

The Gospel of Life

Evangelium vitae

COMPENDIUM



**United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities**

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(Evangelium vitae)

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What follows are summaries of each of the 105 numbered paragraphs of Evangelium vitae, prepared by USCCB's Secretariat on Pro-Life Activities, to serve as a resource on and introduction to this great encyclical. Most of the italics are added by the Secretariat for emphasis.

BACKGROUND

Pope St. John Paul II was born Karol Wojtyła in Poland in 1920. The youngest of three children, he faced great suffering, loss, and hardship in his early life. His elder sister had died in infancy, his mother and brother by the time he was 12, and his father when he was only 20. He witnessed firsthand the invasion and occupation of Poland by German forces, the rise of communism, and the scourge of Nazism.

During the Second World War, the young Wojtyła began studying for the priesthood in an underground seminary and was ordained in 1946. He was elected Pope in 1978 and served as the Bishop of Rome until his death on April 2, 2005. His 27-year pontificate is among the longest in the Church's history. As Pope, he visited 129 countries, canonized 482 saints, and wrote 14 encyclicals, including *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). He was canonized by Pope Francis on April 27, 2014, and his feast day is celebrated on October 22, the anniversary of the inauguration of his pontificate.

The twentieth century witnessed some of the greatest assaults on human dignity in history, including multiple world wars, the Holocaust, and the advance of legalized abortion and euthanasia. Promulgated in 1995, on the eve of a new millennium, Pope St. John Paul II's *Gospel of Life* sought to counter the spread of such unprecedented threats to human life and combat the "culture of death." Despite such grave threats to human life, John Paul II vigorously proclaimed the *good news* of the value, sacredness, and dignity of every human life in every stage and circumstance. His landmark, pro-life encyclical continues to offer prophetic insights for the Church's efforts to build a culture of life and civilization of love.

INTRODUCTION

1

The Gospel of Life is at the heart of Jesus' saving mission, to be preached as "good news" to all people. In taking on human flesh and coming to Earth, Christ reveals the full meaning of every human birth and the dignity of all human life.

2

Man is created to share in the very life of God. This eternal destiny reveals the *immeasurable* value of the human person, and the sacredness of earthly life. The dignity of human life from beginning to end can be recognized by every person open to truth and goodness, but Christians are particularly entrusted with its protection. *The Gospel of God's love for man, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel.*

3

Every threat to human life is a threat that Mother Church feels in her very heart. In addition to the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger, disease, violence and war, new threats to human life are emerging on an alarming scale. Whatever is opposed to life itself, violates the integrity of the human person, or insults human dignity poisons human society and is a dishonor to the Creator.

4

Today, scientific and technological developments have given rise to new forms of attacks on human dignity. At the same time, there is a new cultural climate developing in which certain crimes against life are justified in the name of the rights of individual freedom. The failure to punish and instead legalize such practices is both a symptom and cause of grave moral decline in our world. Consciences are finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the value of human life.

5

This encyclical was written in response to a request from the Cardinals that the value and inviolability of human life be reaffirmed with the authority of the Successor of Peter. Just as the Church spoke out against injustices suffered by the working classes a century ago, now she must speak out on behalf of the great multitude of weak and defenceless human beings, unborn children in particular, whose fundamental right to life is being trampled upon. This encyclical is a pressing appeal to every person: *respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!*

6

I pray that the family will always remain the "sanctuary of life,"¹ in accordance with God's plan. All members of the Church are called to offer the world new signs of hope, to work to ensure that justice and solidarity will increase and that a new culture of human life will be affirmed, for the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love.

CHAPTER 1

THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES TO ME FROM THE GROUND

Present-Day Threats to Human Life

“Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him” (Gen 4:8): the roots of violence against life

7

God did not make death, but rather created man in his image for a destiny of full and perfect life. Death came into the world as a result of the devil's envy (cf. *Gen 3:1,4-5*) and the sin of our first parents (cf. *Gen 2:17, 3:17-19*). The first murder occurred violently in the killing of Abel by his brother Cain.

[This biblical account can be found in *Gen 4:2-16*.]

8

In freedom, Cain chose to give into the temptations of envy and anger, killing his own brother. Every murder is similarly a violation of the *“spiritual” kinship* uniting mankind in one family. This killing at the dawn of human history is a sad witness of how evil spreads with amazing speed. Cain refuses to accept responsibility for his sin with the question, *“Am I my brother's keeper?”* (*Gen 4:9*). This pattern continues throughout human society today as ideologies try to justify and disguise the most atrocious crimes.

9

The blood of Abel cries out for justice. God cannot leave such a crime unpunished. Life belongs to God alone; therefore, *whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself*. Yet paradoxically, God is merciful even when he punishes—*for not even a murderer loses his personal dignity*. God protects Cain from those seeking revenge, desiring not his death, but rather his *conversion*.

10

God's question to Cain, *“What have you done?”* (*Gen 4:10*), is also addressed to the people of today, for human history has been marked by attacks on life. Some threats come from nature itself, but are made worse by culpable indifference and negligence. Others are of human origin, such as murder, war, poverty, and malnutrition.

11

Another category of attacks specifically threaten life at its earliest and at its final stages, striking at the time of life's greatest frailty when it lacks any means of self-defense. Often such attacks are no longer considered crimes, but instead assume the nature of *“rights.”* A profound crisis of culture has created scepticism about the foundations of knowledge and ethics. In a complex society, people are often left alone with their problems, which include situations of acute poverty and instances of violence, especially against women. The value of life can today undergo an *“eclipse.”*

12

We are faced with a *“structure of sin”* that is characterized by the emergence of a culture that denies solidarity and that in many cases takes the form of a *“culture of death.”* A society increasingly concerned with efficiency leads to *a war of the powerful against the weak*. Any life that requires greater care or attention comes to be seen as useless and an intolerable burden. A *“conspiracy against life”* is unleashed. This conspiracy distorts personal

and family relationships, as well as those between peoples and nations.

13

Although *specifically different* evils, contraception and abortion are often closely connected as fruits of the same tree. It is true that in many cases contraception and even abortion are practised under the pressure of real-life difficulties, which nonetheless can never exonerate from striving to observe God's law fully. Still, in very many instances, both practices are rooted in a hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality with a self-centered concept of freedom that regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfilment. The life that could result from a sexual encounter becomes an enemy to avoid at all costs. Abortion therefore becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception, according to this tragically flawed logic. Additionally, some contraceptive products actually act as abortifacients.

14

While various techniques of artificial reproduction may appear to be at the service of life, such practices actually introduce new threats. These techniques are morally unacceptable, first of all, because they separate procreation from the conjugal act. Furthermore, the "spare embryos" are either destroyed or used for research. Prenatal diagnoses can be helpful in identifying medical treatments needed by a child in the womb, but all too often become opportunities for proposing and procuring eugenic abortions in the case of illness or handicap. There are alarming proposals that extend this logic to justify infanticide.

15

Serious threats also hang over the incurably ill and the dying. There is a temptation to resolve the problem of suffering—sadly considered meaningless and the epitome of evil—by hastening death. While often stemming from a false understanding of compassion, euthanasia is a misguided response to suffering. There exists

in contemporary culture a certain Promethean attitude which leads people to think that they can control life and death by taking the decisions about them into their own hands. Euthanasia is sometimes justified by the utilitarian motive of avoiding costs.

16

Demographic considerations are also being used to justify further attacks on human life. Birthrates are disturbingly declining or collapsing in rich, developed countries, while poorer nations generally have high rates of population growth. Instead of forms of global intervention at the international level, such as serious family policies, programmes of cultural development and of fair production and distribution of resources, however, anti-birth policies are being forced on developing nations.

17

Attacks on life are spreading in extent and in high numbers. Moreover, they receive widespread and powerful support from a broad consensus on the part of society, from widespread legal approval and the involvement of certain sectors of health-care personnel. We are faced by an objective "conspiracy against life," involving even international institutions that, with the assistance of mass media, are engaged in encouraging and carrying out campaigns to make contraception, sterilization, and abortion widely available.

***"Am I my brother's keeper?":
a perverse idea of freedom***

18

There is a disturbing tendency to interpret crimes against life as *legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights*. It is a surprising contradiction that, precisely in an age when the inviolable rights of the person are solemnly proclaimed and the value of life publicly affirmed, the right to life is being denied, especially at the more significant moments of existence: life and death. Such attacks directly violate respect for human life and represent a *direct threat to the entire culture of human rights*.

