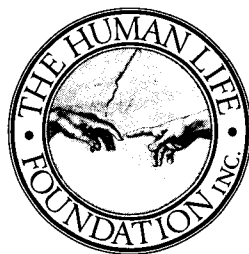


the HUMAN LIFE REVIEW



SUMMER 1995

Featured in this issue:

Faith Abbott on Death Row and the Innocent
Francis Canavan, S.J. on The Choosing Self
Dominic Lawson says All You Need Is Life
John Muggeridge on ... Deadly "California Dreamin'"

Evangelium Vitae: a Symposium

William McGurn • Anne Muggeridge • James Hitchcock
William Murchison • John F. Matthews • Paul Johnson
Mary Kenny • Lynette Burrows • Paul Scalia • David
Reardon • Robert M. Patrick • *The Sunday Telegraph*

Also in this issue:

Michael Novak on the Pope • Malcolm Muggeridge on *Humanae Vitae*

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE . . .

. . . there are few voices, if any, as eloquent on the sanctity of human life as Pope John Paul II. His recent encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, is a powerful defense of life at all stages. For that reason, in this issue we are departing from our usual format to bring you a symposium on The Gospel of Life. In it, a dozen contributors discuss their own reactions to the encyclical. We trust you will agree it makes for fascinating reading.

In his introduction, our editor quotes a passage about Pope Innocent III from *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*. This is a useful book for anyone interested in papal and church history—it has biographies of the popes in chronological order—and was published by Oxford University Press in 1986. Also mentioned in the introduction is the article then-President Ronald Reagan wrote for the Spring 1983 issue of this journal, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation*. It was published in book form in 1984 by Thomas Nelson.

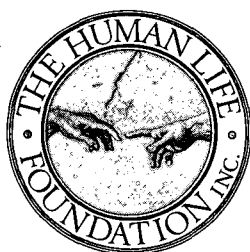
The books cited in Father Canavan's article (*The Choosing Self*, p. 19) may be of interest to our readers. Leo Strauss' *Natural Right and History* was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1953; *The Homeless Mind*, by Peter and Brigitte Berger, was published by Random House in 1973; and the more recent *The Loss of Virtue*, edited by Digby Anderson, is a National Review Book, published in 1992 (the paperback edition is available from *National Review* for \$17.95). Canavan's own book, *Freedom of Expression: Purpose as Limit*, was published in 1984 by Carolina Academic Press.

A note from the Spring issue: we described George Mulcaire-Jones ("In a Basin Clearly") as an obstetrician in Montana. He writes to say that he is actually a board-certified family practitioner—though a large part of his practice consists of obstetrical care. As a matter of fact, he and a hospital-based midwife in the area (who is also, as is Dr. Mulcaire-Jones, pro-life) have between them delivered over 650 babies in the past three years!

We would like to thank *The Sunday Telegraph* for permission to reprint its editorial; Michael Novak, for giving us his permission to bring you his column on the Pope; and *The Spectator*, for permission to reprint editor Dominic Lawson's poignant piece and Paul Johnson's column, as well as providing us with the cartoons which are, as always, priceless.

Finally, we would like to welcome our new Managing Editor, Anne Conlon (Colleen Boland has taken an opportunity on the West Coast), and wish you all a happy summer.

MARIA MCFADDEN
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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INTRODUCTION

THERE ARE MANY ROMAN CATHOLICS we know who deplore (to put it mildly) the present Pope; they had hoped that the “Spirit of Vatican II” would bring the Catholic Church “into the modern world” whereas, they say, John Paul II has brought it back to the Middle Ages. And it does seem likely that the doctrines preached by the incumbent would have been familiar to, say, Innocent III, the peerless medieval pontiff, about whom *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* says:

A man born to rule, uniting exceptional gifts of intellect and character with determination, flexibility, rare skill in handling men, and also humaneness . . .

We suspect that John Paul’s admirers would find all that quite applicable to *him*, while his detractors would charge him with the rest of the description:

. . . Innocent had an exalted conception of his position as Vicar of Christ (a title he made current), “set midway between God and man, below God but above man,” given “not only the universal church but the whole world to govern.”

What we’d say has happened is, this Pope *has* brought the Church to the world—and the world to him—more dramatically than friend or foe would have dared to imagine when his pontificate began in 1978; sixteen years into his tenure, it also seems safe to say that his critics are right, his Church *is* rather less their yearned-for “modern” edition than it is the same old immemorial one.

In the current historical moment, John Paul stands peerless both as a commanding personality and as a world statesman; his last generally-recognized competition was no doubt Ronald Reagan (who was, as it happened, the *other* prime mover in the demise of the “Evil Empire”); in this century only Charles de Gaulle has won as much by strength of will, beyond political power.

As regular readers will recall, President Reagan once wrote an article for this journal, and we’ve often written about him, in connection with our “single issue” of abortion and its legions of progeny. The Pope has not graced our pages (except for his words of encouragement, conveyed by his Secretary of State on our tenth anniversary), which is hardly surprising. What does surprise us, looking back, is that we’ve had so little to say about him, given all that *he* has said, for so long, on “our” issues.

But now that John Paul has written a powerful encyclical devoted primarily to abortion and euthanasia, it is obviously impossible for us to ignore it, or him. So we’ve done the sensible thing and made *Evangelium Vitae* and its author the primary subject of this issue: you will find the result in the middle half of what follows.

The other half is in many ways related to *Evangelium Vitae*, beginning with Faith Abbott’s commentary on the current state of the “capital punishment”

debate. The media have ballyhooed the Pope's "rejection" of the death penalty, except when "it would not be possible otherwise to defend society," and it does seem that, given our "culture of death," John Paul would have us stop *all* the killing. But to Abbott the crucial distinction is the taking of *innocent* human lives, and the relevance of that distinction to abortion in America, where the perception is that anti-abortionists who support capital punishment are "inconsistent" in their defense of life, while pro-abortionists who oppose it are, by their "compassion," absolved from guilt in the slaughter of "the uncounted millions of innocents who are awaiting execution in the death row of their mothers' wombs."

Next, Rev. Francis Canavan, S.J., considers the other target of the encyclical: euthanasia. The current euphemism for promoting euthanasia, personified by Dr. Jack Kevorkian, is "assisted suicide"—another act of "compassion" for the suffering (and, willy nilly, the unwanted?). In pre-Nazi Germany, influential doctors advanced the doctrine of "lives unworthy of living"—Hitler acted on it with such vengeance that it became a war crime, setting back the march of "progress" for over 30 years. But the doctrine has made a powerful comeback, as the ethic of the "best and brightest" people—Canavan describes them, simply, as the "elite," who think of "a human being as a choosing self that creates its own ends"—ending one's own life is merely a private choice, just like abortion. But unlike abortion, the victim is capable of objecting, therefore effective persuasion must be legalized, lest some continue to call it murder.

The Pope's plea for life is addressed to "All people of good will," not Catholics only. We have no idea whether Mr. Dominic Lawson (a professed atheist) reads encyclicals, but after reading what he wrote about the birth of his daughter Domenica, we thought that you would want to read it as well. It struck us as a perfect fit for this issue, a vivid—and moving—affirmation of precisely what *Evangelium Vitae* is intended to *mean*, in "real life" application. Don't be surprised if you find yourself adding little Domenica and her family to your prayer list.

Our final regular article comes from our Canadian editor, John Muggeridge, but it is mainly about us Americans and our dreams of "doing something" about all problems. Trouble is, we tend to *define* problems in terms that fit our solutions. As Muggeridge shows, that is what our "medicine" professionals have done with the vexed question: How do we value human life? They simply re-defined "sanctity" *out*, replacing it with a "quality of life" standard that made first abortion and then euthanasia acceptable as "public policy" solutions. Again, all that Muggeridge says fits nicely with what the Pope is trying to accomplish, i.e., to put the sanctity of life back into the question.

We haven't the space this time for our usual assortment of appendices, but we do have two that bear directly on our main theme. In *Appendix A*, Mr. Michael Novak provides a 75th birthday tribute to John Paul Superstar; along the way he gives you fascinating insights *cum* historical settings—not to mention gossipy tidbits—that ought to make everything else in this special issue even more inter-

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esting. *Appendix B* is in itself a kind of historical document: if there is one thing that baffles “moderns” about this Pope, it is surely his adamant re-affirmation of *Humanae Vitae*, the fateful “birth control” encyclical of his much-maligned predecessor, Paul VI. Here, the *apologia* comes from the late great Malcolm Muggeridge—not then a Catholic, as he was quick to point out—but even then (1978) convinced that the encyclical would “stand in history as tremendously important.” Indeed it has, but be not afraid that you will find the piece heavy going; as always, “St. Mugg” is a delight to read, a master of style, with a gift for turning his professed pessimism into unconquerable hope.

* * * * *

OUR SYMPOSIUM ON *Evangelium Vitae*, beginning on page 25, isn’t quite the usual kind of thing; we didn’t seek out “expert” punditry but rather commentary from interesting people in various places—from London to Hong Kong, as it turned out. We were impressed by the “leader” (in American, editorial) that ran in *The Sunday Telegraph* on April 2: if Britain’s leading newspaper could run a review of this papal encyclical, surely there was more than the usual “secular” interest in it? So we sent copies to a few friends, suggesting that there *was* something unusual about *Evangelium Vitae* and the more-than-perfunctory media treatment it was getting, and asking: Would you do us a piece on it? All agreed, on both counts. So we solicited more contributors, to make it an even dozen.

You will find more about the contents on the title page, but here we perhaps should repeat that we specifically asked our contributors *not* to “review” the encyclical; we wanted to know how it struck them, after which, we said, they could write about it in any way they pleased. All of them took us at our word. Thus, Mr. William McGurn leads off with an evocative description of what reading *Evangelium Vitae* made him ponder in far-away Hong Kong where, as he explains, he sees just the kind of people he thinks the Pope has in mind. But up in Canada Mrs. Anne Muggeridge was inspired to ponder John Paul himself, plus some of the controversies that divide his flock. Professor James Hitchcock, well known to American Catholics for his many books and commentaries on churchly affairs, considers the impact this Pope is having—and *not* having—in this country.

