

Protecting the unborn life

The sanctity of human life is a fundamental principle upheld by the Catholic Church. Socrates' philosophy emphasises the importance of examining life, and Aristotle's definition of life as "the actualisation of a living being's potential" underscores the inherent value of every human life.

The Bible affirms life's sacredness, with Psalm 139:13-14 declaring, "You knit me together in my mother's womb...I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

The Church teaches that abortion is a grave moral evil, attacking an innocent human life. Pope John Paul II stated, "The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message." The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "Since the first century, the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion" (No. 2271). This teaching is rooted in the natural law, recognising every human being's inherent dignity. Human personhood begins at conception, and that the embryo is a distinct, living being with its own inherent dignity and worth. This understanding is based on the biological fact that conception marks the beginning of a new, genetically distinct individual.

From earliest times, Christians rejected abortion and infanticide, practices common in surrounding pagan cultures. The Didache and Letter of Barnabas condemned these acts, as did early Church councils. St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas reaffirmed this teaching, with Aquinas stating that abortion is a sin "against nature" as it rejects God's gift of life.

The Church's stance is not based on outdated biology, as some claim. Modern science confirms that human life begins at conception, with the union of sperm and egg producing a distinct human being. The Church's teaching remains unchanged: every human life has inherent dignity and must be treated with respect.

Three positions on abortion are commonly held: 1) Abortion is the ending of an innocent life and must be opposed; 2) Abortion is a woman's choice, with some advocating for limits on gestational age; and 3) Abortion is wrong, but should be legal, often citing personal freedom.

The first position aligns with Catholic teaching, recognising the unborn child's inherent dignity and right to life. The Bible prohibits murder, and Jesus' commandment to "love one another" applies equally to the unborn. The Church teaches that life must be "respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception" (CCC 2270).

The second position dehumanises the unborn, often citing questionable theories of personhood. This stance can lead to further devaluation of human life, as seen in Nazi Germany's euthanasia programme and modern-day eugenics.

The third position, often held by "pro-choice Catholics," acknowledges abortion's wrongness but advocates for its legality. This stance is problematic, as it implies that some lives are more valuable than others. If abortion is wrong, it should be opposed, not tolerated.

The Church's teaching on abortion is clear: it is a grave moral evil. Yet, there is hope for those who have had an abortion or supported it. Jesus offers forgiveness and healing to all who seek it. As St John Paul II said, "The mercy of God is greater than our sins."

We must work to build a culture of life, valuing every human being, regardless of age or ability. This requires compassion, understanding, and a commitment to supporting women and families in need.

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognised as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life. The Catholic Church's teaching on abortion is rooted in Scripture, tradition, and natural law.

Every human life has inherent dignity and must be respected. Let us strive to create a world where the unborn are cherished and protected, and where women and families receive the support they need.

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