The roots of this remarkable contradiction begin with a cultural mentality that carries the concept of subjectivity to an extreme and even distorts it, and that recognizes as a subject of rights only the person who enjoys full or at least incipient autonomy. This mentality also tends to *equate personal dignity with the capacity for verbal and explicit communication*. There is no place for anyone who is radically dependent on the other and can communicate only through the silent language of a profound sharing of affection, such as the unborn and the dying. Such denials of human rights are also rooted in a *notion of freedom* that exalts the individual in an *absolute* way, giving no place to solidarity or service to others. Every man is indeed his “brother’s keeper,” because God entrusts us to one another. When freedom is stripped of its inherently *relational* dimension, it loses its original meaning. Freedom no longer exists when it fails to recognize and respect its connection with objective and universal truth.

This view of freedom *leads to a serious distortion of life in society*. When the promotion of the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy, society becomes a mass of individuals placed side by side, each trying to make his own interests prevail. There is no reference to a truth binding on everyone and relativism reigns. Having lost its foundation, the “right” ceases to be a right and becomes subject to the will of the stronger. Democracy effectively moves towards a form of totalitarianism, where a tyrant State arrogates to itself the right to dispose of the life of the weakest in the name of a public interest which is really nothing but the interest of some. The process leading to the *breakdown of a genuinely human co-existence* and the *disintegration of the State* itself has already begun.

**“And from your face I shall be hidden” (Gen 4:14):
the eclipse of the sense of God and of man**

The deepest roots of the struggle between the “culture of life” and the “culture of death,” lie in *the eclipse of the sense of God and of man*, typical of a social and cultural climate dominated by secularism. There is a vicious cycle. When the sense of God is lost, there is a tendency to lose the sense of man, of his dignity and his life. In turn, the systematic violation of the moral law, especially in the matter of respect for human life and its dignity, progressively darkens our capacity to discern God’s living and saving presence.

When God is forgotten, the creature itself becomes unintelligible. Man no longer grasps the transcendent character of his existence, and is reduced to being a “thing.” Life is no longer viewed as a gift from God entrusted to his care, but instead becomes a possession to be controlled and manipulated. *Once all reference to God has been removed, the meaning of everything else becomes profoundly distorted*. Nature is reduced to being “matter,” and is subjected to every kind of manipulation. By living as if God did not exist, man not only loses sight of the mystery of God, but also of the mystery of the world and the mystery of his own being.

This eclipse of the sense of God and of man leads to a *practical materialism*, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism, and hedonism. The values of *being* are replaced by those of *having*. One’s own material well-being is paramount, at the impoverishment of the interpersonal and spiritual dimensions of life. The body is reduced to pure materiality, a complex of organs, functions, and energies to be used according to the criteria of pleasure and efficiency. In the materialistic perspective, the criterion of personal dignity is replaced by the criterion of efficiency, functionality,

and usefulness: others are considered not for what they *are*, but for what they *have, do, and produce*.

24

The eclipse of the sense of God and man is taking place first of all in the moral conscience of the individual, but also in the moral conscience of society, which encourages the culture of death. Today, the moral conscience, both individual and social, is in danger of confusion between good and evil, precisely in relation to the fundamental right to life. When conscience, this bright lamp of the soul (cf. *Mt 6:22-23*), calls “evil good and good evil” (*Is 5:20*), it is already on the path to the most alarming corruption and the darkest moral blindness. Yet all the conditioning and efforts to enforce silence fail to stifle the voice of the Lord echoing within every person. In this sanctuary, a new journey of love, openness, and service to life can begin.

“You have come to the sprinkled blood” (cf. *Heb 12: 22, 24*): signs of hope and invitation to commitment

25

The blood of Christ, while it reveals the grandeur of the Father’s love, *shows how precious man is in God’s eyes and how priceless the value of his life*. It reveals to man that his greatness, and therefore his vocation, consists in *the sincere gift of self*. It is from Christ’s blood that all draw *the strength to commit themselves to promoting life*. His blood is *the most powerful source of hope* and the foundation of the *absolute certitude that in God’s plan life will be victorious*.

26

Despite our societies being strongly marked by the culture of death, there are many positive signs that point to life’s ultimate victory. Among these positive signs are: *married couples* ready to accept children as a gift; *families* willing to accept abandoned children, handicapped persons, and elderly people left alone; *centers* that offer support to mothers facing difficulties and the temptation to abort; and

medical advances that offer care to the unborn, the sick, and the suffering.

27

Movements to raise social awareness in defense of life have sprung up in many parts of the world. Furthermore, we witness *daily gestures of sacrifice and unselfish care* in families, hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the elderly. Guided by the example of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk 10:29-37*), the Church continues to lead the way in providing charitable help, contributing to a “civilization of love and life.” Other signs of hope include *growing public opposition to war and the death penalty*, greater attention to concerns of *quality of life and ecology*, and the *reawakening of ethical reflection on issues affecting life*.

28

We find ourselves in the midst of a battle between a culture of life and a culture of death. We are all involved in it, with the inescapable responsibility of *choosing to be unconditionally pro-life*. The choice for life reaches its full religious and moral meaning when it flows from, is formed by, and is nourished by *faith in Christ*. With the light and strength of this faith, the Church is becoming more aware of the grace and responsibility of proclaiming, celebrating, and serving the *Gospel of life*.

CHAPTER 2

I CAME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE

The Christian Message Concerning Life

“The life was made manifest, and we saw it (1 Jn 1:2): with our gaze fixed on Christ, “the Word of life”

29

Faced with countless threats to human life, one can feel overwhelmed by sheer powerlessness. During such times, the People of God is called to profess its faith in Jesus. The *Gospel of life* is not simply a reflection on life or merely a commandment to change society. The *Gospel of life* is something *concrete* and *personal*, for it consists in the proclamation of *the very person of Jesus*. Through the words, actions, and person of Christ, we are given the possibility of knowing the complete truth concerning the value of human life. In Jesus, the *Gospel of life* is definitively proclaimed and fully given. This Gospel can be known in its essential traits by human reason, having been written on the heart of every man and woman and echoing in every conscience.

30

With our attention fixed on the Lord, we wish to meditate anew on the *Gospel of life*. In Jesus, the “Word of life”, God’s eternal life is thus proclaimed and given. Thanks to this proclamation and gift, our physical and spiritual life acquires its full value and meaning, for God’s eternal life is the end to which our living in this world is directed and called.

***“The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation” (Ex 15:2):
life is always a good***

31

The fullness of the Gospel message about life was prepared for in the Old Testament. In the events of the Exodus, Israel discovered the preciousness of its life in the eyes of God. The Lord reveals himself to Israel as its Savior, with the power to ensure a future to those without hope. Freedom from slavery meant the gift of an identity, the recognition of an indestructible dignity, and *the beginning of a new history, in which discovery of God and discovery of self go hand in hand*. Through the Exodus experience, Israel learns to turn to God with renewed trust whenever its existence is threatened. In coming to know the value of its own existence as a people, Israel grows in its *perception of the meaning and value of life itself*. The problem of suffering challenges faith and puts it to the test. But even when the darkness is deepest, faith points to a trusting and adoring acknowledgment of the “mystery”: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2).

“The name of Jesus... has made this man strong” (Acts 3:16): in the uncertainties of human life, Jesus brings life’s meaning to fulfillment

32

The experience of the people of Israel is renewed in the experience of all the “poor” who meet Jesus of Nazareth. As God reassured Israel in the midst of danger, so now the Son of God proclaims to all who feel threatened that their lives, too, are a good to which the Father’s love gives meaning

and value. All who suffer because their lives are in some way “diminished,” hear from Jesus the good news of God’s concern for them; their lives are a gift carefully guarded in the hands of the Father. Proclaiming Christ, the Church is the bearer of a message of salvation that resounds amid the hardships and poverty of human life. By faith in Jesus, life that lies abandoned and cries out for help regains self-esteem and full dignity.

33

Jesus’ own life was marked by a dialectic between the experience of the uncertainty of human life and the affirmation of its value. Life’s contradictions and risks were fully accepted by Jesus as he shared in the lowliest and most vulnerable conditions of human life. Jesus lived this poverty right up to the culminating moment of the Cross. It is precisely *by his death that Jesus reveals all the splendor and value of life*, inasmuch his sacrifice on the Cross becomes the source of new life for all people. *Truly great must be the value of human life if the Son of God has taken it up and made it the instrument of the salvation of all humanity!*

“Called ... to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:28-29): God’s glory shines on the face of man

34

Life is always a good. This is an instinctive perception and a fact of experience. Why is life a good? This question is found everywhere in the Bible. Man, though formed from dust, *is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory* (cf. Gen 1:26; Ps 8:6). Man has been given a *sublime dignity*, based on the intimate bond which unites him to his Creator: in man there shines forth a reflection of God himself. The Book of Genesis affirms this value when it places man at the *summit* of all God’s creation. Only the creation of man is presented as the result of a special decision on the part of God, a deliberation to establish a *particular and specific bond with the Creator*. The life which God offers to man *is a gift by which God shares something of himself with his*

creature. Among all visible creatures, only man is capable of knowing and loving his Creator.