And so it goes, right on through to our friend Robert M. Patrick, who does give you a review of sorts: he argues that John Paul *must* be famous to get three full pages in *The Economist*, and proceeds to review that prestigious publication’s credentials for pontificating on the Pope of Rome. All in all, a disparate lot, with ideas and opinions to match. We think you will appreciate them as much as we did, as a very good read.

J. P. MCFADDEN
EDITOR

Death Row and the Innocent

Faith Abbott

Even before the last bodies were recovered from the devastation of Oklahoma City—the remains of the babies and toddlers were already out, the terrorist blast had gone off closest to them—opponents of capital punishment were busy in behalf of the guilty. Some Catholic nuns (putatively speaking for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious) sent letters to President Clinton and to Cathy Keating, wife of Oklahoma's governor, urging them to use their influence to spare the lives of the bombers.

To the President, the sisters wrote: "In the name of God who teaches us to forgive one another and to turn away from destructive actions and attitudes, we implore you not to seek the death penalty for the perpetrators of this heinous crime. . . . A few more deaths . . . will not restore to life the precious victims of the bombing." In their letter to Mrs. Keating, the sisters praised her for organizing the memorial prayer service and asked her to find the "grace and courage" to spare the lives of the killers: "Someone, somewhere, has got to say once and for all, 'Stop the killing.'"

Others think that one way to stop the killing would be to stop the killers: "She hates to say it but killers must go" was the New York *Daily News*' headline on a column by columnist Joan Beck, on September 9, 1990—well before the World Trade Center bombing and the Oklahoma City disaster. "It's not easy to speak up for the death penalty," Beck begins: "It seems inhumane and vindictive and the antithesis of all that is decent and civilized and caring in this society. But it is, I am afraid, a terrible necessity."

What had caused Joan Beck—a liberal (albeit a *thoughtful* liberal)—to speak up for the death penalty? Well, two cases were uppermost in her mind. "Illinois was right this week," she wrote, "when it used a lethal injection to execute Charles Walker for the murders of a couple he robbed while they were fishing, tied to a tree and then shot. And Oklahoma was justified this week when it executed Charles Troy Coleman . . . for killing a couple who walked in on him during a burglary." Beck is convinced "The death penalty, at least, tries to put society on record that it will not tolerate murder and that those who do murder can forfeit their own right to live." Which is a point, she says, that is rarely made these days.

Faith Abbott, our senior contributing editor, is the author of the recently-published *Acts of Faith: A Memoir* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco).

Beck mentions the “many and familiar” arguments against capital punishment—one of course being that it is not an effective deterrent—but “evidence of deterrent effect—or lack of it—is flimsy.” She questions whether the death penalty is used often enough to be a credible threat, and says it’s obvious that prison sentences aren’t sufficient to deter many people from murder; both Coleman and Walker had been in prison repeatedly and they had been charged with other murders. While Coleman was awaiting trial, he escaped and slashed a police officer’s throat. “At least,” Beck says, “he is now deterred from killing anyone else.”

New York’s Mayor Rudolph Giuliani (in an interview with *USA Weekend* last August) also rejects as “silly” the argument that the death penalty doesn’t deter crime: “This is an academic’s debate that is almost to the point of absurdity when you deal with reality,” he said, admitting that he himself was “confused” about this until ten or twelve years ago when a prison official was killed by a prisoner. “I think it was his third killing. If he had been executed after his first killing, the second or third person wouldn’t have died.” Giuliani says he knows this from talking to robbers: “You go back 20, 25 years, any number of stickup men could tell you . . . when they did stickups they went in with blank bullets. Because they wanted to frighten the person but didn’t want to kill somebody. The reason was 5 to 10 years for the stickup; executed, possibly, for the murder.”

Considering the argument that *innocent* people will be executed, Joan Beck cited “the meticulous and exhaustive appeal processes” and thinks it’s much more likely that innocent people will die because the death penalty isn’t used nearly *enough*. “And surely it demeans life—particularly the lives of murder victims—not to consider murder a capital crime.” In theory, she wrote, we could greatly reduce crime by ending racism, illegal drugs, improving schools, providing jobs and homes: all these efforts must continue, but “Regrettably,” she says, “we also need capital punishment to enforce the message that killing others will not be tolerated. To have any effect, the death penalty must be used, applied as consistently and surely as possible, with the number of appeals shortened to a justifiably reasonable limit.”

Had this happened in the case of the World Trade Center bombing, might it have “sent a message” to the Oklahoma City terrorists?

Another columnist changed his mind about the death penalty, before the Oklahoma City bombing but just after a subway bombing in Manhattan. Ray Kerrison, in the *New York Post* (December 23) wrote (under the headline “Cold-blooded terrorist attacks blow away any reservations about

the death penalty”): “I have never been an advocate for capital punishment because violence begets violence, the death penalty is usually imposed on the poor and never the rich and courts are too imperfect to give them power of attorney over life and death. But times have changed. New York is becoming a city under siege, its very life and nerve threatened by the World Trade Center terrorist bombing, drug cartel slaughters, a train massacre, a deadly suburban mall bombing and now a massive subway bombing. . . . This is beyond murder. It is anarchy or civil war, perpetrated by groups hostile to American interests or by individuals with real or imagined grievances.” All this, remember, well *before* Oklahoma City.

Kerrison—a pro-papal Catholic—goes on: “Either way, society should not treat them as routine criminal acts. They are full-blooded assaults on the community and demand a matching response.” And this: “In New York, outgoing Gov. Cuomo was the most formidable political opponent of the death penalty. Twelve times he vetoed it. With his departure, the Catholic bishops now loom as the most significant opponents.”

More about the bishops later; here it seems opportune to take a backward look at Mario Cuomo, who gained fame for refusing to allow his “personal” opposition to abortion to affect his support of it as Governor. But he would, and he did, impose on the state of New York his personal opposition to capital punishment, which he called “cruel and unusual punishment.” He said nothing about the cruel and unusual punishment of the innocent unborn.

But last summer, when Cuomo feared that his “disapproval” of capital punishment might cost him re-election, he tried to convince voters that they didn’t *really* want the death penalty reinstated. In an “Opinions” piece in the New York *Daily News* (July 13) he wrote: “For 12 years I’ve said if New Yorkers could choose, they’d conclude death isn’t the the best way.” Of course he understood “the terrible sense of rage and violation when people we love are attacked . . . the overwhelming desire to fight back, to settle the score.” But, he wrote, building a law on the surging tide of those emotions wouldn’t make us better or stronger or safer as a society: if the people of New York really *thought* about it, he was sure they’d conclude that imposing a death penalty was “neither the best nor the only way to satisfy our thirst for justice.”

The now ex-Governor wanted to be thought of as “compassionate” and above the “revenge motive” but we were given an insight into his “personal” vindictiveness when he wrote “ . . . there is a better punishment available, one that is tougher and fairer . . . life in prison without any

chance of parole. *Surely no penalty could be harsher or more terrifying than to spend the rest of your life—for many perpetrators, half a century, maybe more—in a cage!*" [my emphasis]. So much for "compassion."

But back to Ray Kerrison's column. "Just last week," he wrote, "the Brooklyn diocesan weekly *The Tablet*, in a strongly worded editorial, condemned capital punishment as morally unjustifiable. It quoted the Vatican theologian Rev. Gino Concetti, who said, 'The state does not have and cannot have the right to decide the life or death of any human being, not even those guilty of grave crimes. The precept of Moses, "Do Not Kill," has, in the light of Christian doctrine, an absolute value.'"

This judgment, writes Kerrison, "sharply contradicts the clear assertion of St. Augustine . . . who wrote 'It is in no way contrary to the commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," to wage war at God's bidding, or for the representatives of the State's authority to put criminals to death, according to law or the rule of rational justice.' When mad bombers are on the loose, attempting to blow up skyscrapers, suburban homes and subway cars filled with people, society surely has a right and obligation to defend itself. Would 'rational justice' in such cases automatically exclude the death penalty? The debate is about to begin."

The debate had already begun last August in St. Louis, whose new Archbishop, Justin Rigali, petitioned a judge for leniency in the sentencing of a young man who had abducted a woman from her home, beat her, and bound her with duct tape and wire. He then threw her into a van for a 16-mile drive, forced her to walk out on a railroad bridge, hog-tied her into a fetal position, then kicked her off into the Meramec River, where she fought to untie herself until she drowned. The jury recommended the death penalty. The Archbishop's plea for leniency was joined by that of Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, the Vatican's nuncio to the United States.

"Archbishop's Pleas To Spare Killer's Life Angers Many," headlined the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* on the *Letters From The People* pages. Many letters took issue with the liberal newspaper's editorial, which called Archbishop Rigali's plea "a welcome expression of moral outrage against a penalty that is becoming far too mundane." The editorial also lauded the letter from Archbishop Cacciavillan—"a representative of Pope John Paul II who said he was seeking clemency on behalf of the pope," adding that "A gesture of mercy in this case would greatly contribute to the promotion of non-violence and of mutual respect and love in society" and ending with "He [Archbishop Rigali] and his colleagues in the religious community should make themselves heard more often."

But not—as readers of the *Post-Dispatch* well know—when they "speak

out” against abortion. Here is what one St. Louisan wrote:

An Aug. 9 editorial, “A Voice of Morality,” supports Archbishop Justin Rigali’s request that, for humane considerations, sentence of execution not be imposed in the Simmons case. That support is consistent with your previous editorials maintaining that killing is killing and that states ought not to resort to it. Whether or not the opinion prevails, it is defensible.

On the other hand, the *Post-Dispatch*’s track record convinces me that had Rigali interceded to prevent an abortion for the same humane considerations, the editorialist would have transmogrified killing into the golden coach called “choice,” by which so many infants are transported from this life. That is the menace of editorial subjectivism; killing is wrong when the writer pleases but, by dash of pen and writer’s whim, the deplorable can become suddenly embraceable.

Here in my city, the January 19 issue of *Catholic New York* ran a letter under the title “Vox Populi” which began: “The decision of the New York bishops to impose their opinion regarding the death penalty on the faithful is ill-advised, lacking in credibility, and totally out of touch with reality. Have they not read the Catechism of the Catholic Church?” The writer quotes this section:

Preserving the common good of society requires rendering the aggressor unable to inflict harm. For this reason the traditional teaching of the Church has acknowledged as well-founded the right and duty of legitimate public authority to punish malefactors by means of penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime, not excluding, in cases of extreme gravity, the death penalty.

