

A STATEMENT ON LIFE FOR SCHOOLS AN APPEAL TO THE INTELLECT

The practice of abortion, it is argued does not do violence to anyone's conscience, since each person is left free to follow his own judgment while being enjoined from imposing his own views on others.

The right of "ethical pluralism" is asserted as though it flowed with inner logic from ideological pluralism. But the two things are in fact very different. Since actions impinge upon the rights of others far more quickly than simple opinions do, and since no one may invoke freedom, of thought as a justification for attacking the rights of others. especially the right to life.

*Vatican Document on Abortion,
Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
November 18, 1974.*

THE PROBLEM

Canada is now without a law regulating abortion. The pro and anti forces concerning the right to unborn life speak without the benefit of law. Recently the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that an unborn child could not sue its mother for neglect or injury suffered "in utero". Given that we as a nation have not seen fit to recognize the unborn in Canadian Law and given that the debate concerning the humanity of the unborn continues and given that the Catholic Church teaches respect for all human life, it is important to our school community and to our students that we reflect clearly our Catholic Traditions concerning "preborn life."

As educators within the Catholic Academic Tradition, we dare not be silent lest our students judge that we have nothing to say concerning the sanctity of human life, or worse, that we are indifferent. Our students deserve to know unequivocally that we support the right to human life and to the integrity of body conception to old age and natural death.

FAITH AND REASON

Faith is not contrary to reason. As teachers whose work is in the province of the intellect, we react logically and in Faith to what the Church teaches. WE carry on our work of studying and teaching not in any blind fashion but in a firm belief in the Church as a competent teacher; we have confidence in what She teaches.

Thus, what follows is an appeal to the intellect of those who live and teach within the Church. Primarily, I wish to illustrate that the Church's position of respect for all life is reasonable and to give you confidence that it is possible for us to understand why the Church must teach that life is to be respected from the first moment of conception until death.

ALL LIFE IS DEPENDENT

Dependence on and trust in the good will we have for each other is a basic principle of life and subsequently of the operation of our society. Life is firmly rooted in our need, trust and respect for one another.

As infants, we were utterly dependent on parents for the nourishment, protection and intellectual stimulation necessary for the maintenance of our life. To a degree, these same life needs follow us through adolescence and adult life.

Regardless of age, convenience or the extent of economic contribution to society, human life is valuable. WE are responsible for one another; we are, as a society, dependent on mutual respect for all life.

ARGUMENTS USED FOR ABORTION

Gestational arguments justifying abortion declare that the conceived are human only after a certain number of weeks “in utero” Because this argument does not proceed from a common universal definition of human life, it quickly descends into a morass of conflicting personal values, perceptions and conclusions concerning what constitutes a human, the value of life in general and at what moment or period of time during gestation the foetus is human.

Obviously, society cannot operate without agreement and principle to guide our decisions and relationship to one another.

Arguments for and against the maintenance and continuation of human life must begin with the recognition and agreement concerning the dignity, uniqueness and rights of human life.

CONCEPTION – HUMAN LIFE

The first moment of conception is the first moment of life. If that life continues for the next hundred years, its first moment of life will always be the moment of conception. Obviously, everyone does not agree that conception is the beginning of human life. There is a current argument which would deny any humanity to the moment of conception. The argument claims that conception begins a biological process which will be ultimately associated with life but it is not recognizable or operative human moment. If this argument is true, if it stands up to the scrutiny of philosophy, logic and biology, then we would have an argument for abortion at the moment of conception and possibly at other stages of development after conception.

However, logically, we have to admit that all life flows from the first moment of conception. The continuum of life from conception is obvious. That continuum is a state of development. There is a mutual use of organs between mother and foetus but there is no constitutive addition to that which was there at conception. Conception contains all the constitutive elements of a human being.

As humans, we would agree that we have obligations to nourish and to protect one another. Logically it follows; we must accept the complications which ensue from that life statement. An act of feeding the hungry or seeing to the needs of the injured and the ill are common human responses. Often it is inconvenient to respond to the needs of others. Looking after our neighbour consumes some of our time and resources. Regardless, we respond because such response is one of the highest expressions of our humanity.

To do away with other humans because they are inconvenient or in the way is essentially the same fallacious logic of the tyrants who through simplification justified the extermination of whole classes of people because of their nationality culture, color, religion, physical or mental capabilities.