35

The Yahwist account of creation speaks of a divine breath that is breathed into man so that he may come to life. Because man is made by God and bears within himself a lasting imprint of God, he is naturally drawn to God. As St. Augustine expressed, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”²² Similarly, the Psalmist wonders, “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps 8:4). Compared to the vastness of the universe, man is very small, and yet, this very contrast reveals his greatness.

36

Sadly, God’s marvelous plan was marred by the appearance of sin in history. Through sin, man rebels against his Creator and ends up by worshipping creatures. As a result, man not only deforms the image of God in himself, but is tempted to offenses against God’s image in others. When *God* is not acknowledged *as God*, the profound meaning of man is betrayed and communion between people is compromised. However, at the coming of Christ in human flesh, God’s image shines forth anew and is revealed in its fullness. The plan of life given to the first Adam finds at last its fulfilment in Christ. In contrast to the disobedience of Adam, the redemptive obedience of Christ is the source of grace poured upon the human race, opening wide to everyone the gates of the kingdom of life. All who commit themselves to Christ are given the fullness of life: the divine image is restored, renewed, and brought to perfection in them.

“Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn 11:26): the gift of eternal life

37

The life that the Son of God came to give to human beings cannot be reduced to mere existence in time, but consists in being begotten of God and

sharing in the fullness of his love. The life which Jesus promises is “eternal” because it is a complete sharing in the life of the Eternal One. To know God and his Son is to accept the mystery of the loving communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into one’s own life. That life even now is open to eternal life because it shares in the life of God.

38

Eternal life is therefore the life of God himself and at the same time the *life of the children of God*. Here the Christian truth about life becomes most sublime. *The dignity of this life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact that it comes from God, but also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God in knowledge and love of him.* This reality has immediate consequences for human life in its earthly state. Although man instinctively loves life because it is a good, this love will find further inspiration and strength, and new breadth and depth, in the divine dimensions of this good. For earthly life can be the “place” where God makes himself *known*, where we encounter God and enter into communion with him.

“From man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting” (Gen 9:5): reverence and love for every human life

39

The life of man comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. *God therefore is the sole Lord of this life:* man cannot do with life as he wills. Both human life and death are in the hands of God alone: “In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind” (*Job 12:10*). However, God does not exercise his power in an arbitrary or threatening way, but rather as part of his *care and loving concern for his creatures*. God’s hands are like the loving hands of a mother who accepts, nurtures, and takes care of her child. For, “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist” (*Wis 1:13-14*).

40

The sacredness of life gives rise to its inviolability, written in man’s conscience from the beginning. Man is always reminded of the inviolability of life as something that does not belong to him, because it is the property and gift of God the Father. The commandment regarding life’s sacredness is at the heart of the covenant that God makes with Moses on Mount Sinai (cf. *Ex 34:28*) as God commands Israel: “You shall not kill” (*Ex 20:13*). Israel’s sense of the value of life culminates in the positive commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (*Lev 19:18*). This message will be brought to perfection in the New Testament.

41

The Sermon on the Mount expounds on God’s commandment to value life: “I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment” (*Mt 5:21-22*). By both his words and actions, Jesus further unveils the positive requirements of the commandment regarding the inviolability of life. While these requirements were already present in the Old Testament’s calls to protect life when it is weak or threatened—including foreigners, widows, orphans, the sick, and the poor, with Jesus these requirements take on new force and urgency, even to the point of loving one’s enemy. Thus, the deepest element of God’s commandment is the *requirement to show reverence and love* for every person and his or her life.

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28): man’s responsibility for life

42

To defend and promote life is a task which God entrusts to every man, calling him as his living image to share in his own lordship over the world. Having been called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. *Gen 2:15*), man has a specific responsibility towards *the environment in which he lives*, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity—not only for the present generation but for future generations. While

God gave man dominion over the earth, this is not an absolute power. When it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity.

43

A certain sharing by man in God's lordship is also evident in the specific responsibility which he is given for human life as such, a responsibility that reaches its highest point in the giving of life *through procreation* by man and woman in marriage. Having a child is an event which is deeply human and full of religious meaning, insofar as it involves both the spouses, who form "one flesh," and God who makes himself present. God alone is the source of that "image and likeness" which is proper to the human being, as it was received at Creation. Begetting is the continuation of Creation. A man and woman joined in matrimony become partners in a divine undertaking: through the act of procreation, God's gift of life is accepted and a new life opens to the future. While parents cooperate with God's plan for human life in a specific way, *the task of accepting and serving life involves everyone; and this task must be fulfilled above all towards life when it is at its weakest.*

***"For you formed my inmost being" (Ps 139:13):
the dignity of the unborn child***

44

Human life finds itself most vulnerable when it enters the world and when it leaves. While there are no explicit calls in Scripture to protect human life at its very beginning (specifically unborn life) and nearing its end, this can be explained by the fact that harming or denying life in these stages is completely foreign to the way of thinking of the People of God. In the Old Testament, sterility is dreaded as a curse, while numerous children are viewed as a blessing. At work here is the certainty that the life transmitted by parents has its origins in God. *The life of every individual, from its very beginning is part of God's plan:* "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer 1:5).

45

The New Testament confirms *the indisputable recognition of the value of life from its very beginning*. The value of the person from the moment of conception is celebrated in the meeting of the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, and between the two children they are carrying. It is precisely the children who reveal the advent of the Messianic age: in their meeting, the redemptive power of the presence of the Son of God among men first becomes operative. Elizabeth was the first to hear the voice; but John is the first to experience grace.

"I kept my faith even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted' " (Ps 116:10): life in old age and at times of suffering

46

The cultural and religious context of the Bible is also free from any temptations to hasten the death of the sick and elderly by force. Rather, *old age is characterized by dignity and surrounded with reverence* (cf. 2 Mac 6:23). *In the face of death, the believer knows that his life is in the hands of God:* "You, O Lord, hold my lot" (cf. Ps 16:5). In life and in death man has to entrust himself completely to God and his loving plan. In moments of sickness, too, man is called to have the same trust and to renew his fundamental faith in the Lord.

47

The many healings which accompany Jesus' earthly ministry show *God's great concern even for man's bodily life*. Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted. But *life in its earthly state is not an absolute good* for the believer, especially as he may be asked to give up his life for a greater good. The New Testament offers us the examples of Jesus, John the Baptist, and Stephen the martyr. No one, however, can arbitrarily choose whether to live or die; the absolute master of such a decision is the Creator alone.

***“All who hold her fast will live” (Bar 4:1):
from the law of Sinai to the gift of the Spirit***

48

Life is indelibly marked by a truth of its own. By accepting God’s gift, man is obliged to maintain life in this truth which is essential to it. *To detach oneself from this truth is to condemn oneself to meaninglessness and unhappiness.* The truth regarding human life is revealed by God’s commandment. The word of the Lord shows concretely the course which life must follow if it is to respect its own truth and to preserve its own dignity. In the Covenant with his people, God’s commandment is offered as the path of life. In fact, it is impossible for life to remain authentic and complete once it is detached from the good; the good, in its turn, is essentially bound to the commandments of the Lord, to the “law of life” (Sir 17:11). It is thus the Law as a whole that fully protects human life.

49

This history of Israel demonstrates how difficult it is to remain faithful to the Law of life, that God has inscribed on human hearts and which he gave on Sinai to the people of the covenant. When the people look for ways of living which ignore God’s plan, it is the Prophets in particular who forcefully remind them that the Lord alone is the authentic source of life. But while the Prophets condemn offences against life, they are concerned above all to awaken hope for a new principle of life, capable of bringing about a renewed relationship with God and with others, and of opening up new and extraordinary possibilities for understanding and carrying out all the demands inherent in the Gospel of life. This will only be possible thanks to the gift of God who purifies and renews: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you” (Ezek 36:25-26). This “new heart” makes it possible to achieve the deepest and most authentic meaning of life: *that of being a gift which is fully realized in the giving of self.* In Jesus of Nazareth the Law is fulfilled and a new heart is given through his Spirit.

***“They shall look on him whom they have pierced
(Jn 19:37): the Gospel of life is brought to
fulfillment on the tree of the Cross***

50

Looking at spectacle of the Cross we shall discover in this glorious tree the fulfilment and complete revelation of the *Gospel of life*. On Good Friday, “there was darkness over the whole land ... and the curtain of the temple was torn in two” (Lk 23:44), symbolizing a great cosmic disturbance and a massive conflict between the forces of good and evil. Today, we too find ourselves in a battle between the “culture of death” and the “culture of life.” Jesus is nailed to the Cross and lifted up from the earth. It is at his moment of greatest weakness that the Son of God is revealed and *his glory is made manifest*. By his death, Jesus sheds light on the meaning of the life and death of every human being. By looking upon the one who was pierced, every person whose life is threatened encounters the sure hope of finding freedom and redemption.