Then he asks this question: “Have they not read St. Thomas Aquinas? ‘If a man be dangerous and infectious to the community, on account of some sin, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good’” [*Summa Theologica*].

Other readers of diocesan papers were also confused by such headlines as “Catholic Bishops Oppose Death Penalty” and (more alarming) “Church Opposes Death Penalty.” Did they mean that, for loyal Catholics, The Debate was over? Not exactly: headlines can be (and often *are*) misleading. The careful reader will notice references to this or that “episcopal conference” and may suspect that the bishops’ statements are mainly a reflection of collective *opinion* put forth in an attempt to effect public policy. And in fact the various conferences of bishops are not “the Church.” This is what Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote in 1985:

We must not forget that episcopal conferences have no theological basis, they do not belong to the structure of the Church, as willed by Christ, that cannot be eliminated; they have only a practical, concrete function. . . . No episcopal conference as such has a teaching mission; its documents have no weight of their own . . .

The point is that neither collections of bishops nor individual bishops in their dioceses have the authority to confect, state, or impose anything at odds with official and traditional Church teaching. And the *fact* is that the Church has never condemned capital punishment in cases where the law provides for it, when it is imposed by the state with due attention to defendants' rights under the virtue of justice; more, Vatican II confirmed the condemnation of crimes against *innocent* life.

The debate that was "about to begin," as columnist Ray Kerrison predicted last December, not only began anew but intensified in March as both sides evaluated and interpreted the Pope's words in his new encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. Death-penalty opponents gleefully proclaimed that it "reversed" the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on capital punishment. "Hold on there," said the supporters: "Go back and read those parts of the encyclical and the new catechism more carefully." What John Paul II said in his encyclical was that the principle set forth in the Universal Catechism remains valid: "If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority must limit itself to such means"—obviously, that little "If" is the key word?

In Italy, one organization (with links to the Radical Party) was thrilled to perceive in the encyclical a recognition of "a growing tendency, both in the Church and in civil society, to demand that [the death penalty] be applied in a very limited way, or even that it be abolished completely." This anti-death-penalty group (called "Nessuno Tocchi Caino"—No One Should Lay a Hand on Cain) held a march on Palm Sunday, supported by Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro—described as "a devout Catholic."

And there was more glee among Catholic and non-Catholic theologians and journalists opposed to capital punishment when word got out that Cardinal Ratzinger had "acknowledged" that the encyclical constitutes "an important new development in Catholic teaching on the issue" and may require an amendment to the Catechism. (It is amusing to note the fervor with which critics of the encyclical and the Pope's "rigidity" and "inflexibility" on sexual sins rushed to laud him for what they considered to be his flexing on capital punishment.)

And then of course the debate *really* got hot in April, after the Oklahoma City horror. The timing was grist for the mill, for both sides.

An editorial in the *Tennessee Register* (diocese of Nashville) said that cries for the death penalty for the bombers run counter to the message in the latest encyclical: "The Pope states emphatically that there is virtually no situation in modern society, such as ours, in which the state should

execute persons convicted of crimes,” said the writer, adding that the death penalty for the bombers would be another brutal blow to society.

Surprisingly, Rev. Richard McBrien, professor of theology at Notre Dame (and a well-known anti-papal “Dissenter”) argues that what’s at issue is not the horror or magnitude of the Oklahoma crime but whether society would be threatened by *not* executing the perpetrators—“the only situation when capital punishment should be allowed, according to the Pope’s encyclical. . . . If Oklahoma doesn’t merit capital punishment, then the Pope’s exception is meaningless.”

And Father John Navone, a New Testament scholar at the papal Gregorian University in Rome, agrees that the encyclical does not rule out capital punishment in the Oklahoma case, saying “I don’t think a Catholic could come out and say that those individuals who committed this act should escape capital punishment on the basis of what the pope has written.”

But Father Richard McCormick—professor of Christian ethics at Notre Dame (a colleague and usually an ally of Father McBrien)—says that there’s a way of defending society *without* killing the perpetrators of the bombing: “We have the means to put these people away, we have the adequate means to prevent these people from doing it again. *That’s what the pope would say, and I share that view*” [emphasis mine].

McCormick acknowledges that many will ask whether there are indeed “adequate means” to prevent another Oklahoma City, and that question was raised by Robert Boston, a Catholic layman and ethicist at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a Washington think tank. Citing the Pope’s contention that improvements in penal systems around the world have made capital punishment all but unnecessary, he asks: “What does the availability of prisons mean?” He admitted that he had “some personal squeamishness about the state coldly putting a person to death” but said “The death penalty does deter. I don’t think there is any moral tradition that would countenance that kind of killing” in Oklahoma City.

Last December the journal *First Things* ran a letter (from a Reverend) under the title “Abortion and Capital Punishment” which began: “I am continually amazed at those who insist on drawing a parallel between abortion and capital punishment. It is morally obtuse and demonstrates a kind of willful blindness to what would seem to be a rather obvious distinction. Surely one may grasp that there is in fact a clear, moral distinction to be made between, say, Herod and the innocents he slaughtered.”

The May 19 issue of *Commonweal* magazine had its editor, Margaret O’Brien Steinfels, and associate editor Paul Baumann, competing for the

High Moral Ground on the subject of "To kill, or not to kill." Steinfelds deplored the carnage in Oklahoma City, but said that "With all this firmly and unbearably in mind, the editors still do not think these killers, when fairly tried and properly convicted, should suffer the death penalty." Baumann ("An Editorial Dissent") wrote that "Those justly convicted for the mass killing in Oklahoma City deserve the death penalty. If justice means anything, it means that the willful, premeditated murder of the innocent cannot be seen to be tolerated. . . . The state should end the lives of murderers only for heinous crimes, but it is precisely in those instances that the death penalty alone can express the moral outrage of humanity." He believes, for example, that the execution of the Nazi war criminals was "meet and just." And, he says, "The living owe the murdered innocent no less . . . than to assume the full burden of judgment and the responsibility for punishment."

About the abolitionists' argument that imposing life terms on murderers puts the state in a morally-superior position (the state avoids "getting blood on its hands") he has this to say: "Convicted killers kill again, either in prison or after they are released. Innocent people are killed as a direct consequence of not imposing the death penalty on the guilty. Those deaths may be a necessary cost of the state washing its hands of direct killing, but it is sentimental to think that outlawing the death penalty will 'end the cycle of violence.'" Statistics seem to support Baumann's argument: for instance, the average murderer spends only about eight years in jail; of 47 Texas prisoners whose sentences were commuted and who were returned to the general prison population, 12 subsequently committed 21 serious, violent offenses against other inmates and prison staff. And over 40 percent of those on death row in 1992 were on probation, parole or pre-trial release at the time they murdered.

Mr. Baumann rejects the argument that only God has the right to take human life, even the life of a justly convicted killer. "Traditionally," he says, "God is understood to be the ultimate source of all authority, not an alternative authority who renders moot the judgments of temporal justice. Indeed, Catholicism has characteristically held that God's authority must be mediated by human institutions. Civil authority is fallible, often woefully so, but it does not follow that we must be agnostic about our ability to seek or render justice in the here and now."

[In Jesuit Father John A. Hardon's *The Catholic Catechism*, published in 1975, I find this: "Capital punishment is part of the acknowledged Christian tradition, illustrated by St. Paul's statement that 'The State is there to serve God for your benefit. If you break the law, however, you

may well have fear; the bearing of the sword has its significance. The authorities are there to serve God; they carry out God's revenge by punishing wrong-doers'”—*Romans*, 13: 4.]

To speak for the victims, says Baumann, is an essential element of justice, and one that *only* the community can perform. In our “adversarial” system, the voices and lives of murder victims are quickly forgotten as attention is focused on the “alleged perpetrator” and *his* rights (Need I cite the O.J. Simpson case as a prime example?). Baumann says, “Once those rights are secured . . . the law surely fails in its primary task—namely, to make human community and life possible—if it does not speak forcefully for the dead and for the moral order of things. That is why the law itself, and the punishment the law demands, does not seek direct compensation for the victims or eventual reconciliation for the criminal, rather it expresses our moral purposes. In punishing, the law articulates and defends the common good. That is why justice must be seen to be done. . . . In imposing the death penalty for especially heinous crimes, the law proclaims in unambiguous terms the value society places on innocent life and the absolute revulsion in which we hold such murders. Moral outrage, mediated by the institutions of justice, is the best way to secure the sanctity of life.”

In fact, Oklahoma City has produced conflicting opinions among Catholic bishops themselves. For example, in a recent *Florida Catholic* column, Miami Archbishop John C. Favalora suggested that the death penalty for the Oklahoma bombers would assure swift and severe justice and “might serve as a deterrent for similar groups currently roaming at large in our nation.” One reader wrote to the paper (May 12) expressing disappointment that the Archbishop did not offer a prayer for the souls of the criminals. The death penalty, he writes, “may protect society and service justice, but it does nothing for the tortured soul that suffers it.” He admits that praying for a killer of innocent people “is one of the most difficult callings for Christians” but “It is also very necessary that we do so . . . because God desires every person to repent and meet Him in heaven. We must endeavor to pray for all criminals, no matter what the crime, that they may see and believe the truth and attain eternal glory with the Lord.”

At the bottom of this long letter there is an “Editor’s note” stating that the Archbishop *did* call for a conversion of the hearts of the perpetrators, and that “In the past he has been strongly against the death penalty, but, as noted in his column, he said that this may be one of those rare exceptions where it is justified.” And Bishop Leroy T. Matthiesen of Amarillo,

Texas (in his diocesan newspaper), reminded readers that the ultimate judge in this case is God: "Those who committed this crime will get their punishment; if not now, then on judgment day. . . . Our call as Christians is to pray for their souls and hope they may come to a realization of the destruction that they wrought on the innocent . . . and repent."

