

## PASTORAL LETTER

On

### ABORTION

14 May 1973

In a modern society many and varied viewpoints on principles are voiced and upheld. While we accept the fact that the guiding principles of a modern society need not necessarily be Christian principles, we must, nevertheless, realise the necessity of ensuring that our Christian point of view also gets a hearing among the many others. We are part of society and therefore our opinion merits the attention and consideration of society. We acknowledge that it is not the task of the pluralistic state to promote or defend the religious teaching of any Church where that teaching does not coincide with the generally acknowledged good of the society.

As in any other countries so also in our country there is a move to introduce a new abortion law, which will give greater freedom to terminate the life of an unborn baby. Let us reflect together what is involved here.

God gave us the privilege of participating in his creative power. The Creator gave man and wife the power to call into existence something which did not exist before. He ordered nature in such a way that the womb of a woman is destined to be the first cradle to protect and nourish the new life.

There are voices today, which say that the unborn life is of lesser quality. Against them are the voices of the experts in the fields of medicine and anthropology who affirm that from the first moment of conception life is there. "Before birth there is no difference existent between non-life and life, non-individual and individual, non-human life and human life". (Professor Bucher). From the first moment of conception life is there and any intervention, which destroys the unborn life is not allowed.

We have the Second Vatican Council on our side, reaffirming earlier doctrinal pronouncements of the Pastoral Constitution in the Modern World declaring that the Lord of life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life – a ministry which must be fulfilled in a manner that is worthy of man.

Therefore, from the moment of conception, life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes. (Part II, 51) One reason put forward for the production of legal abortion is that the number of "backyard practices" will be thereby reduced. Experience in England and other countries proves, however, that this not the case. On the contrary illegal abortion is as widely practised as before. Other reasons advanced for the proposal of greater freedom to practise abortion are: the human right of self-determination of women; and the assertion that the new life is an assault on the beauty of the woman. But in the face of all reasons the fact remains that the unborn life has a separate existence; it is not part of an organism, not part of the human body. And in its separate, although not independent, existence it has the right to live.

In our opinion – an opinion shared by many others – it is the duty of the legislator to protect life. The fact that unborn life is unable to protect itself; that it has no one standing by to prevent its destruction or notify the authorities of it, is no justification for the removal of legal protection. What guarantee have we that once protection of the unborn life is removed, the elimination of "worthless lives" will not speedily follow?

We share with Dr. E. G. Cleary, lecturer in Pathology at Adelaide University, the fear that likely dangerous principles are involved:

"First, the protection of the law is withdrawn arbitrarily, from the unborn for no better reason than that a majority of the community are said not to believe that the developing foetus is a human person, entitled to the protection of the law. The very arbitrariness of this decision should make us aware that the majority may soon be persuaded to regard other groups in the community as "not fully human" and thus sanction their extermination.

Second, by allowing abortion against the possibility that the child may be born “handicapped”, we introduce into the law the principle of the life-not-worth-preserving. This may well, and probably, prove to be the thin edge of the wedge of voluntary euthanasia legislation, of its involuntary variant for handicapped children.

Further, there is evidence that it distracts from the promotion of responsible parenthood and contraceptive programmes. Both of these are said by many pro-abortionists to be their ultimate goals and abortion only a necessary but unsatisfactory stop-gap alternative. (The Christian Nurse in the Community.)

From doctors we know that the advance in the field of medicine has made such strides that today one rarely comes across a case where the life of the mother has to be forfeited in order to save the child, or the life of the child for the mother. If such extraordinary circumstances arise, we will respect the responsible conscientious decision of the parents.

It is observed that the present Bill carries no conscience clause, declaring that no person shall be under legal duty to participate in any treatment authorised by the Bill, to which he/she has a conscientious objection. The situation may arise that medical staff employed by the State have to perform or co-operate in operations which they regard as unethical, otherwise they will lose their employment. Medical Personnel will be fearful that if they follow their conscience they may jeopardise their future careers. I ask you, therefore, to support by your signature the move of the Catholic Welfare Council to have inserted in the Bill a conscience clause, guaranteeing that no person or institution will suffer disability because of conscientious refusal to participate in the treatments authorised by the Bill. The recommended conscience clause reads as follows:

*“That no person shall be under the duty, whether by contact or by any statutory legal requirement, to participate in any treatment authorised by this Act to which he/she has a conscientious objection.”*

Let me conclude a few words which Mother Theresa of Calcutta addressed to us during the Eucharistic Congress: “Any country which accepted abortion is among the poorest of the poor, even if it is filled with material wealth and all that money can buy.”

“In the Modern World, more and more try to prove that Divine Providence cannot take care of the unborn child.”

“Maybe here, in Australia, in Europe, or in the United States, we don’t have hunger for a slice of bread or a piece of cloth.”

“But we do have the terrible loneliness, the terrible need to be wanted, to be loved, of people who have no one to call their own. This is the great poverty.”

“It is because you and I did not give to them; we were not an instrument of love in the hands of God.”

“It is because we did not recognise Christ as He came in the distressing disguise of the hungry man, the lonely one, or the homeless child, seeking shelter.”

Let us be united in prayer that the Creator and Giver of life may guide our members in parliament during such crucial deliberations and decisions.

**Manfred**  
*Bishop of Oudtshoorn*