51

After Jesus’ death on the Cross, his side is pierced and blood and water flow out. The “giving up” of the spirit describes Jesus’ death, a death like that of every other human being, but it also seems to allude to the “gift of the Spirit”, by which Jesus ransoms us from death and opens before us a new life. It is the very life of God that is now shared with man. This life is continually given to God’s children through the Sacraments of the Church, making them the people of the New Covenant. From the Cross—the source of life—the “people of life” is born and increases. In giving his life as a ransom for many, Jesus proclaims that *life finds its center, its meaning, and its fulfilment when it is given up.* We too are called to give our lives for our brothers and sisters, and thus to realize the meaning of our existence.

CHAPTER 3

YOU SHALL NOT KILL

God's Holy Law

***“If you would enter life, keep the commandments”
(Mt 19:17): Gospel and commandment***

52

God's commandment is never detached from his love: it is always a gift meant for man's growth and joy. As such, it represents an essential and indispensable aspect of the Gospel. The Gospel of life is both a great gift from God and an exacting task for humanity. In giving life to man, God demands that he love, respect, and promote life. The gift thus becomes a commandment, and the commandment is itself a gift. Man, as the living image of God, is willed by his Creator to be ruler and lord. Created to exercise dominion over the world, he was given a likeness to the king of the universe. However, man's lordship is not absolute, but ministerial: it is a reflection of the unique and infinite lordship of God. Therefore, man must exercise it with the wisdom and love, through obedience to God's holy Law.

***“From man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting for human life (Gen 9:5):
human life is sacred and inviolable***

53

God alone is the Lord of life. No one, in any circumstance, has the right to destroy directly an innocent human being. God proclaims that he is absolute Lord of the life of man, who is formed in his image and likeness (cf. *Gen 1:26-28*). Human life is thus given a sacred and inviolable character, which reflects the inviolability of the Creator himself. God will severely judge every violation

of the commandment “You shall not kill,” the commandment which is at the basis of all life together in society.

54

The precept “You shall not kill” is strongly negative, indicating the extreme limit which can never be exceeded. However, it implicitly encourages a positive attitude of absolute respect for life; it leads to the promotion of life and to progress along the way of a love which gives, receives and serves. The people of the Covenant progressively matured in this way of thinking, and thus prepared for the proclamation of Jesus that the commandment to love one's neighbour is like the commandment to love God. From the beginning, the *living Tradition of the Church* upheld God's command not to kill. The *Didache*—the oldest non-biblical Christian writing—explicitly condemns both abortion and infanticide and indicates that they belong to the “way of death.”

55

While killing a human being is obviously a serious sin, Christian reflection has always sought a fuller and deeper understanding of what God's commandment prohibits and prescribes. In certain situations, values proposed by God's Law seem to involve a paradox. For example, in the case of *legitimate or self-defense*, the right to protect one's own life may be difficult to reconcile with the duty not to harm someone else's life. The intrinsic value of life and the duty to love oneself *no less* than one's neighbor are the basis of a *true right to self-defense*. Moreover, legitimate defence can be not only a

right but a grave duty for someone responsible for another's life, the common good of the family or of the State. Unfortunately, it happens that the need to render the aggressor incapable of causing harm sometimes involves taking his life.

56

This is the context in which to place the problem of the *death penalty*. On this matter there is a growing tendency, both in the Church and in civil society, to demand that it be applied in a very limited way or even that it be abolished completely. The problem must be viewed in the context of a system of penal justice that is ever more in line with human dignity and thus with God's plan for man and society. The primary purpose of punishment inflicted by a society is to remedy "the disorder caused by the offence."³ Adequate punishment is assigned as a condition for the offender to regain the exercise of his or her freedom. In this way the public authority fulfills the purpose of defending public order and ensuring people's safety, while at the same time offering the offender an incentive to change his or her behavior and be rehabilitated. The nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and ought not go to the extreme of executing an offender unless absolutely necessary: namely, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent.

57

If such great care must be taken to respect the lives of criminals and unjust aggressors, the command to not kill has absolute value when it refers to the innocent person—and all the more so for those who are weak and defenseless. The absolute inviolability of innocent human life is a moral truth clearly taught by Sacred Scripture, constantly upheld in the Church's Tradition, and consistently proposed by her Magisterium. *Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral.* This doctrine, based

upon that unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15), is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.⁴ The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of life is always evil and can never be licit, either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end; it contradicts the virtues of justice and charity. "Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying. Furthermore, no one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care, nor can he or she consent to it, either explicitly or implicitly. Nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such an action."⁵ As far as the right to life is concerned, every innocent human being is absolutely equal to all others.

"Your eyes beheld my unformed substance" (Ps 139:16): the unspeakable crime of abortion

58

Among all crimes against life, abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable. But today, in many people's consciences, the perception of its gravity has become progressively obscured. The acceptance of abortion in the popular mind, in behavior, and even in law itself is a sign of an extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense, which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil. We need now more than ever the courage to look truth in the eye and to *call things by their proper name*: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Is 5:20). Ambiguous terminology is used to hide abortion's true nature. But no word has the power to change the reality: abortion is *the deliberate and direct killing of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence*. And no one is more innocent than an unborn child. While the decision to have an abortion is often tragic and painful for the mother, insofar as the decision to

pursue an abortion is not made for purely selfish reasons or out of convenience, but out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family, such reasons *can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being*.

59

In addition to the mother herself, there are often others who decide upon the death of a child in the womb. The father of the child may be to blame either by directly pressuring the woman to have an abortion or by indirectly encouraging such a decision by leaving her to face the problems of pregnancy alone. Such actions mortally wound the family in its vocation to be a *sanctuary of life* and its nature as a *community of love*. Responsibility may also lie with: the wider family circle and friends who place pressure on a pregnant woman; doctors, nurses, and health care administrators who place their skills at the service of death; legislators who promote and approve abortion; those who have encouraged sexual permissiveness and a lack of esteem for motherhood; those who should have ensured—but did not—effective family and social policies in support of families; and international institutions which campaign for legalized abortion around the world. In this sense abortion goes beyond the responsibility of individuals and beyond the harm done to them, and takes on a distinctly social dimension. We are facing what can be called a *“structure of sin” which opposes human life not yet born*.

60

Some try to justify abortion by claiming that the result of conception cannot yet be considered a human life, at least up to a certain stage of development. But from the time of fertilization, a life is begun which is neither that of the father or the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already. Modern genetic science offers clear confirmation: It has demonstrated that from the first instant there is

established the programme of what this living being will be: a person, this individual person with his characteristic aspects already well determined. What is at stake is so important that the mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolutely clear prohibition of any intervention aimed at killing a human embryo. The Church has always taught and continues to teach that the result of human procreation, from its first moment of existence, must be guaranteed unconditional respect. *The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception*, and first among his rights as a person is his right to life.

61

The texts of Sacred Scripture never address the question of deliberate abortion and so do not directly and specifically condemn it. But they show such great respect for the human being in the mother’s womb that they require as a logical consequence that God’s commandment “You shall not kill” be extended to the unborn child as well. All human beings, from their mothers’ womb, belong to God who searches and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny, shapeless embryos and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow whose vocation is even now written in the “book of life” (cf. *Ps* 139: 1, 13-16). From its first contacts with the Greco-Roman world, in which abortion and infanticide were widely practiced, the first Christian community radically opposed such customs. Throughout Christianity’s two thousand year history, this same doctrine has been constantly taught by the Fathers of the Church and her Pastors and Doctors.

62

The more recent Papal Magisterium has vigorously reaffirmed this common doctrine. The Second Vatican Council upheld that, “From the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.”⁶ The Church’s canonical discipline, from the earliest centuries, has inflicted

penal sanctions on those guilty of abortion. Given such unanimity in the doctrinal and disciplinary tradition of the Church, Paul VI was able to declare that this tradition is unchanged and unchangeable. *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.⁷ 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.

63

This evaluation of the morality of abortion is to be applied also to the recent forms of intervention on human embryos which, although carried out for purposes legitimate in themselves, inevitably involve the killing of those embryos. The use of human embryos or fetuses as an object for experimentation—inevitably leading to their death—is a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born. Likewise, procedures that exploit human embryos and fetuses to be used *as providers of organs or tissues* must also be condemned. The killing of innocent human beings, even if carried out to help others, is an absolutely unacceptable act. Prenatal diagnostic testing that enables early detection of anomalies in an unborn child can also be problematic. While such testing can be ethical when used to provide therapeutic care or help families prepare for a child's arrival, they are often used with a eugenic intention to prevent the birth of children affected by various types of anomalies.

