

Remembering the Sanctity of Life From the Very Beginning

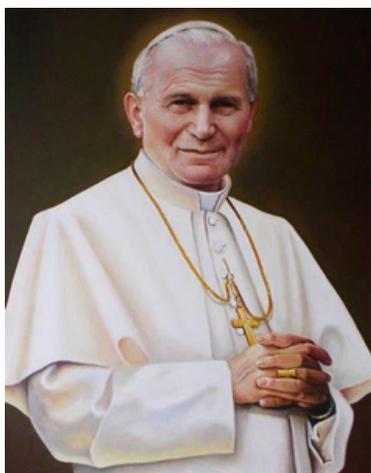
During the present COVID 19 crisis our community and its leaders have gone to extraordinary lengths to protect our health. The lockdowns, the social distancing, and all the other measures, have all been about protecting the vulnerable and defending human life and dignity. Within our Catholic hearts, it echoes as the right way to go, for at the core of our faith is our belief in the utmost importance and sanctity of human life, which comes to us directly from the teachings of Christ himself.



Yet there is an irony in the response to the COVID 19 crisis. Our society, that defends human life in the face of a devastating virus also passes laws that enables abortion and euthanasia. On the one hand we are keen to defend life in the face of the virus, but on the other hand our state parliaments have passed far reaching laws that enable life to be taken away when it is at its most vulnerable.

We can observe that attacks against life have grown over time. Today in our country abortion is legal in most states. Euthanasia is legal or actively promoted. Globally we see the unequal distribution of resources, human and drug trafficking, racism and the presence of radical terrorism. The culture of death has grown in its magnitude and there is a great need to hear anew the voice of Christ in its midst and remember that in our Catholic understanding of life, "Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being." [1] This is the common thread which runs through all life issues, especially from its very beginning.

For us as Catholics, the sanctity of life from the moment of conception, is not a recently formed view. It has been with us since early Christian times. We read in the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles or, the Didache (c. AD80), "You shall not procure abortion. You shall not destroy the newborn child." [1] It was a teaching that ran counter to the culture in the then Roman Empire which allowed the practice of infanticide.



More recently, Pope John Paul II reflected on the practice of abortion in the wider context of a "culture of death" that has grown strong in our world. He said that "we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the 'culture of death' and the 'culture of life.'" [2] He urged us to stay true to the faith we have received and to be proactive in countering the culture of death, especially when it affects the most vulnerable.

Some Medical Background on the Situation in Queensland

On October 17th 2018, the Termination of Pregnancy Bill was passed by the Queensland Parliament and so abortion on demand is now legal up to 22 weeks gestation.[4]

After 22 weeks, a doctor must consider a woman's current and future physical, psychological and social circumstances and consult with a 2nd doctor (who could be the abortionist) in order to provide an abortion to a patient. This is a loophole so wide, that any conceivable reason for wanting an abortion up until term (37 weeks) could be deemed acceptable. Legitimate reasons could include: a relationship breakdown with the father, loss of employment, sex selection, a perceived abnormality in the baby, and the risk of prematurity. Under these laws, women who are vulnerable (e.g. drug addicted, homeless etc) could be encouraged or coerced into having an abortion.[5]



There are no protections for doctors with conscientious objection to abortion. If they are approached by a patient to perform, assist in, refer for or advise about an abortion, they must disclose their conscientious objection to the patient. They must then refer to another practitioner who they believe will 'provide that service'. The practitioner 'has a duty' to provide these services in an emergency.[6] Being required to refer is indirectly participating in the abortion process, which Catholic doctors are morally compelled not to do.

There are no safeguards for women considering abortion, such as compulsory independent counselling or having an ultrasound. There is no provision to provide medical care for babies born alive in failed abortion procedures. Babies can be left to die with no pain relief.

These laws are extreme and contrary to our beliefs as Catholics. In their recent statement, The Common Good in a COVID World, the Queensland Bishops note that "*Politics...is an arena in which we can express our faith and therefore the truth of our humanity. As citizens who are Catholic, we have the opportunity to participate in the electoral process, to use our voice and our vote for the benefit of the whole community.*" Please inform yourself, talk to your local Member of Parliament about how she/he views these abortion laws and any repeal, or changes to them.

“This week we are focussing on the beginning of life and its vulnerability. This is important to reflect on, pray and act. I look forward to praying with you on Sunday 4 October.”

- Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton

Prepared by Bishop's Advisory Panel on Sanctity of Life Issues 2020

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[1] Didache 2:1-2.

[4] Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018 (Qld)

[2] Evangelii Vitae 28

[5] Ibid.

[3] Donum Vitae 5.

[6] Ibid.