

Archbishop Borders' pastoral

Church has duty of guarding life 'with greatest care'

Ten years ago the Second Vatican Council repeated clearly and succinctly the basic principle of respect for human life:

"For God, the Lord of Life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life in a manner that is worthy of man. Therefore from the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes."

The Church's insistence on the dignity of the human person is grounded in a tradition that sees whatever is opposed to human life, such as abortion or euthanasia, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as some forms of human experimentation, and whatever diminishes human dignity, such as poverty and injustice, as moral evils and an affront to God, the Creator of all.

The Church has a duty to speak in behalf of human life and to encourage a just social order and a system of justice that protects basic human rights, especially the right to life. Governments must also protect human rights. Laws that permit the arbitrary destruction of human life—before as well as after birth—are unjust and immoral.

Recognition of the dignity of the human person, made in the image of God, lies at the very heart of our individual and social duty to respect human life. It is this which causes us to state forcefully once again that abortion and euthanasia are violations of the right to life and are morally evil.

There is widespread disrespect for the sanctity of human life in our nation today. It is evidenced in many ways, and especially in the destruction through abortion of more than one million unborn children each year. Disrespect for the sanctity of life is also evident in current efforts to persuade people that euthanasia is acceptable. Responding to such abuses of the sanctity of life, the Bishops of the United States adopted a Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities at their annual meeting last November. This Pastoral Plan seeks to activate all the resources of the Church in order to check the trend toward permissive abortion. It calls on all the Church's agencies, institutions and people to take part in a comprehensive effort of education, moral and pastoral guidance, and social action which will restore respect for human life and establish a system of justice in which the basic right to life is protected at every stage and in every circumstance.

The Pastoral Plan addresses itself to the practical task of amending the Constitution in order to make possible laws that protect the unborn. It invites the cooperation of all Americans, regardless of sex, race, religion or ethnic origin. Protection of the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" has always been one of our nation's most important commitments. Reaffirmation of that commitment is a responsibility of all Americans.

Thus, the Pastoral Plan recognizes the value and necessity of local pro-life action groups which are separate from the Church and involve the efforts of all who are committed to the value of human life, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

As we approach once again the date on which the Supreme Court of the United States issued its decisions in 1973 denying protection to unborn children, we urge a renewal of commitment and a resurgence of systematic efforts to persuade our nation's leaders to restore the protection of the Constitution to the unborn.

We urge Catholics to move out into the society and invite their neighbors, colleagues and friends to take part in this most important effort.

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