Such an attitude is reprehensible, since it presumes to measure the value of a human life only within the parameters of “normality” and physical well-being, thus opening the way to legitimizing infanticide and euthanasia as well.

***“It is I who bring both death and life” (Dt 32:39):
the tragedy of euthanasia***

64

At the other end of life's spectrum, men and women find themselves facing the mystery of death. As a result of advances in medicine and in a cultural context often closed to the transcendent the experience of dying is marked by new features. When the prevailing tendency is to value life only to the extent that it brings pleasure and well-being, suffering seems like an unbearable setback, something from which one must be freed at all costs. When he denies his fundamental relationship to God, man thinks he is his own rule and measure, with the right to demand that society should guarantee him the ways and means of deciding what to do with his life in full and complete autonomy. The temptation toward *euthanasia* grows—that is, *to take control of death and bring it about before its time*, “gently” ending one's own life or that of another. While such an action may appear logical and humane, in reality it is *senseless* and *inhumane*. In societies preoccupied with efficiency, elderly and disabled people are seen as intolerable and too burdensome.

65

Euthanasia in the strict sense is an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering. It must be distinguished from decisions to forego aggressive medical treatments that no longer correspond to the real situation of the patient, either because they are by now disproportionate to any expected results or because they impose an excessive burden on the patient and his family. In such situations, when death is clearly imminent and inevitable, one can in conscience “refuse forms of treatment that would only secure a precarious

and burdensome prolongation of life, so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted.”⁸ To forego extraordinary or disproportionate means is not the equivalent of suicide or euthanasia; it rather expresses acceptance of the human condition in the face of death. In modern medicine, increased attention is being given to methods of palliative care which seek to make suffering more bearable in the final stages of illness. Painkillers and sedatives can be used to relieve the patient’s pain, even when the result is decreased consciousness and a shortening of life, if no other means exist, and if, in the given circumstances, this does not prevent the carrying out of other religious and moral duties. In such cases, death is not willed or sought; there is simply a desire to ease pain effectively. A dying person should not be deprived of consciousness without a serious reason. He or she ought to be allowed to prepare for their definitive meeting with God. Taking into account these distinctions, *in harmony with the Magisterium of my Predecessors⁹ 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.¹⁰

66

Suicide is always as morally objectionable as murder. It involves the rejection of love of self and the renunciation of justice and charity towards one’s neighbour, towards the communities to which one belongs, and towards society as a whole. In its deepest reality, suicide represents a rejection of God’s absolute sovereignty over life and death. To support the intention of another to commit suicide or to help in carrying it out through so-called “assisted suicide” means to cooperate in, or to be the actual perpetrator of, an injustice that can never be excused, even if it is requested. Even when not motivated by a selfish refusal to be burdened with

the life of someone who is suffering, euthanasia is a false mercy. True compassion leads to sharing another’s pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear. Euthanasia becomes more serious when it takes the form of murder of a person who has in no way requested or consented to it. The height of injustice is reached when certain people—such as physicians or legislators—assume the power to decide who ought to live and who ought to die. Once again we find ourselves before the temptation of Eden: to become like God who “knows good and evil” (cf. *Gen 3:5*).

67

The *way of love and true mercy* are quite different from this. The request arising from the human heart confronting suffering and death is above all a request for companionship, sympathy, and support in the time of trial. It is a plea for help to keep on hoping when all human hopes fail. Our natural aversion to death is illumined by Christian faith, which promises a share in the victory of the Risen Christ. The certainty of future immortality and *hope in the promised resurrection* cast new light on the mystery of suffering and death, and fill the believer with an extraordinary capacity to trust fully in the plan of God. In the words of the Apostle Paul: “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (*Rom 14:7-8*). *Dying to the Lord* means experiencing one’s death as the supreme act of obedience to the Father. *Living to the Lord* means recognizing that suffering can always become a source of good, if experienced for love and with love through sharing in the suffering of Christ Crucified.

**“We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29):
civil law and the moral law**

68

One of the specific characteristics of present-day attacks on human life consists in the *legal justification* for them, as if they were rights which the State must acknowledge as belonging to citizens.

It is often claimed that the life of an unborn child or a seriously disabled person is only a relative good—a good that should be compared and balanced against other goods. It is even maintained that only someone present and personally involved in such a situation can correctly judge the goods at stake: consequently, only that person would be able to decide on the morality of his choice. Therefore, this faulty logic continues, the State should respect this choice, even to the point of permitting abortion and euthanasia. At other times, it is claimed that civil law cannot demand that all citizens should live according to moral standards higher than what all citizens themselves acknowledge and share. More radical views go so far as to maintain that in a modern and pluralistic society people should be allowed complete freedom to dispose of their own lives, as well as the lives of the unborn.

69

In the democratic culture of our time it is commonly held that the legal system of any society should limit itself to accepting the convictions of the majority. If it is believed that an objective truth shared by all is unattainable, then respect for the freedom of the citizens would require that on the legislative level the autonomy of individual consciences be acknowledged. As a result, we have two diametrically opposed tendencies. On the one hand, individuals claim for themselves complete freedom in the moral sphere and demand that the State should not impose any ethical position but limit itself to guaranteeing maximum space for the freedom of each individual. On the other hand, it is held that, in exercising public and professional duties, respect for other people's freedom of choice requires that one set aside his or her own personal convictions to satisfy every demand of the citizens that is recognized by the law. It is held, therefore, that, in carrying out one's duties, the only moral criterion should be what is laid down by the law itself. Individual responsibility is turned over to the civil law and personal conscience is renounced.

70

At the basis of all these tendencies lies the *ethical relativism* which characterizes much of present-day culture. Some consider such relativism essential to democracy, whereas moral norms considered to be objective and binding are held to lead to authoritarianism and intolerance. The issue of respect for life, however, reveals the misunderstandings and contradictions concealed in this position. While history has seen crimes committed in the name of "truth," equally grave crimes have and continue to be committed in the name of "ethical relativism." When a parliamentary or social majority decrees that it is legal to kill unborn human life, is it not really making a tyrannical decision with regard to the most defenseless human beings? Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality. Democracy is a system and as such is a *means* and not an *end*. Its moral value is not automatic, but rather depends on conformity to the moral law. *The value of democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes.* The basis of these values cannot be changeable "majority" opinions, but only the acknowledgment of an objective moral law. Otherwise, the democratic system itself would be reduced to a mere mechanism for regulating different and opposing interests on a purely empirical basis.

71

It is therefore urgently necessary to rediscover those essential and innate moral values which flow from the very truth of the human being and express and safeguard the dignity of the person: values which no individual, no majority, and no State can ever create, modify, or destroy, but must only acknowledge, respect, and promote. The purpose of civil law is different and more limited in scope than that of the moral law. "In no sphere of life can the civil law take the place of conscience or dictate norms concerning things which are outside its competence"¹¹ which is that of ensuring the common good of people through the recognition and defence of their fundamental rights, and the

promotion of peace and of public morality. The real purpose of civil law is to guarantee an ordered social coexistence in true justice. For this reason, civil law must ensure that all members of society enjoy respect for certain fundamental rights. First among these is the inviolable right to life of every innocent human being. The legal toleration of abortion or euthanasia can in no way claim to be based on respect for the conscience of others.

72

The doctrine on the necessary conformity of civil law with the moral law is in continuity with the whole tradition of the Church. This is clear in the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, who writes that “human law is law inasmuch as it is in conformity with right reason and thus derives from the eternal law.”¹² However, if a human law “is somehow opposed to the natural law, then it is not really a law but rather a corruption of the law.”¹³ Consequently, laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law. Such laws are radically opposed not only to the good of the individual but also to the common good; they are completely lacking in authentic juridical validity. A civil law authorizing abortion or euthanasia ceases by that very fact to be a true, morally binding civil law.

73

Abortion and euthanasia are crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; rather, there is a *grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection*. While Christians have a duty to obey legitimate public authorities, “we must obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29*). In the case of an intrinsically unjust law—such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia—it is never licit to obey it, or to “take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of such a law, or vote for it.”¹⁴ When it is not possible to completely overturn an unjust law, an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to abortion was well known,

could licitly support proposals aimed at *limiting the harm* done by such a law and lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality. Such action does not represent illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate attempt to limit its evil aspects.

