

SAINT JOHN PAUL II LECTURE SERIES IN BIOETHICS

In Defense of Human Life

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1. Setting the Stage

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:26). This solemn announcement of the first Book in the Holy Scripture helps us to appreciate the dignity of the human person and the sacredness of human life. And yet in the world of today human life is threatened in many ways and is systematically attacked from many angles. It is therefore proper that in the inauguration of this John Paul II Bioethics Center we reflect on the important theme: "In Defense of Human Life"

We shall first examine why human life is so precious. What Holy Scripture and Church Tradition say about it will be summarized. Some of the threats to, and offences against, human life will be called by their proper names. Since the medical profession, almost five hundred years before Christ, already recognized the sacredness of human life, the Hippocratic Oath will be recalled.

The ground will then be prepared to examine in greater detail abortion, euthanasia, suicide and other attacks on human life. Why do some people today descend so low as to try to decorate these crimes with the title of rights?

The Church has duties in this matter. So has the State. We shall close with a consideration of some means of promoting human life and a listing of some initiatives being taken in that direction.

2. Human Life is Precious

The human being is the crown of God's visible creation. The Book of Genesis tells us how God created water, land, trees, birds, stars, sun, moon, beasts, and finally man. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). Genesis, says the Venerable Pope John Paul II, "places man at the summit of God's creative activity, as its crown. Everything in creation is ordered to man and everything is subject to him" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 34).

The old *Baltimore Catechism* tells us why God made us: "God made me to know him, to love him, to serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next". That our life on earth is dignified with the promise and certainty of participation in the divine life which will reach its full realization in eternal happiness, if we do our part, is a breathtaking proof that human life is precious. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 Jn 3:1), is the beautiful exposition by Saint John the Evangelist who was so close to the Word of God made man.

The human being is gifted with intelligence and will, and therefore with an immortal soul. In this he or she is superior to every visible creature and, of all that God has created, only the angels are superior. Every sincere person can by the light of reason, and much more by the hidden action of God's grace, recognize the sacred value of human life from conception right up to death. Indeed, the organization of civil society and political and social associations would be impossible without a recognition of this inbuilt human dignity. It is neither romantic poetry nor mere pious talk to say that the human person is sacred. It is the reality. It is a hard fact.

For a Christian, the fact that the Eternal Father sends his Only begotten Son to suffer an atrocious passion and die for all men and women is a proof, if any were needed, that the human being is precious in God's eyes. "God so loved the world that he gave his Only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

3. Holy Scripture on Human Life

Sacred Scripture extols the dignity of the human person. The Book of Genesis tells us with what solemnity God created man. After God had created land, water, trees, stars and beasts, God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Gen 1:26). God gifted man with intelligence and will: "He created in them the knowledge of the spirit; he filled their hearts with understanding, and showed them good and evil" (Sir 17:7). Man alone, among all visible creatures, says the Second Vatican Council, is "capable of knowing and loving his Creator" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 12).

After original sin, Cain, out of envy and anger "rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (Gen 4:8). "Man has become the enemy of his fellow man" (CCC 2259). "Man's revolt against God in the earthly paradise is followed by the deadly combat of man against man" (*Evangelium Vitae*, henceforth EV, 8). "The Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' And the Lord said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground'" (Gen 4:9-10). Cain tells a terrible lie. And he refuses responsibility for his brother. Are people very different today who reject responsibility for the

aborted children, or who kill the old and sick? And what of the denial of solidarity with the sick, the immigrant and the homeless? "You shall not kill" (Exod 20:13), God tells the chosen people through Moses at the Covenant on Mount Sinai. "Do not slay the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked" (Exod 23:7). Jesus repeated this commandment in telling the rich young man what to do in order to have eternal life: "If you would enter into life, keep the commandments...You shall not kill" (Mt 19:17-18). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had earlier repeated, elevated and refined this commandment: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Mt 5:21-22).

During his public life, Jesus healed many people who were sick. He even raised a few dead people to life again. He sent his Apostles to preach and heal: "Preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Mt 10:7-8).

True, Jesus did not say that earthly life has absolute value. He demanded love for God even to the extent of laying down one's life: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10:39). Martyrs like Saint John the Baptist and Saint Stephen are praised and extolled by the Church, following the teaching of Christ. Holy Scripture, however, teaches that no one has the right to terminate the life of another human being, or even his or her own. God the Creator is the absolute master of life and death. In the Covenant with Noah after the flood, God insists: "For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning. of every man's brother I will require the life of man" (Gen 9:5-6).

