deafness to values? Conscience does not scream through a microphone, it echoes silence.

You ask, then, what values are left? Kindness, courage, honesty, responsibility - certainly they exist in fellow Americans throughout this land. It is more than likely that they have shared in common parents or presences who cared enough to instill them from the time they could crawl. By love, by precept, by words. By simple daily judgments and acts of their own.

Perhaps there are simply not enough of them now to withstand the tidal waves of greed and self-gratification. Our only hope, then, is in a new breed of young men and women who will follow their intense hatred of war with an equal disgust for daily murders on neighborhood streets and for nightly "entertainment" by mass violence and loveless sex.

## REBIRTH

Somehow the privacy and tenderness of love will supersede the public market of instant coupling.

Somehow the brutalities daily committed against people by an unresponsive government - local, state and Federal - will no longer be tolerable to them.

If these young people (and many are already beginning to do so) gradually take positions of leadership in their communities, their nation and their homes, a rebirth of values may follow them.

New parents may restore the functions of that invisible organ of conscience in their children. So, importantly, might the long-exiled grandparents be once again a source of surviving and immutable truths.

Clearly we stand in crucial need of their common and individual resuscitation. And the sooner the better, if an already fragmented society is not to follow its leader into that heart of chaos, the moral void.

Credit: Copyright, Newsweek, Inc., 1974.

Reprinted by permission of Marya Mannes

## Belmont Abbey College Rotaract Club Certified

The Rotaract Club of Belmont Abbey College recently has been certified as one of over 1,500 such clubs under the sponsorship of Rotary International. Dr. Gilbert J. Farley of the Abbey faculty, and chairman of the Rotaract Committee of the Belmont Rotary Club, announced the certification.

Jack Sailstad of Davidson, N.C. a senior at the Abbey, was elected president of the club by the charter members. Other officers elected were: Gerard J. Sheeran, Stone Harbor, N.J., vice-president; Mark Wm. Koon, Washington, D.C., Secretary; Jeffrey Van Hook, Newark, Del., treasurer. Those serving on the Board of Directors are: Barry D. Miles, Belmont, N.C.; Douglas

May '74, CROSSROADS, Page 7

ALUMNI NEWS From Page 6

'72 - Thanks for your note, Ralph Tileston, telling me that you were discharged from the Airce in March after four years of service, and are presently employed with New Jersey Bell Telephone Co. as an installer. Ralph and his wife live in Burlington, N.J.

'73 - Congratulations and best wishes to Joe Antosek and Linda Diane Hill, who were married December 26 in Kansas City, Kansas. Joe is a salesman with Owens-Illinois and as of January 1 is living in St. Louis, Missouri. Salvatore DeSapio is operating engineer for DeSapio Brothers, contractors and builders in Baptistown, N.J., and studying to take the N.J. State examination for real estate salesman. He hopes to obtain his salesman's license some time this spring. Ed Ferris has accepted a position with Burlington Industries in Cramerton. It was good to see Janet and Chris Rasmussen when they visited the Abbey in March while on break from Virginia Commonwealth University where Chris will complete his graduate studies in Business in June.

'76 - It was good to see Chris Johnston when he visited the Abbey in January. He was still on Christmas holiday from St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore.

## IN MEMORIAM

Wallace G. Dunham, Class of 1932.

Wade H. Williford, Class of 1935.

Maynard Joyner, Class of 1944.

Paul F. Blackwelder, class of 1955

Dr. A.R. Keppel, Class of 1967 (L.H.D.)

C. Keir, Charlotte, N.C.; Baxter L. Starr, Gastonia, N.C. and Donald Hatchett, Newport News, Va.

Sailstad announced that the first major club project was cooperation with the Gaston County Chapter of the American Cancer Society in its Crusade of information distribution in North Belmont, April 28.

On May 1, the club sponsored the FAST TO SAVE A PEOPLE campaign at the college. Students and faculty were urged to skip one of the days meals and to donate the money saved to aid the people of drought stricken Africa. Campus chairman for the project was Barry D. Miles.