74

The passage of unjust laws often creates difficult problems of conscience for morally upright people with regard to the issue of cooperation. Sometimes difficult choices must be made that require the sacrifice of prestigious professional positions or reasonable hopes for career advancement. In other cases, it can happen that carrying out certain actions, which are provided for by legislation that overall is unjust, but which in themselves are indifferent, or even positive, can serve to protect human lives under threat. Christians have a grave obligation not to cooperate formally in practices that, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God’s law. *It is never licit to cooperate formally in evil*. Such cooperation occurs when an action, either by its very nature or by the form it takes in a concrete situation, can be defined as a direct participation in an act against innocent human life or a sharing in the immoral intention of the person committing it. To refuse to take part in committing an injustice is not only a moral duty; it is also a basic human right. The ability to refuse to take part in the phases of consultation, preparation, and execution of acts against life should be guaranteed to physicians, health-care personnel, and directors of hospitals and clinics. Those who consciously object should be protected not only from legal penalties, but also from any negative effects on the legal, disciplinary, financial, and professional plane.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lk 10:27): “promote” life

75

God’s commandments teach us the way of life. The *negative moral precepts* are valid always and everywhere, without exception. They make it

clear that the choice of certain ways of acting is radically incompatible with the love of God and the dignity of the human person created in his image. Such choices cannot be redeemed by the goodness of any intention or consequence; they contradict the fundamental decision to direct one's life to God. The negative moral precepts have an important *positive* function. The "no" which they unconditionally require makes clear the absolute limit beneath which the free person cannot lower himself. At the same time, they indicate the minimum which he must respect. They provide the beginning and the first necessary stage of the journey towards freedom.

76

The commandment "You shall not kill" establishes the point of departure for the start of true freedom. It leads us to promote life actively and to develop ways of thinking and acting which serve life. The Creator has entrusted the life of man to his own care, not to make arbitrary use of it, but to preserve it with wisdom and to care for it with loving fidelity. The God of the Covenant has entrusted every individual to his or her fellow human beings as brothers and sisters according to the law of reciprocity in giving and receiving, of self-giving and of the acceptance of others. The Spirit becomes the new law which gives strength to believers and awakens in them a responsibility for sharing the gift of self and for accepting others, as a sharing in the boundless love of Jesus Christ himself.

77

This new law gives spirit and shape to the commandment "You shall not kill." For the Christian it involves an absolute imperative to respect, love, and promote the life of every person, in accordance with the requirements of God's bountiful love in Jesus Christ. "He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn 3:16). The commandment "You shall not kill", even in its more positive aspects of respecting, loving and promoting human life, is binding on every individual human being. It resounds in the moral conscience of all people as

an irrepressible echo of the original covenant of God the Creator with mankind. It is therefore a service of love that we are all called to provide to our neighbor, in order that his or her life may be always defended and promoted, *especially when it is weak or threatened*. We are asked to love and honor the life of every man and woman and to work with perseverance and courage so that our time, marked by all too many signs of death, may at last witness the establishment of a new culture of life—the fruit of the culture of truth and of love.

CHAPTER 4

YOU DID IT TO ME

For a New Culture of Human Life

***“You are God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9):
a people of life and for life***

78

The Church has received the Gospel as a proclamation and a source of joy and salvation. Jesus was sent by the Father “to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18). Pope Paul VI wrote that “*evangelization is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.*”¹⁵ Evangelization is an all-embracing, progressive activity through which the Church participates in the prophetic, priestly, and royal mission of the Lord Jesus. It is therefore inextricably linked to preaching, celebration and the service of charity. Evangelization is a profoundly ecclesial act, which calls all the various workers of the Gospel to action, according to their individual charisms and ministry. This is also the case with regard to the proclamation of the *Gospel of life*, an integral part of the Gospel which is Jesus Christ himself. With humility and gratitude, we know that we are the *people of life and for life*, and this is how we present ourselves to everyone.

79

We are the *people of life* because God, in his unconditional love, has given us the *Gospel of life*, and by this same Gospel we have been transformed and saved. We have been ransomed by the “Author of life” (Acts 3:15) at the price of his precious blood. Through the waters of Baptism we have been made a part of him. Everyone has

an obligation to be at the service of life. This is a properly “ecclesial” responsibility, which requires concerted and generous action by all the members and by all sectors of the Christian community. This community commitment, however, does not lessen the responsibility of each *individual* to “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37). Together we all sense our duty to *preach the Gospel of life*, to *celebrate it* in the Liturgy and in our whole existence, and to *serve it* with various programs and structures that support and promote life.

***“That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you” (1 Jn 1:3):
proclaiming the Gospel of life***

80

Jesus is the only Gospel: we have nothing further to say or any other witness to bear. *To proclaim Jesus is itself to proclaim life*. For Jesus is “the word of life” (1 Jn 1:1). Enlightened by this Gospel of life, we feel a need to proclaim it and to bear witness to it in all its marvellous newness. This Gospel exceeds every human expectation and reveals the sublime heights to which the dignity of the human person is raised through grace. Gratitude and joy at the incomparable dignity of man impel us to share this message with everyone. We need to bring the *Gospel of life* to the heart of every man and woman and make it penetrate every part of society.

81

Doing so involves proclaiming the core of this Gospel. It is the proclamation of a living God who is close to us, who calls us to profound communion

with himself, and awakens in us the certain hope of eternal life. It is the affirmation of the inseparable connection between the person, his life and his bodiliness. It is the presentation of human life as a life of relationship, a gift of God, the fruit and sign of his love. It is the proclamation that Jesus has a unique relationship with every person, which enables us *to see in every human face the face of Christ*. It is the call for a “sincere gift of self” as the fullest way to realize our personal freedom. The consequences of this Gospel can be summed up as follows: human life, as a gift from God, is sacred and inviolable. For this reason, abortion and euthanasia are absolutely unacceptable. Not only must human life not be taken, but it must be protected with loving concern. The meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love, and in this light human sexuality and procreation reach their true and full significance. Love also gives meaning to suffering and death; they can become saving events. Respect for life requires that science and technology should always be at the service of man. Society as a whole must respect, defend, and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person’s life.

82

To be truly a people at the service of life we must propose these truths constantly and courageously from the very first proclamation of the Gospel, and thereafter in *catechesis, preaching, personal dialogue, and all educational activity*. By making the *Gospel of life* shine forth, we can help everyone discover in the light of reason and of personal experience how the Christian message fully reveals what man is and the meaning of his existence. When faced with opposing points of view, we can feel Paul’s words to Timothy also addressed to us: “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). These words should resound with special force in the hearts of those who directly share in the Church’s mission as “teacher” of the truth, including: *Bishops, theologians, pastors, teachers, and those responsible*

for *catechesis and the formation of consciences*. May they never be so irresponsible as to propose ideas contrary to the *Gospel of life*. We must not fear hostility or unpopularity and refuse any compromise or ambiguity in the proclamation of this Gospel.

“I give thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14): celebrating the Gospel of life

83

Because we have been sent into the world as a “people for life”, our proclamation must also become a *genuine celebration of the Gospel of life*. For this to happen, we need to *foster a contemplative outlook* in ourselves and others. Arising from faith in the God of Life, such an outlook sees the deeper meaning of life, its beauty, and its invitation to freedom and responsibility. It discovers in all things the reflection of the Creator and sees in every person his living image. Such an outlook is not discouraged when confronted by those who are sick, suffering, outcast, or at death’s door. Instead, in all these situations it feels challenged to find meaning. It is time for all of us to adopt this outlook and rediscover the ability to *revere and honor every person*.

84

To celebrate the Gospel of life means to celebrate the God of life, the God who gives life. In our *daily prayer as individuals and as a community*, we praise and bless God our Father who knitted us together in our mother’s womb, and saw and loved us while we were still without form (cf. Ps 139:13, 15-16). In every child which is born and in every person who lives and dies we see the image of God’s glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being—a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ. We are called to express wonder and gratitude for the gift of life and to welcome, savour and share the Gospel of life not only in our personal and community prayer, but above all in the *celebrations of the liturgical year*. Especially important are the *Sacraments*, the efficacious signs of the presence and saving action of the Lord Jesus in Christian life.

They make us sharers in divine life, and provide the spiritual strength necessary to experience life, suffering, and death in their fullest meaning.

85

In celebrating the *Gospel of life* we also need to *appreciate and make use of the wealth of gestures and symbols present in the traditions and customs of different cultures and peoples*. I propose that a *Day of Life* be celebrated each year in every country, as already established by some Episcopal Conferences. Its primary purpose should be to foster in individuals, families, the Church, and civil society a recognition of the meaning and value of human life at every stage and in every condition.