There is no doubt that the Lord Jesus regarded human life as precious. Indeed he came to enhance it: "I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

4. Church Tradition and Respect for Human Life.

Church Tradition is unanimous and clear in showing respect for human life, from the life of the child still in the mother's womb right down to the life of the old man or woman. Abortion, murder and suicide have been regarded as abominable crimes by the Church for two thousand years. The early Christian community opposed the practices of abortion and infanticide which were fairly common in the Greco-Roman world. The second century document *Didache* is explicit: "You shall not kill a child by abortion nor shall you kill it once it is born" (V, 2: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X.Funk, 1,17). Tertullian affirms: "It is anticipated murder to prevent someone from being born; it makes little difference whether one kills a soul already born or puts it to death at birth. He who will one day be a man is a man already" (*Apologeticum*, IX, 8: CSEL, 69,24).

Among recent Papal Magisterium documents that have vigorously reaffirmed the common doctrine

in condemnation of procured abortion, we can mention Pope Pius XI in the Encyclical Letter, *Casti Connubii* in 1930, Pope Pius XII in his address to the Biomedical Association "San Luca" on 12 November, 1944, Blessed John XXIII in his Encyclical Letter, *Mater et Magistra*, in 1961, Pope Paul VI in his Address to the National Congress of Italian Jurists on 9 December, 1972, and in the Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, 14, in 1968, the Venerable John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter, *Evangelium Vitae*, in 1995, and Pope Benedict XVI in his last Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, in 2009, where he states that "openness to life is at the centre of true development" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 28). Our present reflections will draw heavily on the 194- page Encyclical Letter, *Evangelium Vitae*, of Pope John Paul II, which is entirely dedicated to the defense of the value and inviolability of human life.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) insists on reverence for the human person: "Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 27). The Council later adds in paragraph 51 of the same document: "From the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes"

Canon Law regards murder as a major crime and inflicts many penalties on those guilty of it (cf canons 695, 1041, 1044, 1046, 1078, 1090, 1362, 1397). A person who procures a completed abortion incurs an automatic excommunication (canon 1398). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is very clear and vigorous in its defense of human life in discussing the fifth commandment of the Decalogue: "You shall not kill" (CCC, 2259– 2301)

Among documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, two deserve special mention on our subject: *Declaration on Procured Abortion*, in 1974, and *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Donum Vitae*, in 1987.

5. Threats to and Offences against Human Life.

As we proceed with our reflections, it is useful to list the major threats to human life and the offences against it.

There are threats which are due to natural causes. Examples are earthquakes, tsunami, flooding, landslides, drought and famine, although this last can at times be at least partly attributable to human fault.

There are threats to human life which are due to human sins of commission or omission. Examples are poverty, malnutrition and hunger when it is due to the unjust distribution of wealth, war or poor economic and agricultural policies. More serious threats come from communal tension, genocide, war and arms trade which equips even poor nations with modern weapons with which they kill their fellow humans. And what shall we say about the criminal spread of drugs, the reckless tampering with ecological balances and irresponsible sexual activity which often leads to terrible diseases?

More severe and direct attacks on human life are constituted by contraception, sterilization, abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, suicide and irresponsible tampering with embryos and with the divinely-established origins of human life. A sinister new cultural climate against human life is being created in many countries in the world of today. Science and technology are being enlisted to do this harm. Broad sectors of public opinion are thus being gradually conditioned to justify certain crimes against life and to present them as rights of individuals. On this point we shall dwell more later. Serious demographic, social and family problems are left open to false and deceptive solutions opposed to the truth and to the good of persons, families and nations. A sign of a sharp descent on the moral slippery slope is the case when many people no longer see what is wrong with abortion and euthanasia. *Evangelium Vitae* goes so far as to speak of a "conspiracy against life" which sometimes involves even international organizations and the mass media (cf EV, 17).

6. Hippocratic Oath and Respect for Human Life

It is most interesting to note that the ethical dimension of the medical profession was stressed in the Hippocratic Oath which arose among the Greeks four or five hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. This is the Oath taken by doctors traditionally for the past two millennia and a half. In its classical form it contains paragraphs such as the following:

"I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice.

