

STATEMENT

On

ABORTION

SACBC – Administrative Board, 10 November 1974

In various parts of the world today one of the major moral problems people have to contend with is that of the preservation of the right of life of the human child. What makes the matter more difficult is the blurring of moral values and the contradictory opinions, which cause confusion. We do not wish to place before you at this stage a comprehensive treatment of the subject. Instead we wish to clarify certain points in order that you may help us to present once more with all possible clarity and vigour the Catholic moral position on abortion.

THE CATHOLIC MORAL POSITION

The Catholic moral position is succinctly expressed in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World:

“For God, the Lord of Life, has conferred on man the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life, a ministry which must be fulfilled in a manner which 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.” (No. 51)

Abortion, that is to say, the deliberate expulsion of the foetus from the womb of its mother to terminate pregnancy is therefore a serious and immoral action. Catholics who perform or obtain abortions, or persuade others to do so, commit a serious sin. All who deliberately and willingly assist in abortion procedures share the sinfulness of the abortive act. This teaching is based on the fact that the unborn child is a living person and therefore any deliberate direct attack on its life in order to destroy it is an attack on a living person.

STATE OF LEGISLATION

Last year a Bill was introduced in Parliament concerning the matter of abortion and sterilisation. This Bill passed its first reading. In the subsequent debate there was considerable comment. A Parliamentary Select Committee was set up to gather evidence why the proposed Bill was not acceptable in the form in which it had been presented.

This select commission was later changed into a Commission of Inquiry, which made several amending recommendations that have since been incorporated into the Bill as it now stands proposed. At the time of writing the Bill is due to be read a second time and debated. After the Third Reading and after acceptance by the Senate and the State President it becomes law. But at this stage it is **not** law.

EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE LEGISLATION

Various responsible bodies and persons have shown their concern in this matter by presenting memoranda on the subject. Immediately after the introduction of the Bill the Hierarchy dealt with the question at parliamentary level and we have done all in our power to state the Catholic moral position. This work has continued to date and

until now we have not published these efforts. But we deem it opportune to do so for several reasons.

First, we want to reiterate the catholic moral position as outlined in our statement published in the Southern Cross on the 1st March 1974. Secondly, we want you, dear brethren, to know what we have been doing in this most important matter. Thirdly, we want to give our whole-hearted support to all those concerned with the preservation of the right to life of the unborn child. Finally, we wish to solicit your continued support in this vital matter. Accordingly, we urge you:

- To state the Catholic position clearly and to gather like-minded opinion on this question so as to present all this to your representative government body or person.
- To campaign for the right to life of the unborn child.

We gratefully commend the work done by our brother clergy in this matter and urge them to continue to give strong leadership.

Future generations will judge us by the efforts we have made to protect the life of the unborn child – and so will God! A single voice is sometimes weak but a collective voice has the power to be heeded. When faced with the prospect of legislation that is morally unacceptable to us, we must make our voices heard – we must do everything we can to protect the right to life of the unborn child.

We trust in God's help and in your support.