

ABUNDANT LIFE VERSUS THE “CULTURE OF DEATH”

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For over five decades, our North American society has upheld legislation that defends the heinous crime of abortion. This legislation comes with the appearance and excuse - among other things - of protecting a woman's right to make decisions about her own body and of supporting poor women so that they do not seek abortions in the darkness of illegality, with all the serious risks that this entails for their health and life. Yet this legislation forgets and tramples over, yes, the rights of the unborn, adding us – thereby – to the “culture of death” that, in so many ways, imposes itself on all of humanity.

We live in this historical and socio-cultural juncture of postmodernity. After two world wars, pessimistic accounts of “deconstruction” and “no-future” have appeared and the easy and fast, transitory, temporary, disposable, and ephemeral have prevailed. This is a historical and social moment in which individual freedoms and rights appear to take precedence over the common good and in which the truth has become “*what is useful to me*,” with the consequent predominance of subjectivism and sentiment, where each person assembles “a la carte,” his own manual of “truths” and constructs his own life project.

This is a world of permissiveness and moral laxity, of appearances, and where the unbridled search for happiness is confused with momentary and physical pleasure as an end, regardless of the means to achieve it. This is a hedonistic and pansexualist society in which sexuality, also “light,” is lived without love, without exclusivity, without commitments, reduced to genitality, and the frenzy of

orgasms. This is a society and culture without convictions and without meaning, that has traded the transcendent value of life in exchange for all that be enjoyed here and now amidst the easy and immediate.

Issues such as abortion, divorce, euthanasia, etc., have gained resonance and power. In this “light” world and culture, a world of relativism and half-truths, and under the pretext of respect for plurality and differences, the truth is diluted or hidden. Feminist movements are acquiring rising power in all areas of our life in society, here and throughout the rest of the world. It is in this postmodern and “light” socio-cultural context that I will dare in these lines to give some opinions on the issue of abortion, at a time when our society is talking about the possible repeal, by the Supreme Court, of the federal law on abortion, to leave the legal decisions in this regard in the hands of each State of the American Union.

I write from the point of view of the Christian humanism that I profess because I understand that these teachings have universal validity insofar as the tendencies toward life, peace, justice, and truth are the intrinsic and inborn heritage of every human being whether or not we affirm the existence of the God of Christians and the consequent truths, values, and principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

An ethical-moral reflection on abortion cannot and should not be approached or appropriated exclusively by the humanistic and theological vision of Christianity. This appropriation or attribution of the discourse on the defense of life in abortion impoverishes and reduces the scope that the issue has for all humanity, because the appreciation, respect, and defense of the gift of life is the heritage of all humanity, insofar as that life is a value, inscribed in nature and in the heart of every human being and valid for every man and woman of any race, people, creed, ideology, etc.

The following reflections, great principles to consider on the subject of abortion and consigned here as concisely as possible, are only to

foster an initial understanding that in no way exhausts the abundant and complex moral, ethical, legal, religious, psychological, political, and social controversies related to this topic:

- Christian and Catholic Moral Theology has always affirmed that the existence of the human person begins “from its conception. That is to say, from the moment in which the human sperm cell penetrates the human egg and fertilizes it, the moment in which the set of biological phenomena that lead to syngamy (union of the male and female pronuclei) begins, where the genome of the human being itself, the one that is unalterable, is definitively organized. In the union of the ovum with the sperm, the human nature of the new being is established and at that same moment, the genetic sex is also established.” (Dr. Rafael Pineda, Comentarios sobre los proyectos consensuados de fertilización asistida, translated from Spanish)
- All this means that Christian humanism maintains, at the same time, that human life is a biological process in permanent development: from conception to biological death, and that said process constitutes a personal identity, a human being. Therefore, “from the first moment of his existence, the human being must see his personal rights recognized, among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.” (From the Instrucción Donum Vitae 1,1 en el Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica 2270, translated from Spanish)
- For Catholic moral theology, the "direct and voluntary" elimination of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral. “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” (John Paul II - Encyclical Evangelium Vitae of March 25, 1995 - N. 62). If the embryo is a person – who, like all human beings, is constantly developing from conception until death – then abortion is, bluntly, murder and the worst of crimes if we

consider that parents and relatives (beings called to protect the life of the murdered innocent) lend themselves to take the life of an innocent and defenseless human being.

- Abortion is a crime. However, it is not only the woman who is involved in abortion. The woman who undergoes an abortion is the product of a social structure (family and legal) that influences and conditions her. Along with her, others are equally or more guilty (the father, the family, society...). The degree of culpability (whether the woman who should have been a mother acts with more or less malice) will depend on her degree of awareness, knowledge, etc. But, at the same time, nothing justifies the death of a human being, much less an innocent and defenseless one in the womb.
- Medical science serves life and never death. This is its first vocation, its reason for being.
- Naturally, the vast majority of human beings are born in a situation that – medically – can be considered “normal.”
- Any form of life is preferable – however precarious it may seem – to any form of death, however sophisticated it may be.
- The experience of parents and entire families who have accepted the existence of a child born sick affirms – also – the child’s value within the family and society and, furthermore, the moral value that accepting evil, suffering, and pain says about human existence. All this sounds contrary to a hedonistic and postmodern society in which pain and suffering are avoided in the unbridled pursuit of solely pleasure, regardless of the means to achieve it.
- If medicine fulfills its vocation and mission—that of promoting life and improving the quality of life of human beings—no one can decide to eliminate the life of a human being who—in the

future—could experience an improved quality of life due to advances in medicine.

- The application of a greater evil (that of killing the child) does not solve the traumas and consequences left behind by a moral and physical evil such as rape. On the contrary, common sense allows us to understand that abortion adds greater evils and traumas to the woman who was raped and her life.
- The same society that encourages abortion also abandons the woman undergoing an abortion to her own fate. Also, this same society, instead of punishing the rapist, punishes the woman who was raped and doubles her experience of evil by converting her, through abortion, into the murderer of an unborn child and adding "the physical and psychological complications that abortion already has in itself." (Cf. Dr. Cameron, Paul in *Aciprensa*).
- When we discuss abortion, we speak, first of all, of innocent people whose life is taken from them in the womb. But, we are also talking about the entire social, academic, scientific, medical, cultural, religious, political, legal, cultural, and family structure that directly affects the occurrence of all abortions.
- The woman's body is the "lodging" that—during pregnancy—houses the body and the personal and distinct identity of the child: another being who is morally, psychologically, and legally independent, unique, and different than the mother. That the mother grants herself or is given the right to attack the child and kill him because he is lodged in her body is comparable to—for example—a homeowner believing he has the right to kill anyone who lives in his house.

What should be done, given the controversy and the political and public debate in our society about abortion? Let us return to valuing life as the sacred gift on which all other individual, group, and social values are based because political-social peace, social justice, and

the progress and development in justice and the freedom of peoples are not built on death and cemeteries. Let's work comprehensively, through all our actions, words, and attitudes, toward a "culture of life" and against a "culture of death." Let's not use legal devices to calm the twists of our consciences.

The clandestine practice or the decriminalization-legalization of abortion is hardly coherent in societies incapable of social justice, freedom, respect for human rights, equity, solidarity, and peace; that is, in societies where the "culture of death" is fostered. It is hypocritical to throw up our hands in horror at the murder of the innocent unborn, if, at the same time, we are not moved by the hunger and by the so many forms of injustice, violence, and death that surround us and also threaten the gift of life, and whose victims are the so many millions of our brothers here and beyond our borders.