"I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy. In purity and holiness I will guard my life and my art.

"I will not use the knife, not even on sufferers from stone, but will withdraw in favor of such men as are engaged in this work.

"Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief and in particular of sexual relation with both female and male persons, be they free or slaves.

"What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself, holding such things shameful to be spoken about".

Considering that this magnificent document is the most enduring, and certainly the most quoted, tradition in the history of medicine, and that it was crafted centuries before Christ, we cannot but admire how God has gifted the human mind with the light and power to see the true and the good. The Oath stresses the ethical responsibilities of health-care workers, particularly medical doctors. It rejects medical aid for abortion and also physician-assisted suicide. It commits doctors to absolute respect for human life and its sacredness and even to respect for the personal condition or ills of the patient. Far from it the modern temptation of some medical workers or scientists to allow themselves to become manipulators of life, or even agents of death (cf EV, 89).

The Hippocratic Oath is also a proof that the major dictates of the Ten Commandments can be known by human reason, without the aid of revelation. The natural law, as articulated in the Ten Commandments, is within the grasp of reason. It is not Church law. It is divine law. It is binding on every human being. The Venerable John Paul II, when he visited Mount Sinai, said that before God gave the Ten Commandments in stone to Moses, he already wrote them into the human heart.

In 1964 Louis Lasagna unfortunately rewrote and softened the Hippocratic Oath so that many modern medical students do not now take the Oath in its classical form. The Lasagna version does not mention abortion and, worse still, admits that a doctor could sometimes terminate human life. This is to be regretted.

7. Abortion, an Unspeakable Crime

Procured abortion is the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth. In simple language, it is the killing of an unborn child, no matter by what euphemistic name it may be decorated, such as termination of pregnancy, or birth control, or free choice of a woman over her body, or removal of embryo or even tissue.

Abortion is an epidemic of gigantic world proportions. It kills more human beings than all the world wars put together. In its annual report on abortion in Europe on 2 March, 2010, the

European Parliament was informed by the Institute for Family Policy that in Europe in 2008, 2,863,649 abortions were performed. Of that number, 42 per cent, or 1,207,646, were perpetrated in the 27 countries of the European Union. In the European Union in the last fifteen years alone, 20,635,919 abortions were done. That means one abortion every eleven seconds (cf *Una Tragedia Europea*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 March, 2010. p. 1). You can then figure out how many abortions are done in the United States of America, in China, in India, in Japan and all around the world.

We can ask ourselves why normal human beings would like to do an abortion. Let us examine some of the arguments of those who are in favor, or who vote for abortion in parliaments, and suggest answers to them.

Some people argue that in a pluralist society that includes citizens with conflicting or contrary philosophical or religious beliefs, the law should not favor any of the sectarian beliefs. A Catholic, for example, should not impose his religious beliefs on others. The answer is that abortion stands condemned on grounds of natural reason, justice and respect for the life of other human beings. The conceived child is a human being. Not to kill an innocent person is natural law, divine law, not Church law like not to eat meat on Friday. The Catholic or other Christian who argues that the State should ban abortion and not support it, is not imposing his or her religious views on other people. The secularist who accuses a Christian of imposing his or her religious views in this matter is himself actually trying to impose his secularist views on the whole of society. Such a secularist is violating a fundamental human right. And the right to life is the most fundamental of all fundamental human rights.

Others argue that we should leave people free and not interfere with their freedom. In particular, some women argue that nobody is going to tell them what to do with their body. The answer is that the argument does not hold when there is the risk, or even the certainty of the death, of another human being, or when one's life is at risk. The safeguarding of human life has precedence over the exercise of individual freedom. Other people have rights. My freedom should not be exercised ignoring the rights of other humans, especially the right to life. I have the right to drive a car, but not to the extent of ignoring the right of pedestrians to be left alive. If I drive in such a way that I crush other people, my exercise of my so-called freedom is flawed. Moreover, the child in the womb is not the mother's body but is a separate person. A mother has no right to kill herself, not to talk of the right to kill her baby and turn her womb into a tomb.