In the wake of the Oklahoma City massacre, pious urgings to pray for the assassins probably leave most people unmoved—prayers seem hypocritical when not inspired by sincere "compassion." Of course it *is* theologically correct to pray for God's mercy on "tortured souls." But were it an obligation, it would require a strong act of will for anyone whose feelings lag somewhat behind those of, say, the nuns who so passionately implored President Clinton and Governor Keating's wife to spare the lives of the killers. But "spare" them for what? For Mario Cuomo's "harsher and more terrifying" penalty of life imprisonment? Cuomo is certainly right about the terrors of prison life—and death: the Associated Press (May 28), covering a violent eruption in a Chicago prison's "maximum security" section, reported that "Fighting left two county jail inmates dead and about 26 injured . . . it was hand-to-hand combat; they were fighting with broom handles and homemade knives"

It seems reasonable to believe that just defending themselves against prison violence (never mind taking *part* in it) will harden the hearts of "lifers" and make remorse as remote as their guilt—as is well known, most prisoners come to consider *themselves* to be "victims"—it is rare to find an inmate who doesn't end up claiming "innocence." Whereas it was once considered "Christian" to think that swift execution after conviction put "the fear of God" into murderers, sufficient to produce repentance; at least they would have the chance to *prepare* for death—a grace denied their victims. As Dr. Johnson famously pointed out, the prospect of hanging wonderfully concentrates the mind. And perhaps the soul too? It is curious that so many "men of the cloth" nowadays oppose capital punishment so passionately: If man has an immortal soul whose intended destination is Heaven, how can death be an unthinkable evil? *How* one dies—repentant or hardened of heart—makes the eternal difference, at least for those who still believe in Hell. Of course "moderns" do not seriously believe in Hell, which warps their understanding of Heaven as well. This no doubt explains their inordinate fear that an innocent man could be executed: they cannot accept the "orthodox" belief that, in such a case, he becomes a martyr to innocence itself, unjustly condemned only here, surely *not* hereafter? But I imply beyond my means: I'll return to the state of the debate.

One Catholic bishop set out to convert his whole state. In May, Charleston's Bishop David B. Thompson issued a statement on capital punishment "to all men and women of good will in the state of South Carolina" in which he declares: "I oppose the death penalty, and I shall work with my brother bishops and others of good will to present to the citizens of our respective states our solid conviction that capital punishment as a penalty in the United States needs to be abolished." The bishop quotes the relevant parts of *Evangelium Vitae*, which he calls "a sweeping statement" of the Pope's commitment to "uphold the sanctity of all human life in the face of the culture of death. . . ." Thompson is "convinced" that capital punishment "doesn't work," that "the hidden victim of public executions is the public conscience, along with the public's respect for the sacredness of life at all levels," and that it has a "rebound effect" that makes us "more brutal" as a society. The real question we should be asking, he claims, is: "Should we act on our instinctive feelings of vengeance, of 'a life for a life,' of getting back in retribution, or should we act in what we realize will be, in the long term, the most effective way of dealing with crime and punishment." Justice, he believes, "can be better satisfied by imprisonment than by execution."

Bishop Thompson's statement was published in the May 18 issue of the diocesan paper *The New Catholic Miscellany*. I wondered, as I read it, if "all good men and women in the state of South Carolina" would accept it as Gospel Truth: might some have reservations? Sure enough, "Statement draws response" topped a page one column in the May 25 *Miscellany*; we learn that State Attorney General Charles Condon, a Catholic and a strong supporter of capital punishment, told *The State* newspaper the *day after* the Bishop's statement was released that his own "aggressive stand on capital punishment" was *not* opposed to Church teachings. Earlier, he had said that the death penalty is necessary in today's world, and for certain heinous crimes it is "the appropriate sanction."

Responding to that response, Bishop Thompson said: "I have to do what's right, not what's popular," adding that his anti-death penalty view is "in concert with the United States Catholic Conference and with the stance of the bishops of the Province of Atlanta." Attorney General Condon replied that he feels "very differently" from the bishops; that "When someone makes a conscious choice to do great evil, he must be put to death." (Condon won the 1994 election, running on a tough-on-crime platform—he is the only Catholic currently holding statewide elective office in South Carolina.) Bishop Thompson "admitted" that Catholics *can* advocate the death penalty: "Theologically and philosophically, it can be used. I just

don't think it should be." He also said that another reason for his statement is his concern for the sacredness of human life "from start to finish: God gives life and God should take it away. I'm so pro-life that I'm pro-life right to the end."

To the end of *what*, precisely? Again, the question arises: Does he believe that life goes on beyond *this* life, or fear that life imprisonment could diminish the prisoner's chance of achieving life *eternal*? The bishop doesn't say. Nor does he mention the fact that there have been only *four* executions since the state's death penalty was reinstated in 1977. It is fascinating to observe how both sides base their arguments on "the sanctity of human life"—just as both sides quote the new encyclical and the Catechism. The noted British journalist and historian Paul Johnson—a Catholic himself—titles his article in *The Spectator* (May 13) "The sanctity of human life is everywhere undermined. It's time to bring back the death penalty." Bishop Thompson's statement could be titled "The sanctity of human life is everywhere undermined. It's time to abolish the death penalty."

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In the weeks following the April 19 Oklahoma City bombing, 168 bodies of men, women, children and babies were recovered from the rubble. The sad but inevitable truth (as Paul Baumann pointed out in *Commonweal*) is that from now on the victims and their survivors will fade from memory "as we direct our attention to the criminal's rights." There will be pleas for "compassion" and even for "forgiveness."

Vengeance is His, not ours, saith the Lord. Shouldn't *forgiveness* be His, too? I suspect that when we say the Lord's Prayer, most of us have certain reservations about forgiving those who have trespassed against us: the "trespassing" is usually a personal matter and we're willing to forgive *if* the offender a) has said Sorry or b) if he seems to be "invincibly ignorant" about what he has done or not done. Then again, sometimes we forgive because it makes us feel good about ourselves. But when something is not a personal offense but an act of terrorism, does "society" have the authority to "forgive"? Isn't that rather the victims' right? It is true that the Pope publicly forgave his would-be assassin: John Paul was alive to do so. And he forgave with the intent to help his assailant save his soul.

Last spring an Ursuline nun was brutally raped and murdered. Perhaps in her dying moments she forgave her killer: no one can know that, but her sister nuns in the Cleveland Ursuline community in effect presumed to speak *for* her when they publicly asked the county prosecutor (the killer

had been arrested) not to seek the death penalty. The community's superior said: "I just cannot think we can possibly eliminate violence with more violence. I think if you're pro-life you have to be consistent with all life."

Congressman Henry Hyde has said that he favors the death penalty precisely *because* he is pro-life; he wonders if the "cheapening" of life by abortion is not, in fact, mirrored in the widening circles of our increasingly-violent society, in which murderers elicit more sympathy than their victims.

And so the debate goes on.

There is of course "the law of unintended consequences." The unintended consequence of Pope John Paul's remarks in his encyclical about the sanctity of human life is the perception that he is against capital punishment; that, in our age of abortion and euthanasia, he believes that any killing adds to the mass slaughter, and thus he has abandoned the "old" Catholic teachings on capital punishment for a pragmatic emphasis on life in the context of "the culture of death." Quite understandable, but it seems to fog over the crucial difference between the innocent and the guilty?

Whatever effect this new "pragmatic emphasis" has worldwide, it has a *particular* relevance to the American scene, where Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's "consistent ethic of life" theory (a.k.a. "the Seamless Garment") has fogged over the American bishops' opposition to abortion. The theory holds that opposition to abortion must be joined to opposition to the death penalty and a long list of other "social justice" issues (including such vagarious categories as "the poor"); in effect, abortion—the slaughter of millions of innocents—is reduced to being just one among many "pro-life" issues, without distinction between the innocent and the guilty.

Mario Cuomo personifies the "good Roman Catholic" of the Seamless Garment. He ballyhooed his opposition to capital punishment, the better to defuse his blatant pro-abortion position. This meshed with the standard tactic of "Pro-choice" propagandists, which is to accuse *all* "pro-lifers" of supporting capital punishment (in fact, probably a majority do *not*) and thus being not only "inconsistent" but also hypocritical.

That tactic, which has had the full support of the dominant pro-abortion media, has been very effective in exuding the perception that abortion advocates are really "compassionate" people, thus cancelling out their heartlessness toward the unborn.

The net result has been the suppression of the innocent-versus-guilty argument in the abortion debate—an enormous loss for the "pro-life" side.

It is true that the Pope makes the distinction clearly and forcefully in his encyclical: “*I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral*” [his emphasis]. But the media makes *nothing* of it, for obvious reasons. Rather, they keep the focus on the “rights” involved. Indeed, Americans have been conditioned to think of *all* issues in terms of “rights”—we must respect the “right” of a woman to abort her baby, just as we must defend the rights of murderers—but the rights of the unborn and the murdered get no such support.

Imagine what might happen if the unborn baby’s *innocence* were to be made the crucial point: the baby would then enjoy an overwhelming advantage over murderers, and at *least* moral equality with the “mother” who would abort him (or her).

“God gives life and God should take it away. I’m so pro-life that I’m pro-life right to the end,” says the Bishop of Charleston, who believes in “the sacredness of life at all levels.” But the Church has consistently and continually taught that *innocent* human life is sacred. The sanctity of innocent life is the strongest argument *for* capital punishment, just as it is *against* abortion; the two support each other. If it were again the “perception” that to deliberately and with malice aforethought kill another, you deserve to forfeit your own life (not in the sense of “a life for a life” but to *defend* the sanctity of life), that very argument could and should be turned against abortion—another form of deliberate killing.

That is the connection between the two issues for abortion advocates: just as they will not accept *any* restrictions whatever on the abortion “right” (for even the slightest impediment would “suggest” that there is something *wrong* about abortion), they cannot allow the punishment of the guilty, or the protection of the innocent *as* innocents. They ignore the victims of murderers just as they ignore the unborn: they *have* to, in order to hold their “consistent ethic of death.”

If such perceptions were changed, the death penalty would be seen not as part of the “culture of death” but as an affirmation of the sanctity of human life. At the cost of a very few justly-condemned guilty lives—and, yes, just possibly some genuine martyrs to innocence—we might save the uncounted millions of innocents who are awaiting execution in the death row of their mothers’ wombs.

The Choosing Self

Francis Canavan

On March 5th last, the *New York Times Magazine* published on its “Hers” page a column on assisted suicide by Jennifer Farbar. I may have missed an earlier column on the same subject, but to me that column was significant as a “first” for the *Times Magazine*. Up till then the “Hers” page had been a platform for advocates of abortion; now it had offered itself to proponents of suicide.