When we view the cessation of life for these simplified reasons, we are horrified. Our human sensibilities and our innate human concern for each other, regardless of race, size or color will not allow us to be identified with such reasoning nor the horrifying actions which follow from such thinking.

In considering the life of the unborn, we must not accept nor give credence to opinions and arguments from those who claim a prior right to life because they are known and have a position in society while the unborn are unknown and without property. This appeal to prior right, when exercised 'vis a vis the unborn, denies the actual and potential import of an unborn life.

Our Catholic tradition teaches us that all humans have an equal right to life.

As educators, it is our task to consider the formidable, scientific body of evidence which identifies the continuum of human existence from conception to biological birth.

It is appropriate and prudent to teach our Catholic traditions which recognize the human dignity of life "in utero." As Catholic teachers it is our duty to study and to respect such teaching in the same manner that we would study and respect advances in science or the humanities. Given our Faith in the teaching of the Church and the solid evidence from our own study it is reasonable to respect human life from conception until death. If the unborn, the disabled and the old participate in the human continuum of life, can we dismiss their life without considering their humanity?

ARGUMENTS TEACH

As Catholic Educators, we should not ask questions to trap pro choice or abortionists into logic which causes them to become defensive and does not allow them to think through good answers for their position. Thoughtful logical answers are important because they determine how each of us will relate to the continuum of life. As Catholics, our tradition supports and gives us strong reason for confirming life. In Charity we must be supportive of others who do not have our advantage. We must be logical with them and give them an opportunity to arrive at truth concerning the dignity of the unborn.

The strongest motive for human action is knowledge of goodness. Let us always remember we are dealing with truth – truth is always good.

As humans we are made for goodness. We make our choices because we recognize goodness; we never choose evil because we recognize evil. Evil is destructive of us and the healthy do not knowingly choose that which would lead to personal harm or death.

It is the task of Catholic Education to provide evidence for the human life of the unborn. Historically, as a people, we have never had difficulty admitting to and supporting the goodness of the infant and the child. In ages past the young were considered the hope and the future of society. Recently, our society has not automatically granted that same goodness to the unborn.

The intellect is the province of the teacher. It is the work of the teacher to guide students to the truth concerning life, to celebrate the truth with them and to help them relate that same truth to every other person.

The will follows upon the beauty and truth discovered by the intellect. If we can, along with our students, discover the beauty, the value and the truth of all life, the willful cessation of life

would not be a choice. We do not choose to destroy that which we know and consider valuable, true and beautiful. On the other hand, if the destiny, if the destiny of “preborn life” is subjected to a willful act of choice the whole meaning of that life as beautiful and true is not considered

IN CONCLUSION

Abortion exists in our society; it touches all of our lives. Abortion clouds our ability to discern life as valuable regardless of whether that life is visible outside the womb or invisible within the womb. Abortion disjoins life in the womb from womb-delivered life and justifies a judgment to abort on opinions which we would never use to judge post-natal life.

If life is a continuum of existence from conception to the grave, then logically we cannot grant a right to integrity of body to one stage of life while denying the same right to another stage. Such a position would not be logical

To make decisions based on a selection of facts is to simplify. Society cannot treat matters of life in a simplistic manner. To justify abortion because the unborn is not known by us or to accept justifying arguments for abortion based on a claim to inviolable, individual rights of the mother or to view the unborn “in utero” as an aggressor is to strike deeply at our sense of community obligation for each other.

Do we have the right to neglect another human being who needs our help? Do we have the right to stand aside when another citizen is being beaten and robbed? Our sense of societal interdependence gives us the obligation to come to the rescue of one another. This same principle motivated many of our own relatives to risk their lives in wars against the simplistic ideas of tyranny.

Finally Catholic Schools are communities which gather in the name of Jesus. He was a just man. Our schools must be places of justice. We must be just in our thoughts and actions. Justice is not merely a concept. It must seek its fulfillment in action. Catholic Schools must support the needs of all humans regardless of strength or weakness or state of health.

On an issue as basic as life, we must be unequivocal in our confidence in all human life; we must be prepared to give our students, logical reasons for supporting the dignity of all life.

“The gift of life which God the Creator and Father has entrusted to man calls him to appreciate the inestimable value of what he has been given and to take responsibility for it.”

Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its origin and on the Dignity of procreation.

John Paul II.

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