Some politicians and people in public life argue this way: I am personally not in favor of abortion, but I shall not impose my views on others. In answer, we would like to ask that person what he or she thinks of the following argument: I am personally not in favor of shooting all of you in parliament, but since some people want to shoot you all, I shall not impose my views on them,

because for them it is a matter of pro-choice? This shows the internal inconsistency of that argument "personally against, but..." The fact is that objective norms of right and wrong do exist. "You shall not kill (an innocent person)" is one of them. And of all innocent persons, the unborn child is the most innocent.

If a doctor suggests that he performs abortions for the sake of population control, an "argumentum ad hominem" is to ask him why he and the members of his Population Control Committee do not offer themselves to be shot in order to reduce the world population? Some such abortionists are 60 or 70 years old. The unborn child has not even lived 9 months!

Moreover, there are arguments to prove that the world could feed many more people than at present, if there is the political will on the part of the public authorities in policies regarding agriculture and sharing of resources. Also, it is not proved that the lower the population, the higher is development.

It is not a good argument to say that in a particular country, State law allows abortion, and that therefore we should leave people free in this matter. Civil law has to be in conformity with the moral law under pain of being invalid. Just as no State can legalize adultery, or stealing or telling lies, so no State has the power to legalize abortion (cf EV,73). Not only is there no obligation to obey such laws, but rather there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them also by conscientious objection.

We can, therefore, see why the Venerable Pope John Paul II used very firm and solemn language in condemning abortion: "Therefore by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, in communion with the Bishops — who on various occasions have condemned abortion and who in the aforementioned consultation, albeit dispersed throughout the world, have shown unanimous agreement concerning this doctrine *-I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium*" (EV, 62).

We do not ignore the fact that some women can be tempted to resort to abortion considering the embarrassment of a pregnancy because they are not married, or because of poverty, or an already numerous family, or some other reason. But "no circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church" (EV,62).

Pope John Paul II names those who are responsible for abortion, in various ways: the mother (no

matter how tragic her reasons), the father of the child, the wider family circle and some friends, doctors and nurses, legislators who promote or vote abortion laws, those who have spread an attitude of sexual permissiveness and lack of esteem for motherhood, those who could have ensured, but did not, effective family and social policies, and national and international organizations that campaign for abortion legislation. (cf EV, 58.59).

Contraception is action to prevent intimate sexual relations from resulting in conception. Although from the moral point of view it is specifically different from abortion, it generally inevitably leads to it. The two evils, says Pope John Paul II, are "fruits of the same tree" (EV, 13). It is lamentable that enormous sums of money are invested in the production of ever more powerful pharmaceutical products to make it possible and easy to kill the unborn child in the mother's womb even without recourse to medical assistance.

From what has been said hitherto, it follows that "the use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings. The killing of innocent human creatures, even if carried out to help others, constitutes an absolutely unacceptable act" (EV, 63).

Humanity is not helpless in front of the epidemic of abortion. At the end of this paper, positive steps which have been taken, or which can be taken, will be listed.

8. Euthanasia is Unacceptable

Euthanasia is an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of elimination of suffering.

By nature and by instinct, the human being wants to live. Why then would people want to resort to euthanasia? Here are some possible reasons: prolonged suffering leading to anguish, severe discomfort or desperation; disturbance of the fragile equilibrium of a sick person who feels overwhelmed; compassion of relatives (even though it is misplaced compassion); a culture which sees no value in suffering and therefore maintains that all suffering should be eliminated; absence of a religious outlook which could have helped to approach the mystery of suffering; belief that we should be able to control life and death; too expensive to maintain the sick who are regarded as not profitable to society (hence the proposal, sometimes openly articulated, to eliminate malformed babies, severely handicapped people, disabled, and the elderly terminally ill). Add to this the practice of removing organs from people who are not yet dead in order to transplant to others.

It is therefore no surprise that the Venerable Pope John Paul II solemnly declares: "In harmony with the Magisterium of my Predecessors and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, *I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God*, since it is the deliberate

and morally unacceptable killing of a human person. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium" (EV, 65; cf also CCC, 2276–2279).

9. Other Attacks on Human Life

Other attacks on human life are suicide, murder, terrorism and the death penalty.

"Suicide is always as morally objectionable as murder... Even though a certain psychological, cultural and social conditioning may induce a person to carry out an action which so radically contradicts the innate inclination to life, thus lessening or removing subjective responsibility, suicide, when viewed objectively, is a gravely immoral act" (EV, 66; cf also CCC, 2280–2283).