Ms. Farbar was moved to write her column by the way her friends reacted to her father’s suicide. At his wake, she says, many of the mourners, “among them a number of Catholic friends . . . were murmuring about shame and tragedy, others about anger and cowardice, each statement loaded with the unspoken assumption that my father had not merely died but that, because of the way his life had ended, he was doomed to suffer for eternity.” How she can be so sure about the unspoken assumption of murmurs is not clear, but in any case the assumption she speaks of does not jibe with anything in my experience.

I know of two suicides among my own relatives, each of whom was buried from a church with a funeral Mass, and I have never heard a word from anyone assuming that they went to Hell. The presumption is rather that practising Catholics who commit suicide must have been under the influence of a depression so severe that they were not in their right minds and, therefore, not responsible for their action.

The case would be different, of course, if the person had clearly stated in advance, while he was of sound mind, that it was his deliberate choice to kill himself, or to be put to death. That seems to be the case that Ms. Farbar has in mind when she asks: “Where are all the pro-choice people, who lobby so loudly and necessarily against those who would make abortion illegal once again? We have yet to open a humane and realistic discussion about choice as it pertains to euthanasia and suicide.” The point at issue in this discussion will be “choice,” and in our liberal culture, we already know where it will lead us. There will be no real discussion, however, because the question will be begged by calmly assuming the primacy of the individual’s choice, to which all other considerations must be subordinated.

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That assumption governs the thinking of our cultural elite, comprising such persons as writers, academics, journalists, professionals in the law and medicine, and executives of foundations and large corporations. Not all of them, of course; there are more than a few exceptions. But we can say that the opinion-making classes in this country, and more broadly in the West, generally share a common mindset. This, having led them to accept abortion, easy divorce, and homosexuality as a lifestyle, is now drawing them on to accept suicide as a legitimate choice for individuals, and euthanasia as a social policy.

This set of ideas and attitudes is part of our inheritance from the Enlightenment, with roots as far back as the sensism of John Locke and the nominalism of William of Ockham. Without going into detail about these philosophies, we may note that over time they have flowered in a radical individualism. Peter and Brigitte Berger describe it in their book, *The Homeless Mind*:

The individual, the bearer of identity as the *ens realissimum* [most real being], quite logically attains a very important place in the hierarchy of values. Individual freedom, individual autonomy and individual rights come to be taken for granted as moral imperatives of fundamental importance, and foremost among these individual rights is the right to plan and fashion one's life as freely as possible. This basic right is elaborated in a variety of modern ideologies.

There is a biblical and Christian individualism that sees every man as created in the image of God and therefore endowed with intelligence and free will. Since he is intelligent, he is capable of knowing the moral law inscribed in his nature by his Creator and, since he is a creature, he is obliged to obey it. Being free by his nature, however, he can obey God's law only by choosing to do so, but the obligation to obey comes before the consent and commands consent. Modern individual autonomy, on the other hand, means that the individual's own will is his highest law; he therefore has to create his own moral universe. In that universe, obligation derives from consent: one is obliged because he has consented to be obliged. The only reason for consenting that such an individual can have is self-interest. The individual self, being prior to the obligations it chooses to assume, can have no motive for choosing other than self-interest.

Intelligence, of course, will suggest that consideration for the interests of others is the more prudent course for those who want to live long in this world. But enlightened self-interest is thought to be enough to maintain a civilized society. As Immanuel Kant said, a race of devils can organize a good state for themselves if they are intelligent.

This view of man is the liberalism that George Will has described as

belief in the moral equality of appetites. For liberalism, man is the free animal, whose defining characteristic is his freedom. In order to safeguard this, his chief good, liberals tend to become agnostics in religion, skeptics in philosophy, and relativists in morals. We can understand why: if freedom is the basic human good, all other goods must be judged in relation to it. Even truth, whether religious, philosophical, or moral, must be subordinate to the individual's liberty. Any assertion of an objective and transcendent truth thereby becomes a threat to freedom.

But this kind of freedom is a hollow and empty good. If the goods for which we live are good only because we have chosen them, we cannot really believe in them. As the late Leo Strauss remarked in his *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago), "Once we realize that the principles of our actions have no other support than our blind choice, we really do not believe in them any more. We cannot wholeheartedly act upon them any more." As this realization forces itself upon our minds, we either change our minds and accept the priority of objective good to our choice, or we continue to insist, in the language of John Rawls, on the priority of the self to the ends that it affirms.

All of this philosophizing is pretty deep stuff, and it would be misleading to attribute a profound understanding of it to television announcers and newspaper columnists. But, whether they are aware of it or not, it lies behind the opinions they propagate on the issues in our current culture war. The issues now being contested in that war include abortion, homosexuality, sex education and condom distribution in the schools, experiments on human embryos bred in the laboratory, teenage pregnancy, welfare dependency, population control, and euthanasia, not to mention lesser ones like arts funding. These are issues that arise in debates on public policy but they reflect deeply opposed views of human life and society.

It is the premise of the liberal opinion-makers' attitude that disagreement with them on these cultural issues must be due to religious fundamentalism and other forms of bigotry. Since all enlightened people know that raising moral, particularly sexual and "life" issues, in politics is an attempt to impose the unenlightened views of some upon the rest of us, there is really nothing to discuss. The unenlightened must be dismissed out of hand. If discussion with them cannot be avoided, they must be told forthrightly that their benighted views have no intellectual foundation, because all ideas of good and evil are simply preferences. Since they are only preferences, it is undemocratic and indeed immoral to force people to base their lives on the preferences of other persons.

I heard a story recently from a friend who was present at a debate on abortion. The pro-choice side was represented by a lady from Planned Parenthood who was obviously pregnant. Someone asked her if she regarded the being in her womb as a person. She said she did. Why is it a person? Because I want it, she replied. Suppose you didn't want it? Then, she said, it would not be a person. That is an extreme but revealing example of the sheer voluntarism by which the choosing self believes that it can create reality. Life and personhood are what the self wills them to be.

Most Americans, of course, do not go so far. But they have been so thoroughly indoctrinated with the notion that, even though they may personally believe that abortion kills a human being, they cannot see their moral conviction as anything more than a merely personal belief. They do not believe that they have any right to assert it as a basis for public law and policy. In the public forum, it is not life but choice that is primary.

In my teaching days, I constantly encountered this attitude in my students in regard to other issues, as well as to abortion. I recall teaching an undergraduate class in which I mentioned decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court that overruled state laws which denied welfare benefits to children born out of wedlock. I then asked one of the girls in the class what she thought of those decisions. "Well," she said, "raised as I have been, I wouldn't even dream of having a child out of wedlock. But other people may have been raised in a different culture, so for them it wouldn't be wrong." That did not answer the question I had asked, but it was typical of the responses I got from students on moral questions.

I don't doubt that this student was fully sincere in saying that she would not have a child out of wedlock, for she was a very refined young woman from a good family. But God forbid that she should say that conceiving an illegitimate child was something wrong for anyone to do. This widely-shared reluctance, however, makes it difficult for American society to sustain a public morality, even in matters that vitally affect the public interest.

Robert Grant has described this climate of opinion in Digby Anderson's *The Loss of Virtue*, where he says that "'democratic' values . . . are liberal, individualist, egalitarian, hedonistic, and rationalist." The emphasis is on individual autonomy, but in a democracy, respect for autonomy must be granted equally to the whole population. All judgments about an individual's conduct, insofar as it affects himself, must be reduced to whether it causes him more pleasure or pain, reason being incapable of recognizing objective norms of human good and evil. Yet we can call this hedonism a kind of rationalism, if we understand that while reason cannot pass judgment on the ends of human life, it can judge the efficiency of

means to the ends that the individual chooses. In more concrete terms, anyone can decide whether it causes him more pleasure or more pain to go on living, but not whether life has a value in itself that demands respect.

In my listing above of the groups that constitute the cultural elite, I left out judges. Let me conclude with a few words about them. Justice Harry Blackmun, for example, wrote an opinion for four Justices who dissented from the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Bowers v. Hardwick* in 1986. By a five-to-four majority, the Court upheld the constitutionality of a Georgia law that made sodomy a crime. Blackmun rejected the Court's claim that its decision "merely refuses to recognize a fundamental right to engage in homosexual sodomy; what the court really has refused to recognize is the fundamental interest all individuals have in controlling the nature of their intimate associations with others."

In his view, the emphasis must shift from the act of sodomy to the individual's choice of it: "The fact that individuals define themselves in a significant way through their intimate sexual relationships with others suggests, in a Nation as diverse as ours, that there may be many 'right' ways of conducting those relationships, and that much of the richness of a relationship will come from the freedom an individual has to *choose* the form and nature of these intensely personal bonds." It is not the nature of the action, but that it has been chosen as a means of self-definition and self-fulfillment, that makes it deserving of constitutional protection. The end, that is to say, justifies the means. This is utilitarianism, and it is the ethic of the cultural elite.

In the case of *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* in 1992, the Court reaffirmed the "central holding" of *Roe v. Wade*. An opinion written by a plurality of three Justices gave as a reason that "personal decisions relating to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, child rearing and education . . . involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

Admitting that "abortion is a unique act," the plurality opinion nonetheless went on to say that "in some critical respects the abortion decision is of the same character as the decision to use contraception" and therefore enjoys the same constitutional protection.

Once again, an end at the highest level of generality—defining "one's

own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life"—is taken to justify a particular means of achieving that end. Choosing that means then becomes a constitutional right. In *Bowers v. Hardwick* it was sodomitic intercourse; in this case it is killing a child in the womb.

Noticing the disparity between the alleged end and the chosen means seems to be beyond the capacity of the Court's liberal and "moderate" members. One has to ask: Do these learned ladies and gentlemen really mean that a man can define himself through sodomy and a woman can explore the mystery of life and the meaning of the universe by killing her own child? If so, one of the qualifications for appointment to the Supreme Court these days is a lack of a sense of the ridiculous.

But there is more. In 1994, Barbara Rothstein, a federal district judge in Seattle, struck down a Washington State law forbidding assisted suicide. The ground she alleged for her decision was the same one on which the Supreme Court found abortion laws to be unconstitutional. "Like the abortion decision," she said, "the decision of a terminally ill person to end his or her life 'involves the most intimate and personal choices a person can make in a lifetime.' " She added: "The suffering of a terminally ill person cannot be deemed any less intimate or personal or any less deserving of protection from unwarranted governmental interference than that of a pregnant woman."