86

The *Gospel of life* is to be celebrated above all in *daily living*, which should be filled with self-giving love for others. In this way, our lives will become a genuine and responsible acceptance of the gift of life and a heartfelt song of praise and gratitude to God who has given us this gift. It is in this context that heroic actions too are born. These are most solemn celebration of the *Gospel of life*, for they proclaim it by the *total gift of self*. Such acts manifest the highest degree of love—to give one's life for the person loved. They are a sharing in the mystery of the Cross, in which Jesus reveals the value of every person, and how life attains its fullness in the sincere gift of self. However, there is also an everyday heroism made up of large and small gestures of sharing that build up an authentic culture of life. Part of this daily heroism is the witness of all “brave mothers who devote themselves to their own family without reserve, who suffer in giving birth to their children and who are ready to make any effort, to face any sacrifice, in order to pass on to them the best of themselves.”¹⁶ While mothers often do not find support in the world around them, the Church thanks them for their invincible love!

**“What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works?” (Jas 2:14):
serving the Gospel of life**

87

By virtue of our sharing in Christ's royal mission, our support and promotion of human life must be accomplished through the *service of charity*, which finds expression in personal witness, volunteer work, social activity, and political commitment. In our service of charity, *we must be inspired and distinguished by a specific attitude*: we must care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to become neighbors to everyone (cf. *Lk 10:29-37*) and show special favor to those who are poorest, most alone, and most in need. In helping the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned—as well as the child in the womb and the old person who is suffering or near death—we have the opportunity to serve Jesus. *Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent*. It cannot tolerate bias or discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation. The Church has an *outstanding history of charity*, and every Christian community must continue to write this history. Effective programs of *support for new life* must be implemented, with special closeness to mothers who, even without the help of the father, bring their children into the world.

88

All this involves a patient and fearless *work of education*, a continuous promotion of *vocations to service*, and the implementation of long-term, practical *projects and initiatives* inspired by the Gospel. At the first stage of life, *centers for natural methods of regulating fertility* should be promoted as a valuable help to responsible parenthood, in which all individuals, and in the first place the child, are recognized and respected in their own right, and where every decision is guided by the ideal of the sincere gift of self. *Marriage and family counseling agencies* should support and accompany every family in its mission as the “sanctuary of

life.” Newborn life is also served *by centres of assistance and homes or centres where new life receives a welcome*. Thanks to the work of such centres, many unmarried mothers and couples in difficulty discover new hope and find assistance and support in overcoming hardship and the fear of accepting a newly conceived life. *Communities and agencies that address drug addiction, mental health, disability, and other challenges* give us new reasons for hope. When earthly life draws to a close, charity enables the *elderly and terminally ill* to enjoy genuinely humane assistance, particularly in response to anxiety and loneliness. In particular, *hospitals, clinics, and convalescent homes* above all should be places where suffering, pain, and death are understood in their human and Christian meaning.

89

Agencies and centres of service to life, and all other initiatives of support and solidarity need to be directed by people who are generous in their involvement and fully aware of the importance of the Gospel of life for the good of individuals and society. *A unique responsibility belongs to health-care personnel—doctors, pharmacists, nurses, chaplains, men and women religious, administrators, and volunteers—who are called to be guardians and servants of human life*. In today’s cultural and social context, in which science and the practice of medicine risk losing sight of their inherent ethical dimension, health-care professionals can be tempted to become manipulators of life, or even agents of death. The *Hippocratic Oath* requires every doctor to commit to absolute respect for human life. Such respect requires the *exercise of conscientious objection* in relation to abortion and euthanasia. “Causing death” can never be considered a form of medical treatment. It runs completely counter to the health-care profession, which is meant to be an impassioned and unflinching affirmation of life. Similarly, biomedical research must reject experimentation, research, or applications which disregard the dignity of the human person.

90

Volunteer workers have a specific role to play: they make a valuable contribution to the service of life when they combine professional ability and generous, selfless love. If charity is to be realistic and effective, the *Gospel of life* must also be implemented by *social activity and commitment in the political field*, as a way of defending life in our ever more complex and pluralistic societies. *Individuals, families, and groups* all have a responsibility for shaping society and developing cultural, economic, political, and legislative projects that contribute to the building of a society in which the dignity of each person is protected. This task is the particular responsibility of *civil leaders*. Called to serve the people and the common good, they have a duty to make courageous choices in support of life, especially through *legislative measures*. Laws play an important and sometimes decisive role in influencing patterns of thought and behavior. It is not enough to remove unjust laws; the underlying causes of attacks on life have to be eliminated by ensuring proper support for families and motherhood. *A family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies*.

91

Today an important part of policies which favor life is the *issue of population growth*. Public authorities have a responsibility to “intervene to orient the demography of the population,”¹⁷ but such interventions must always respect the primary responsibility of married couples and families, and cannot employ methods which fail to respect the person and fundamental human rights. It is morally unacceptable to encourage or impose the use of contraception, sterilization, or abortion in order to regulate births. Governments must strive to create conditions in which married couples can make choices about procreation with full freedom and genuine responsibility. They must then make efforts to ensure “greater opportunities and a fairer distribution of wealth so that everyone can share equitably in the goods of creation. Solutions must be sought on the global level by establishing

a true *economy of communion and sharing of goods*, in both the national and international order.”¹⁸ Service of the *Gospel of life* is therefore an immense and complex task. This is an area for positive cooperation with other Churches, ecclesial communities, religions, and all people of good will. *No single person or group has a monopoly on the defense and promotion of life. These are everyone’s task and responsibility.*

“Your children will be like olive shoots around your table” (Ps 128:3): the family as the “sanctuary of life”

92

Within the “people of life,” *the family has a decisive responsibility* as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage. Within the family each member is accepted, respected, and honored precisely because he or she is a person; and if any member is in greater need, the care he or she receives is all the more intense and attentive. The family is truly the *sanctuary of life*: the place in which the gift of life can be properly welcomed and protected. As the *domestic church*, the family is summoned to proclaim, celebrate, and serve the *Gospel of life*. Procreation is a unique event which clearly reveals that *human life is a gift received in order then to given as a gift*. Parents recognize that children are a gift to both of them, flowing from their mutual gift of love. It is above all in *raising children* that the family fulfils its mission to proclaim the *Gospel of life*.

93

The family *celebrates the Gospel of life* through *daily prayer*, both individual prayer and family prayer. But the celebration that gives meaning to every other form of prayer and worship is found in *the family’s actual daily life together*, if it is a life of love and self-giving. This celebration thus becomes a *service to the Gospel of life*, expressed through *solidarity* as experienced within and around the family in the form of concerned, attentive, and loving care shown in the humble, ordinary events of each day. A particularly significant expression

of solidarity is a willingness to adopt or take in children without parents or in situations of serious hardship. True parental love is ready to go beyond the bonds of flesh and blood.

94

Special attention must also be given to the elderly. While in some cultures older people remain an important part of the family, in others the elderly are regarded as a useless burden and are left to themselves. Neglect of the elderly is intolerable. It is important to preserve, or to re-establish where it has been lost, a sort of “covenant” between generations. In this way aging parents can receive from their children the acceptance and solidarity that they themselves gave to their children when they brought them into the world. This is required by the divine commandment to honor one’s father and mother (cf. *Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3*). The elderly themselves have a valuable contribution to make to the *Gospel of life*; they can and must *be sources of wisdom and witnesses of hope and love*. Modern social, economic, and cultural conditions make the family’s task of serving life more difficult. In order to fulfil its vocation, *the family urgently needs to be helped and supported*.

“Walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8): bringing about a transformation of culture

95

A *great campaign in support of life* is urgently called for. *All together, we must build a new culture of life*. “New” because it will be able to confront and solve today’s unprecedented problems affecting human life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper conviction by all Christians; new, because it will be capable of bringing about a serious and courageous cultural dialogue among all parties. While the urgent need for such a cultural transformation is linked to the present historical situation, it is also rooted in the Church’s mission of evangelization. Like the yeast which leavens the whole measure of dough (cf. *Mt 13:33*), the Gospel is meant to permeate all cultures and give them life from within, so that they may express the full

truth about the human person. We need to begin with *the renewal of a culture of life within Christian communities themselves*. With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread is the culture of life today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth.

96

The first and fundamental step towards this cultural transformation consists in *forming consciences* with regard to the incomparable worth of every human life. It is of greatest importance to *re-establish the essential connection between life and freedom*. There is no true freedom where life is not welcomed and loved; and there is no fullness of life except in freedom. Both realities are inextricably linked by the vocation to love, which gives each its truest meaning. No less critical is *the recovery of the necessary link between freedom and truth*. It is essential that man should acknowledge his inherent condition as a creature to whom God has granted being and life as a gift and a duty. Where God is denied and people live as though he did not exist, or his commandments are not taken into account, the dignity of the human person and the inviolability of human life end up being rejected or compromised.