Murder is obviously gravely sinful. The murderer and those who cooperate voluntarily commit a sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance (cf Gen 4:10; CCC, 2268–2269).

Terrorism merits condemnation for obvious reasons because it precipitates the death of innocent persons.

"The traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor" (CCC, 2267). "Today, however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent" (EV, 56).

10. Crimes Claimed as Rights

A worrying development in some societies in the world of today is the tendency to claim abortion, euthanasia and suicide as rights. "It is a problem which exists at the cultural, social and political level, where it reveals its more sinister and disturbing aspect in the tendency, ever more widely shared, to interpret the above crimes against life as *legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights*" (EV, 18). Governments are asked to use public funds to subsidize them. Health workers are asked to cooperate. The family, the "sanctuary of life", is even expected to comply.

How do we explain that humanity has descended so low? How has such a deplorable situation come to develop? The following analysis can be suggested. There is a growing tendency to regard the human being as an object to be used or discarded. Human dignity is equated with the capacity to fight back, and therefore the unborn child and the very sick are regarded as not dignified. An individualistic concept of freedom makes the strong win over the weak. Solidarity with the weak

and the needy is not appreciated. The idea of abusing freedom to destroy other people denies an essential link with the truth. The life of other people is now made dependent on the will of others, or on the majority vote in parliament. The State then becomes a tyrant State which eliminates those it considers a burden. What it calls public interest is then only the interest of one part, of a group, the powerful group. "To claim the right to abortion, infanticide and euthanasia, and to recognize that right in law, means to attribute to human freedom a perverse and evil significance: that of an absolute power over others and against others. This is a death of true freedom" (EV, 20).

We can even speak of an eclipse of the sense of God and of man (cf EV, 21). The Second Vatican Council already warned that "when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36). When people thus get on the slippery slope, terrible things begin to happen. Man gets over-concerned with technology, programming, controlling, dominating and manipulating birth and death. People begin to show more concern for seals, whales, lions and some trees which they call endangered species. To kill a dog is regarded as wickedness. To kill an unborn child is called "free choice", if not birth control and preservation of quality of life! Can such individualism and utilitarianism not lead to practical materialism? This is what Pope John Paul II calls the culture of death.

We need to look on Jesus Christ hanging on the Cross on Good Friday, in order to begin to see that there is meaning in suffering, even though at the end a certain mystery will remain about it. Dying, he destroyed our death, and rising, he restored our life. "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord" (Rm 14:7). Saint Paul strove to identify with Christ "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:10; cf also 1 Pet 2:21).

11. Duty of the Church to Defend and Promote Human Life

The Church has received from Christ the mission to preach the Gospel of life, to defend and promote human life. This is done in many ways: in catechesis, in various forms of preaching, in personal dialogue and in educational institutions. Teachers, catechists, pastors, theologians and journalists have an important role in this matter. Catholics are expected to join hands with other Christians, other believers and indeed also non-believers to honor human dignity. The Church extols the vocation to motherhood and explains the sacredness of sexuality exercised only within legitimate marriage. Opposition from those who have the spirit of the world is not unexpected. But Jesus already warned his disciples to expect such opposition.

If, at the end of the nineteenth century the Church by the Encyclical Letter, *Rerum Novarum*, of Pope Leo XIII, defended the rights of the oppressed workers, much more does the Church today by the *Evangelium Vitae* of Pope John Paul II defend the rights of unborn children whose lives are

being snuffed out by abortion. "Today there exists a great number of weak and defenseless human beings, unborn children in particular, whose fundamental right to life is being trampled upon" (EV, 5). In a Consistory of all the Cardinals in the world held in the Vatican City in 1991, the Cardinals requested Pope John Paul to write an encyclical letter in defense of life. The Holy Father wrote all the Bishops of the Church at Pentecost, 1991, to ask what each Bishop would want to see in such a document. This is the genesis of that great Encyclical Letter, *Evangelium Vitae*, issued by Pope John Paul II on 25 March, 1995. In it the Holy Father teaches the necessity to respect, protect, promote, love and serve every human life. In the Holy See document, *Charter for Health Care Workers* and the USA Bishops' *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, dynamic directives are given based on the example of Jesus Christ, the teachings of the natural law and the truth of the human person created in the image and likeness of God. All Catholics according to each person's vocation and mission, and especially Catholic health-care workers, have duties in this matter. They are to show in their lives and professions what the Church believes and teaches. They should insist that their respect for the sanctity of human life, and therefore their opposition to abortion and euthanasia, should not bar them from important health-care positions or from prominent places in their political parties. In their medical or political professions, they should be [one] hundred per cent Catholics and not *a la carte* selective Catholics. The Church looks on the face of every human being and sees Christ.