Her decision has been overruled by the U.S. Court of Appeals in San Francisco. But the decision of the Court of Appeals, or some similar decision, will certainly be carried to the Supreme Court. It may affirm the decision of the Court of Appeals. But the previous emphasis by so many members of the Court on the primacy of individual choice in all matters that can be described as "personal" and "intimate" leaves them little logical ground for denying the right to assisted suicide or, for that matter, to homosexual marriage or polygamy among consenting adults.

The Court has a powerful influence on American public opinion. Yet to a large extent it reflects the opinions of the cultural elite. As Peter Berger once remarked, not entirely in jest, the opinions of the Supreme Court are shaped less by the Constitution than by the cocktail parties the Justices attend and by the books their wives are reading. Their ethic is the elite's ethic, and their constitutional law reflects the elite's concept of a human being as a choosing self that creates its own ends. When the electronic world of virtual reality arrives, the elite will be ready for it. And, if we listen to them, so shall we.

The Case of John Paul II:

The Gospel of Life vs. “The Culture of Death”

The present Pope has issued a dozen encyclicals, but none of the others has been given the “secular” attention that *Evangelium Vitae* has received. An editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* (April 7) may have caught the reason why:

If timing is everything, then it would appear that Pope John Paul II timed perfectly the publication of his latest encyclical, “The Gospel of Life.”

At least insofar as Americans are concerned, he caught us with our rationalizations down and our contradictions showing.

Without question, many Americans are deeply troubled by the millions of abortions since 1973, and the growing “demand” for euthanasia—both pillars of the “culture of death” the Pope condemns. And both, of course, are primary concerns of this journal. Thus it seems fitting for us to also give special attention to the encyclical, which we have endeavored to do in the symposium that follows.

Mr. Paul Johnson, one of whose columns appears herein, has elsewhere described John Paul as “a Pope for the public forum, for the vast congregation and the open battlefield, where the forces of Christianity fight for survival in an often hostile world.” How hostile? Well, Ireland’s Conor Cruise O’Brien, a well-known writer, diplomat, *et al.*, has said “I frankly abhor John Paul II,” adding that he prays almost daily (from the Psalm *Deus Laudem*) “May his days be few and may another receive his Bishopric”—O’Brien accuses this Pope of having a “grand design” that is nothing less than “the repeal of the Enlightenment” (Mr. Paul Scalia agrees, as you will see). Clearly, John Paul does not inspire neutrality.

The reader will find echoes of such themes—and much more—in the dozen articles presented here, only two of which have previously appeared elsewhere. Seven of the contributors are American, four British, and one Canadian; two (Messrs. William Murchison and John F. Matthews) are non-Catholics.

G.K. Chesterton once said that the word “symposium” had degenerated from its “dignity of meaning”—to the Greeks, it meant “Drinks All Round”—to little more than separate statements, “generally in every sense dry.” We hope our readers will conclude that this one would have whetted the great Chesterton’s robust thirst for good argument and lively writing. —the Editors.

Blessed Are the Happy

William McGurn

Upon my arrival in Hong Kong eight years ago, I was quickly introduced to the two rules of expatriate life. The first was that you would never again have to do any dirty work yourself: that would be the responsibility of your *amah*, or maid. The second rule was that these amahs would invariably be Filipinas who were in Hong Kong working as domestics because the economic situation back home was so bleak. And because they were relatively cheap, even the lowliest deputy assistant to the assistant branch manager back home might live like the lord of the manor here. Indeed, expat apartments here all come fitted with an “amah’s room”—usually a tiled, un-airconditioned cell off the kitchen barely large enough for one twin bed.

Even though my wife and I do not ourselves have an amah (itself an oddity in expat circles), amahs nonetheless are an inescapable part of our lives. When we go to a friend’s house for dinner, it is the amah who has cooked the meal. When we leave, an amah does the cleaning up. When we go to a pool where there are kids, the amahs are there minding them, and when someone returns a pot or a bowl or something it is the amah who brings it over. And when we get together for a party, the discussion inevitably comes around to amahs: whose is best, whose is worst. There was even a popular Chinese actress on Hong Kong TV for a while who blackened her face and played a character called something like “Maria the dumb amah.”

Today there are almost 120,000 of these women working in Hong Kong as amahs. Many have college degrees, and it is not uncommon to find a mother and her daughters scattered throughout the colony working for different families—all sending their money back home to the Philippines to support their respective children. On Sundays, their one day off, they converge on Statue Square in the Central district, where they crowd the pavement like pigeons in the park, sharing tupperware boxes of Filipino food, doing a bit of shopping, catching up on gossip, exchanging letters and news from back home, taking pictures, the lot. It is an awesome sight, all these Filipinas crowded together in one spot in this Chinese city. Yet even the dullest expat notices something quite extraordinary. They are laughing. They are *happy*.

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The fact of this happiness can be maddening. They have no earthly reason to be happy. To the contrary, they have every reason to be unhappy. It can't be easy to move to a foreign land to raise a foreigner's family so that your own can eat. It can't be easy to know that your child is taking his or her first steps without you—or learn that your husband is now shacking up with another woman in your absence. Yet there they are, laughing and chattering away. And even the expat who thinks it's crazy, who dismisses their faith as the opiate of an ignorant people, this same expat, if he were sick, would want a Filipina for his nurse, and if he has children, wants a Filipina minding them. Because the expat knows that the Filipina brings something to the child that you can't buy. The Filipina brings love.

These are the faces I think of as I read *Evangelium Vitae*, for I have to think that when John Paul speaks about the gospel of life he has the Filipinas in mind. This is not to say that they are all sweetness and light, for among their ranks are social pathologies—child prostitution, bigamy, and abortion, to name some of the more common—that would scandalize a Borgia. Yet for all of this they remain untouched by the defining mark of our age and the phenomenon that has moved John Paul to issue this encyclical: “the fact that conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil.” If there is a special virtue to the Filipina it is not that she claims to be a saint but recognizes herself as a sinner.

The sinner is a far more difficult concept for the modern to accept than the saint. Not least of the characteristics of the heroic is that it compels admiration even from those who are opposed to the cause which it serves, and so it is that a world that is largely hostile to the faith that moves her has no embarrassment in bestowing the Nobel Peace Prize on Mother Teresa. Where they have difficulty is with sinners, or, rather, the idea of sin itself, for sin implies the recognition of immutable laws and limits to our behavior. Such is the sensitivity on this score that the very word is no longer acceptable in polite company, witness the decision last month by the Anglican Church, reported on the front page of the *International Herald Tribune*, no longer to refer to people living together out of wedlock as “living in sin.”

At first blush the move looks to be motivated by an appreciation for the presumption against judging others. But by removing the *notion* of sin it has more to do with arrogance about oneself. When the Lord came upon the adulterous woman and said “Let he who is without sin cast the first

stone,” He did so in the knowledge that consciousness of their own faults would shame the mob into sparing her life. Were He to say it to us today the result would likely be a volley of rocks.

It is this pride that lies behind our troubles, for what makes ours a “culture of death” is not that we have abortion or euthanasia—both have been around for ages—but that we have granted them recognition. We have done so, moreover, “in the name of individual rights and freedom,” as the Pope notes, and on this basis we claim “not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of the healthcare system.” Think of it this way, if you will. In a normal society, people who rob banks are a problem. But in a society where people have the right to rob banks, *society* becomes the problem.

This is what the Pope means by culture, and nowhere was it more in evidence than in last year’s UN-sponsored International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. In the months leading up to the conference, the Pope startled the world first by raising his objections, then forcing the world’s most powerful leaders, including the Clinton Administration, to back down on their attempt to introduce a universally-recognized “right” to abortion. It is not yet clear to me that the Pope “won,” if that is the right term, but there can be little doubt that his opponents lost. And they lost not because of the Pope’s power or authority but because he forced them to state what they really wanted out in the open.

Unfortunately, to most of the world the Pope’s positions on the issues raised by Cairo are literally unintelligible, and if they are considered at all they are dismissed as what the *Economist* called a fear of the “great monster” sex by “the Vatican’s rump of greybeards and nitpickers.” This attitude is especially pronounced in America, whose media tend to shape the parameters of world debates. There is no small irony here, for these treatments of the Pope demonstrate that in less than half a century the Catholic Church has gone from Maria Monk and the Whore of Babylon to the Church of Impossibly Strict Standards, a change that tells us more about the age in which we live than the Church’s relative position within it. The tragedy is that even those who have not been radicalized, some of whom might even admire the Pope, tend to see his attacks on Cairo as stemming from an opposition to homosexuality, birth control, and, of course, abortion. *Evangelium Vitae* demonstrates that this is to get it backwards. It is not John Paul’s objection to birth control or abortion or euthanasia that drove his attack on Cairo, but rather the long-standing, orthodox Christian

view on life and sexuality and their place in civilization that drives his views on homosexuality, birth control, and abortion. In short what we have here is not a debate over policies but a collision of irreconcilable worldviews.

This is a key point, for what the Pope proposes here is not just a catechism of do's and don'ts but a definition of civilization. It has been a long time coming. Earlier on, I mentioned that even to a great many sympathizers the Pope's strictures against abortion, birth control and homosexuality appear arbitrary and unintelligible. In fact, it is worse than that. Stripped of their context, church teachings on life and sexuality resemble Mencken's definition of a Puritan: someone who lives in mortal fear that someone, somewhere, might be having fun.

This, of course, is precisely how church teachings are presented in the mainstream press. Much of this may be unfair; some of it is plain ignorance; and no small part owes itself to outright bias, but it is primarily the responsibility of church leaders, especially the bishops, not simply to repeat the church's teachings like loyal soldiers but to provide the missing context that gives them their coherence. Too often we forget that the bedrock upon which the Pope's strictures rest is not revelation but "the natural law written on every human heart." While you don't have to be a Catholic for them to make sense, Catholic leaders have an obligation to make them make sense.

One way to think of it is to compare it to an athlete's regimen. Without an understanding that exercise, a healthy diet and an avoidance of smoking are intended to make the body function better—to help the body function as it was designed to function—things like push-ups become not a means to an end but a form of masochism. Likewise, without an understanding that Catholic teaching is designed to make us healthier and happier human beings, the proscriptions against birth control, pre-marital sex and the like come across as an arbitrary catechism of don'ts designed to frustrate perfectly natural desires. *Evangelium Vitae* is all about providing this context, a context that assumes not just a connection between being human and being good but between being good and being happy.