97

Closely connected with the formation of conscience is the *work of education*. In particular, there is a need for education about the value of life from its very origins. The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which have led to contempt for new life. We have a duty to offer, especially to adolescents and young adults, an authentic *education in sexuality and in love*, an education that includes *training in chastity* as a virtue which fosters personal maturity and makes one capable of respecting the spousal meaning of the body. The work of education also involves the *training of married couples in responsible procreation*, which requires couples to be obedient to the Lord's call

and to act as faithful interpreters of his plan. They are obliged to respect the biological laws inscribed in their person and to restrict themselves to *natural methods of regulating fertility*. This work of education also *cannot avoid a consideration of suffering and death*. Even pain and suffering have meaning and value when they are experienced in close connection with love received and given. Death is the door which opens wide on eternity and, for those who live in Christ, an experience of participation in the mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection.

98

The cultural change we are calling for demands from everyone the courage to *adopt a new lifestyle*, consisting in making practical choices on a correct scale of values: *the primacy of being over having, of the person over things*. This involves a moving from *indifference to concern for others, from rejection to acceptance of them*. In this mobilization for a new culture of life no one must feel excluded: *everyone has an important role to play*. Much depends on *teachers and educators*. *Intellectuals* are called to be active in the leading centers where culture is formed, in schools and universities, in places of scientific and technological research, of artistic creativity, and of the study of man. Specific contributions must also come from *universities*, particularly from Catholic universities, and from *Centers, Institutes, and Committees of Bioethics*. Similarly, *those in the mass media* have a serious responsibility to ensure that the messages they transmit support the culture of life.

99

Women occupy a unique and decisive place in transforming culture. It depends on them to promote a "new feminism" which rejects the temptation of imitating models of "male domination," in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of society. I address to women this urgent appeal: "Reconcile people with life." You are called to bear witness to the meaning of genuine love, of that gift of self and of that acceptance of others which are present in

a special way in the relationship of husband and wife, but which ought also to be at the heart of every other interpersonal relationship. Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity that comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty, or health. I would like to say a special word to *women who have had an abortion*. The Church is aware that in many cases this was a painful and even shattering decision influenced by many factors. What happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give into discouragement and do not lose hope. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child.

100

In the great endeavor to build a culture of life we are *inspired and sustained by the confidence* that comes from knowing that the *Gospel of life* is growing and producing abundant fruit. While the culture of death has powerful resources, we know that we can rely on the help of God, for whom nothing is impossible (cf. *Mt 19:26*). *A great prayer for life is urgently needed*, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. May an impassioned plea rise to God, the Creator and lover of life, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family, and from the heart of every believer. Let us discover anew the humility and courage to *pray and fast* so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit.

“We are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:4): the Gospel of life is for the whole of human society

101

The revelation of the *Gospel of life* is given to us as a good to be shared with all people. It is not for believers alone: *it is for everyone*. Although faith provides special light and strength, this question

arises in every human conscience which seeks the truth and cares about the future of humanity. To be actively pro-life is to contribute to the *renewal of society* through the promotion of the common good. It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. There can be no *true democracy* without a recognition of every person’s dignity and without respect for his or her rights. Nor can there be *true peace unless life is defended and promoted*. As Pope Paul VI highlighted: “Every crime against life is an attack on peace, especially if it strikes at the moral conduct of people.”¹⁹ Thus, may the “people for life” constantly grow in number and may a new culture of love and solidarity develop.

CONCLUSION

102

At the end of this Encyclical, we look again to the Lord Jesus, “the Child born for us” (cf. *Is* 9:6). In the mystery of Christ’s Birth, the encounter of God with man takes place and the earthly journey of the Son of God begins, which will culminate in the gift of his life on the Cross. By his death, Christ will conquer death and become the source of new life for all humanity. The one who accepted “Life” in the name of all and for the sake of all was Mary, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely associated with the *Gospel of life*. Through her acceptance and loving care for the life of the Incarnate Word, human life has been rescued from eternal condemnation. For this reason, Mary is “a mother of all who are reborn to life.” In Mary, the Church discovers the meaning of her own motherhood. Mary’s experience is the *incomparable model of how life should be welcomed and cared for*.

“A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1): the motherhood of Mary and of the Church

103

The relationship between the mystery of the Church and Mary appears clearly in the Book of Revelation: “A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (12:1). In this sign the Church recognizes an image of her own mystery: present in history, she knows that she transcends history, inasmuch as she constitutes on earth the “seed and beginning” of the Kingdom of God. She sees this mystery fulfilled in complete and exemplary fashion in Mary. The Church is fully aware that she bears within herself the Savior of the world. She is aware that she is called to offer Christ to the world, giving men and women new birth into God’s own life. But the Church cannot forget that her mission was made

possible by the motherhood of Mary. The Church’s spiritual motherhood is only achieved through the pangs and the “labor” of childbirth, that is to say, in constant tension with the forces of evil which still roam the world. Mary too had to live her motherhood amid suffering. At Calvary, Mary shares in the gift which the Son makes of himself. The “yes” spoken on the day of the Annunciation reaches full maturity on the day of the Cross, when the time comes for Mary to receive and beget as her children all those who become disciples.

“And the dragon stood before the woman ... that he might devour her child when she brought it forth” (Rev 12:4): life menaced by the forces of evil

104

The “woman” (12:1) of the Book of Revelation is also accompanied by “a great red dragon” (12:3), which represents Satan and all the powers of evil at work in history. The hostility of the powers of evil is, in fact, an insidious opposition which, before affecting the disciples of Jesus, is directed against his mother. To save the life of her Son, Mary has to flee with Joseph and the Child into Egypt (cf. *Mt* 2:13-15). Mary thus helps the Church to realize that *life is always at the center of a great struggle* between good and evil, light and darkness. The dragon wishes to devour “the child brought forth” (cf. *Rev* 12:4), a figure of Christ, whom Mary brought forth. But in a way, that child is also a figure of every person, every child, especially every helpless baby whose life is threatened. It is precisely in the “flesh” of every person that Christ continues to reveal himself and to enter into fellowship with us, so that *rejection of human life is really a rejection of Christ*. This is the truth which Christ reveals to us and the Church continues to proclaim: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me” (*Mt* 18:5); “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt* 25:40).

***“Death shall be no more” (Rev 21:4):
the splendor of the Resurrection***

105

The angel’s Annunciation to Mary is framed by these reassuring words: “Do not be afraid, Mary” and “with God nothing will be impossible” (Lk 1:30, 37). The Virgin Mother’s whole life is permeated by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care. Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated. *The Lamb who was slain* is alive, bearing the marks of his Passion in the splendor of the Resurrection. He proclaims *the power of life over death*. And as we, the people of life and for life, make our way in confidence towards “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 12:10), we look to her who is for us “a sign of sure hope and solace.”²⁰

O Mary,
bright dawn of the new world,
Mother of the living,
to you do we entrust the cause of life
Look down, O Mother,
upon the vast numbers
of babies not allowed to be born,
of the poor whose lives are made difficult,
of men and women
who are victims of brutal violence,
of the elderly and the sick killed
by indifference or out of misguided mercy.

Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love
to the people of our time.

Obtain for them the grace
to accept that Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it with gratitude
throughout their lives
and the courage to bear witness to it
resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of life.

—

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 25 March, the
Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, in the
year 1995, the seventeenth of my Pontificate.

Pope John Paul II

NOTES

¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 39: AAS 83 (1991), 842.

² *Confessions*, I, 1: CCL 27, 1.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2266.

⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia *Iura et Bona* (5 May 1980), II: AAS 72 (1980), 546.

⁶ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 51.

⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia *Iura et Bona* (5 May 1980), IV: AAS 72 (1980), 551.

⁹ Pius XII, Address to an International Group of Physicians (24 February 1957): *loc. cit.*, 129-147; Congregation of the Holy Office, *Decretum de directa insontium occisione* (2 December 1940): AAS 32 (1940), 553-554; Paul VI, Message to French Television: «Every life is sacred» (27 January 1971): *Insegnamenti IX* (1971), 57-58; Address to the International College of Surgeons (1 June 1972): AAS 64 (1972), 432-436; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

¹⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

¹¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), III: AAS 80 (1988), 98.

¹² *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 93, a. 3, ad 2um.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 95, a. 2.

¹⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (18 November 1974), No. 22: AAS 66 (1974), 744.

¹⁵ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 14: AAS 68 (1976), 13.

¹⁶ John Paul II, Homily for the Beatification of Isidore Bakanja, Elisabetta Canori Mora and Gianna Beretta Molla (24 April 1994): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25-26 April 1994, 5.

¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2372.

¹⁸ John Paul II, Address to the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo (12 October 1992), No. 15: AAS 85 (1993), 819.

¹⁹ *Message for the 1977 World Day of Peace*: AAS 68 (1976), 711-712.

²⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68.

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