12. Duties of the State

It is important that our ideas be clear on where the State or the public or civil authorities come in regarding the respect due to human life. The right to life comes from God, not from the State. The State is there to serve the common good. Human dignity and fundamental human rights, such as the right to religious freedom, come from God and to God people will render an account. These rights are not gifts which the Government distributes or withholds, according to what happens to be the mind of the people now in Government.

There is a law higher than civil law: that is God's law. There is a dignity higher than civil dignity: that is human dignity that comes from God the Creator.

These considerations show the flaw in abortion, euthanasia, suicide and other attacks on human life which are striving to be decorated as rights in the State.

Moreover civil society is much wider than the State. Civil society is made up of families-communities, churches, synagogues, mosques, charitable organizations, fraternal associations and other groupings. All these entities are independent of the State. They have rights which precede the State. No doubt, they also have duties towards the State. The tendency that is to be resisted is the idea that Government organizes everything and that everyone should obey whatever law those in

Government today decide to enact. While obviously Government has the right to make laws, it is bound to respect the law of God, which in practice is the natural law.

And it is to respect the principle of subsidiary which Pope Pius defines thus: "Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them" (*Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23(1931),203; cf also CCC, 1883; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 186).

13. Protection and Promotion of Human Life: Laudable Initiatives

We shall conclude these reflections by listing many laudable initiatives which have been taken, whether by Catholics or others, for the protection and promotion of human life.

Towards unborn life we regard as fundamental respect and openness. "Openness to life", says Pope Benedict XVI, "is at the centre of true development. When a society moves towards the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man's true good. The acceptance of life strengthens moral fiber and makes people capable of mutual help" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 28).

Married people will find help if initiated into the natural methods of regulating fertility, methods that respect both human dignity and correct theology. Many parish or diocesan communities organize marriage and family counseling.

Hospitals, clinics, special centers and convalescent homes look after the sick, the addicted to drugs, the mentally ill, the terminally ill, and HIV/AIDS patients. Religious Congregations, especially of consecrated women, have performed magnificently in Church history in these areas, without denying the contribution of lay people and nurses.

It is not enough to condemn abortion. The arguments of those in support of it have to be listened to and adequate answers provided. Women considering abortion should be offered acceptable alternatives, such as an honorable home where they can discretely remain until childbirth, financial help, and possible adoption of their child brought to term. Many such women have become pro-life by watching a film showing an abortion with the silent scream of the unborn child being cut to pieces, or simply by seeing the child in the womb show signs of life.

Married couples are to be praised and encouraged who are ready to welcome children as "the supreme gift of marriage" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50), even when there are already several children in

the home. Families that adopt children or that welcome the handicapped or abandoned children need good support from the State, including financial help. Centers to look after children whose mothers are working also deserve credit. Medical and other health-care personnel who come to the aid of families and especially children in earthquake and other emergency areas are promoting human life.

Social and political action in favor of human life has also its importance. Consciences have to be formed to appreciate what is wrong with abortion, euthanasia and infanticide. Common action between the academia, the mass media, religious bodies and voluntary organizations needs to be well organized so that the culture of life may squarely confront the culture of death and send it packing. There is necessity to stress the importance of solidarity and the universal destination of earthly goods (cf *Gaudium et Spes*, 69; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 171) and to puncture the population explosion myth, because what is often lacking is the political will to share the goods of the earth and to extend the hand of brotherhood and sisterhood to people who find themselves in less favorable social and economic situations. As Pope Paul VI said, if the bread at table is not enough for the invited, it is better to produce more bread than to kill some of the guests.

Respected brothers and sisters, human life is sacred. Human dignity is God-given. The Son of God, by his Incarnation, has somehow united himself with every human being (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). We need, therefore, to respect, defend and promote human life. May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word, obtain for us the grace to do this with conviction, vision, dynamism and perseverance.


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