And if these assumptions about man are true, they have awesome implications not only for our relationship with our Creator but for our relationships with one another. In looking at our world and with this in mind the Pope has, characteristically, set out what he believes to be the two chief dilemmas of modern society: first, the severance "of the link between freedom and truth"; second, that the refusal to recognize any limits on

personal behavior undermines civilization by setting man against his neighbor. Different parts of the world have different problems. Here and within Asia the second part is not nearly as difficult as the first because Asian societies never have, and likely never will, embrace a construction of personal liberty so abstract and so unlimited that it overrides any consideration of others. To the contrary, within Asia there exists the strong recognition that the community has rights too, and most Asian societies consequently are left completely baffled by the idea that O.J. Simpson might go free and rioters are left unpunished. This has not always been completely healthy—Asian societies have had trouble recognizing the inviolability of the individual conscience, and they have a troubling tendency to identify the community exclusively with the State—but there nonetheless exists an acknowledgement of personal limits critical to the survival of any civilization.

The harder point is the first: the link between freedom and truth. Along with Lord Acton, the Church defines freedom not as the license to do as one pleases but the ability to do what one ought. A subtle distinction, perhaps, but one fraught with fantastic ramifications from which this Pope does not shy. For once we reject the idea that there are certain truths about man—and that we can derive these truths through our reason (a natural law, for the want of a better term)—we have overturned the foundation of civilization. All man's choices are reduced to whims, and there is nothing to hold him back save the practical compromises he must make with his neighbor, who is also out to optimize *his* pleasure. "Everyone else," the Pope points out, "is considered an enemy from whom one has to defend oneself."

Libertarians might counter, as Tocqueville pointed out long ago, that a society that optimizes individual choices in practice forces people toward communal arrangements (just as totalitarian societies, based on a forced communitarianism, appear to polarize people into individual atoms). But what the Pope is talking about here is not liberty but license, not limits imposed by society but truths recognized by society. Pascal said that man was neither beast nor angel but it is probably more accurate to say that man is capable of being *both* beast and angel, and absent any objectively held boundaries about what is and what is not legitimate in the pursuit of one's interest, everyone else becomes important not for who they are but "for what they have, do and produce," i.e., whether they help or hinder us in our quest for fulfillment.

On the face of it, it sounds absurd. But haven't we come this far

already? A pregnancy is inconvenient at this time in your life? Get rid of it. An ailing parent becomes an emotional and financial drain? Put him out of his misery. A wife represents an impediment to a newer and younger model? Divorce her, and so on down the line. In each case these problems admit of solutions, but the point about the solutions is that they are not so much chosen as imposed: "the supremacy of the strong over the weak," as the Pope puts it. And in this way we come full circle, back to the laws of the jungle. With this distinction: whereas the jungle owes its code to cold calculations of survival *because* it's the jungle, we turn civilization into a jungle by following our brutal humanitarianism to its logical conclusions. And here I look back at Paul VI and wonder how a man could be so right about the one thing where the whole world, including his hand-picked advisors, thought him wrong? Have we not now finally arrived at the contraceptive society?

Not that *Evangelium Vitae* is without its disappointments. As in previous documents, John Paul continues to suggest that poor countries have got that way not because of their own disastrous choices but because rich countries have conspired to thwart their development, and elsewhere he, like many in my part of the world, is inclined to treat the state as the primary, if not exclusive, manifestation of community. I don't think this is being pedantic. If freedom is the ability to do as you ought, then the greatest obstacle to that freedom is the state, whether it outlaws religion altogether as Communist states used to do or claims the right to give your 13-year-old a condom against your explicit instructions, as the D.C. public school system does today. Because of their inevitable monopoly of force we ought to see them less as the arbiters of community than as the security guards necessary to allow us to form our communities on the basis of contract and shared values rather than force and the lack of any alternative.

There is further the confusion engendered by the section on the death penalty: although the Pope's larger point that our crimes ought not to deprive us of our human dignity holds true, elevating the death penalty to equal status with abortion and euthanasia strikes a discordant note in a document the thrust of which stresses the importance of defending life at its weakest: the unborn, whose innocence is complete, and the elderly, who may no longer be capable of acting in their own defense. In both these cases, unlike those sentenced to death for crimes, lives are threatened not for anything they have done but for what they are: inconvenient. It is thus hardly surprising to find the Pope's own argument here is not the

categorical statement of principle he puts forward on abortion and euthanasia but a qualified limitation based upon his practical conclusion that the cases where society has no other choice to defend itself are today "very rare, if practically non-existent." It is thus an interpretation open to debate, and the vagueness of the proscription ensures that this debate will continue for some time.

But these are mere quibbles in a document that, more than any other of John Paul's papacy, puts forward in a succinct and coherent way the Church's view of human life, whence it derives its value and where it fits in society. Like as not this encyclical will prove the defining moment of his papacy, even more significant than his role in the downfall of Communism, because by the time Karol Wojtyla became John Paul II Communism was a dead faith while what we have in the culture of death is a living heresy. *Evangelium Vitae* is a withering indictment of that heresy, all the more commanding because in doing it the Pope has proved capable of marshaling all the modern resources of his opponents without ever compromising his message. Surely when we see that the publisher of the American edition of this work is none other than the *New York Times* we know that St. Thomas was wrong when he taught that the nature of the Divinity precluded His having a sense of humor.

Of Sophocles someone once said that his genius lay in seeing life and seeing it whole, and that is almost literally true of *Evangelium Vitae*. Certainly this Pope does not mince words. Yet for all his unvarnished insights into the lock the culture of death now holds on our century, John Paul will be remembered more for the hope that he ever holds out against it. This is the Pope who began his papacy with the words "Be not afraid," the Pope who survived an assassin's bullets and lived to see the collapse of the Soviet Union, the same Pope who calls us here to "have the courage to look truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name." However much we stray into error, he reminds us that man by his nature is disposed toward truth, that by grabbing one part we may find ourselves led back to the whole—and that once we do we will find, almost always to our greatest surprise, a peace and contentment that even makes sense of the suffering the world tries so desperately to avoid. If you don't believe me, come down to Statue Square on Sunday, and I'll show you what I mean.

May He Live 100 Years

Anne Muggeridge

“We are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, ‘the culture of death’ and ‘the culture of life.’” Those dramatic words sum up the Pope’s description of the evils of the society in which we find ourselves. *Evangelium Vitae*, the Gospel of Life, is his best, strongest, most unified proclamation and defense of the whole family of truths about human life. “Whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God Himself.”

The Pope speaks with a sense of urgency and danger, in very strong language, about the consequences of the corruption of “the democratic culture of our time,” in which “the only determining factor should be the will of the majority, whatever this may be.” There is a new, darker tone in his work. The broad ecumenism and the buoyant optimism one has come to expect from his cheerful personality and from his earlier writings are missing. Naught for one’s comfort, in a worldly sense, anyway.

But I’m not going to review the encyclical here; that’s being exhaustively done. I’m going to review the Pope, to take a look at the extraordinary man who sits in Peter’s Chair.

John Paul II is the most public pope in the history of the Church. He is almost always visible, in person or on television. He is comfortable and effective in public. In his youth, he was an actor, and wrote for and performed in the underground theatre during the Nazi occupation of Poland. His physical presence is electrifying. When he visited Canada in 1984, the major media, hostile to religion in general and Catholicism in particular, were awed by his presence. One reporter, speaking to him on camera, addressed him as “Your Majesty.” His personality is strong and integrated, gregarious and of an ardent missionary temperament. Enormous crowds gather around him. This year, in the Philippines, he drew the largest crowd in the history of the world.

He is seventy-five now. It is hard to think of him as getting old, though his enemies are counting the days—as did the ex-Jesuit priest, pope-hater Peter Hebblethwaite, who promptly died himself! The Pope seems at first easy to describe. Certainly, his is a most attractive public character—humorous, tough, brave as a lion, generous even to his would-be assassin, sympathetic, tender-hearted, gallant, poetic, amazingly energetic, practical,

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deeply devout, learned. In his role as Pontiff, he is doctrinally solid, willing to compromise on non-doctrinal though long-established teaching, optimistic, politically daring, ecumenical.

Like the other post-conciliar popes, he inherited a revolutionized Church. Inside the Church, feminists and dissident priests and religious despise him for his stand against abortion, contraception, women priests, a married clergy, and all the rest. Outside the Church, he is hated for his victories at the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population—his defeat of the plan to promote abortion as a “human right” and his creation of a Christian-Muslim coalition against the expansion of “de-population” programs based on abortion as a primary “contraceptive.”

But the deepest split, unreconcilable, is deep within the Church, between those laity who want major doctrinal changes and a fluid liturgy that reflects them, and those who want the restoration of the traditional rite, and the “sense of the sacred” that it embodied (it is significant to note that the few available Latin Masses are patronized increasingly by younger Catholics—and their children, which they actually *have*). This is the real civil war: “It’s the Mass that matters.”

Meanwhile, the great mass of “ordinary” Catholics is left in a liturgical Limbo. Perhaps the thing about John Paul that most alarms his supporters is his style of governance, which seems to have abandoned these ordinary Catholics to the whims of bishops and bureaucrats. How much control, for instance, does the Pope exercise over the huge public spectacle around him? The media show pictures of the Pope wearing a feather headdress and passing the peace pipe among native Indians, or sitting at a Mass in New Guinea listening to a bare-breasted woman read from Scripture. Who is responsible for the politicizing of the Mass by representatives of “oppressed minorities,” or for the female “Christ” in the Stations of the Cross in Denver?

He is a difficult man to read. He is a liberal, but not doctrinally. This has led the media to miss the subtlety of his thought. For example, they got his remarks on capital punishment wrong. He does not wish to impose his own rejection of the death penalty on the Church. In *Evangelium Vitae*, he says: “I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral.” On the other hand, he states that, since one has the right to protect one’s own life and the duty to protect the lives of the innocent, “legitimate defence can be not only a right but a grave duty.” As for the death penalty: it should be applied only “in cases of absolute necessity . . . when it would not be possible otherwise to defend

society.” It isn’t his political liberalism that leads him to hope for the abolition of the death penalty. He rules for both earth and heaven. He is “God’s Consul,” and as such, desires not the death of a sinner but his repentance.

The Pope’s exuberant public *persona* is deceptive. He is a very complex man. A traditionalist who is not troubled by modernity, he sees the world in a way different from the way his predecessors saw it, and that is because the world is different now. He studied the new forms of post-Christian philosophy—personalism, phenomenology and existentialism—and used them to create an understanding of the Christian revelation for our times. To give one example: Every Wednesday from September 5, 1979, through April 2, 1980, the Holy Father delivered, to an audience of transfixed tourists, a series of extraordinary meditations on the Book of Genesis (later published under the title *The Original Unity of Man and Woman*). He speaks in a language which combines the ancient theological understanding of the Biblical account of Creation with the psychological approach found in modern philosophies. There’s nothing else like it since the early Fathers who used what was true in pagan scholarship to show the universality of Christ’s message.

Far from being the Polish innocent beloved of the media, or the intransigent chauvinist hated by feminists, John Paul II is one of the most sophisticated thinkers of our time—and certainly the most charitable. He is confident in the present and not afraid of the future. He loves the world, and he loves people, especially the little ones. He recalls an older chivalry. Poles have held the East Wall of Europe since time immemorial, their latest victory being the defeat of the Communist empire. He has always been a warrior in the struggle to hold back the dark. Long ago, he made the Gospel of Life his Gospel.

I love and revere him. May he live a hundred years.

On Not Living the Gospel of Life

James Hitchcock

In the manner characteristic of classical Catholic thought at its best, John Paul II always discusses moral questions in two related but distinguishable ways—the theological and the philosophical. To this *Evangelium Vitae* is of course no exception.

When the history of Catholic theology in the twentieth century is written, his name will loom very large, perhaps the only pope in the entire history of the church who is a theologian of the first rank.

Although often dismissed as backward, John Paul again shows how completely he has assimilated the best modern theology. He does not simply repeat formal arguments, using “proof texts” from the Scriptures and theologians, but places the “life issues” in the widest possible context, beginning with creation itself. For those able to follow his argument it is a profound meditation on the deepest human and divine realities.

But he also affirms that knowledge of the sanctity of human life is open to human reason, which means that an insensitivity to life cannot be excused merely by disclaiming Christian beliefs. At every point John Paul shows himself a true disciple of Thomas Aquinas, in founding his arguments both on the mysteries of faith and on reason.

In both contexts the encyclical raises troubling thoughts, precisely because, as the Pope states explicitly in the first case and hints at in the second, both secular humanists and professed Catholics often seem to lack these moral insights.

As always, John Paul’s new encyclical is dominantly “positive,” in that it sets forth an inspiring vision of life in its fullness and makes negative judgments only ancillary to that. He is characteristically blunt, however, in noting that, although an upright conscience should comprehend the sacredness of life, in fact the culture is increasingly anti-life, because consciences have been hardened and corrupted. That fact requires little elaboration, since, if it were not true, the great battles over abortion, euthanasia, and other questions would not be occurring.

But the Pope has much less to say about the hardening of the religious conscience and, while the encyclical can scarcely be faulted theologically, examining it within the present ecclesiastical situation explains why

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inspiring papal words so often fall on deaf ears.

At one point John Paul asserts, bravely and correctly, that the mass media are in effect part of a conspiracy to undermine moral values, and in another place he alludes to governments, foundations, and other public agencies as doing the same. No doubt this judgment is especially based on the Holy See's experience at the Cairo conference on world population. However, the Holy Father does not discuss, except obliquely, the ways in which the Catholic Church as it presently exists also undermines the vision which he expounds so inspiringly.

John Paul identifies health care as a crucial factor in any systematic safeguarding of life and warns against an amoral, purely utilitarian approach which defines some patients as expendable.

At this crucial point in the history of health care, when the medical professions face the starkest moral choices in their entire history, the distinction between secular systems of care and those under religious auspices ought itself to be crucial. People who reject the "philosophy of death" which the Pope deplors ought to know that they can put themselves in the hands of Catholic institutions which respect the gospel of life.

Instead, however, the character of those institutions is being rapidly undermined. Religious themselves are scarce in most of them, and an increasing number are owned by national corporations set up for profit. Furthermore, many Catholic institutions are involved in transparent ruses to evade Catholic moral teachings—entering into cooperative arrangements with other institutions, for example, by which the Catholic hospital itself may not perform abortions but gladly refers patients to a sister institution which does. Even this weak gesture on behalf of Catholic morality is not likely to survive long. But the American bishops, both collectively and individually, seem prepared to accept passively this process, and in some cases actively to encourage it. Although almost the entire Catholic health-care system is being lost to the Church, authorities appear unwilling to make any effort to save it.

The Pope succinctly refutes once again the argument that, if the Church approved contraception, abortions would decrease, pointing out among other things that abortions are most common in precisely those societies which are fully committed to contraception.

But the contraceptive culture is not merely outside the Church, nor is it merely a matter of lay people inevitably being influenced by secular culture in opposition to the teachings of their Church. At least in the Western world most bishops seem long ago to have made the decision that they will not oppose contraception on moral grounds, except in purely nominal

ways, and will not even promote the alternative of natural family planning. Many priests in effect tell their people that they are free to practice contraception, an opinion which is also often conveyed in Catholic schools and official courses of premarital instruction.

If there is indeed an intimate connection between the contraceptive mentality and abortion, as the Pope asserts, then the flabbiness of many Catholics on the abortion issue is hardly unrelated. Catholics are often like non-believers in thinking that they have a right to free sexual activity devoid of inconvenient consequence, and little in their Catholic education has taught them otherwise.

John Paul has shown extraordinary courage in opposing the arrayed power of the major Western governments, the United Nations, and the mass media to defend life at Cairo and elsewhere, and he is correct in recognizing the existence of a virtual international conspiracy to the opposite purpose. But as he was facing the arrayed artillery of these powerful groups in Cairo, he was also being shot at from behind his own lines, by priests and religious, by Catholic publications, and other sources, as most bishops appeared to take cover.

The Pope has very frank things to say about the moral obligations of politicians to stand for principle, and about the illegitimacy of countenancing evil for the sake of political advantage. He also reminds his readers of the solemn penalty of excommunication which the Church pronounces on those who promote abortion.

But in the United States a majority of Catholic congressmen and senators consistently vote in favor of abortion, and many preen themselves on their commitment to "choice." Rarely do such politicians encounter any public criticism from bishops, and some politicians privately name particular priests or bishops as their advisors on such matters. The penalty of excommunication is almost unknown, and several years ago high Vatican officials supported the officers of the Knights of Columbus who refused to discipline Knights who hold public office and support abortion.

Far from regarding it as sinful to cooperate materially in the procuring of an abortion, the Jesuit president of Boston College, preaching the funeral sermon of a young alumna of the college murdered while working at an abortion clinic, cited her work there precisely as a sign of her moral idealism, fostered as a student in his university.

The Holy Father urges that seminaries, colleges and universities, and other centers of research strive to develop the gospel of life and make it available to the Catholic people. Yet in most American cities Catholics

need look no farther than their local Catholic college to find professors who boldly repudiate practically every teaching of *Evangelium Vitae* and sneer at its arguments. Probably a majority of Catholic moral theologians, including those who teach future priests, dissent to one degree or another from the teachings of the encyclical.

The Holy See has issued a document for the regulation of Catholic institutions of higher learning, but long ago it removed any powers of enforcement, and at present the committee of American bishops charged with drawing up "guidelines" for such institutions has announced that it will accept only such principles as the university presidents themselves find acceptable. Meanwhile, no matter how sharply they dissent from the Gospel of Life and other Catholic teachings, those institutions will be allowed to continue calling themselves Catholic as long as it suits them to do so.

These institutions regularly provide effective advocates for precisely the values which the Holy Father deplors in his encyclical. Public hearings on "death with dignity" bills, for example, almost always bring a flying visit from a priest-theologian who offers a "Catholic" opinion quite at odds with what the Pope teaches. Almost never does the local bishop contradict the certified expert.

A few relatively small points in the encyclical further reveal how its sublime teachings can be undermined amidst the actual realities of Catholic life. John Paul makes the strongest official criticism yet of the morality of capital punishment, which he seems to say is defensible in theory but seldom in actual cases. Contrary to what early commentators claimed, he does not equate abortion and capital punishment, strongly maintaining the idea of "innocent life."

But it is doubtful if a single person, learning that the Pope condemns capital punishment, will thereby discover new respect for the Catholic teaching on abortion. While the logic may be strong, the Holy Father himself points out the corruption of reason which has occurred throughout the culture.

Instead the passage will mainly be used as a weapon against the foes of abortion, who are constantly flogged for being "inconsistent." One of the first, predictable comments on the encyclical was by a Catholic theologian who argued, fallaciously but with superficial plausibility, that the "link" between capital punishment and abortion makes it almost impossible for pro-lifers now to campaign for anti-abortion laws. The "seamless garment" has always had only one side—those who are anti-abortion are urged to embrace the whole liberal agenda, while secular-minded liberals are not

correspondingly expected to become pro-life.

The encyclical speaks of a "new feminism," in which women are called upon proudly to witness to the virtues of motherhood and to bring into play a truly feminine sense of the value of life. But the rhetorical use of the term "feminism" will also have very little effect. Self-defined feminists, except for the small, valiant group calling themselves "feminists for life," define feminism precisely opposite to the way the Holy Father defines it, and his use of the word will attract no converts from their ranks.

So also the English translation of the encyclical is in "inclusive language," dutifully using "he and she" when referring to individuals, for example. But what can be said about the moral seriousness of readers who would reject the Gospel of Life because they disliked its syntax or would be converted merely because they approve the style of the translation?

A few weeks after *Evangelium Vitae*, the Holy Father issued another encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* ("That All May Be One"), in which among other things he encouraged non-Catholics to speak bluntly about their misgivings over the exercise of papal authority. The encyclical was highly praised by the president of the National Council of Churches, among others. Yet the teachings of *Evangelium Vitae* are surely among the chief things which officers of the N.C.C. and other liberal groups find objectionable in the papal office, and at first glance it appears as though the second encyclical will tend to undermine the effectiveness of the first.

Although the Holy Father does not say so explicitly, a pervasive implication of *Evangelium Vitae* is that people have simply forgotten how to think, feel, and act as children of God, have no sense of themselves as part of the great divine order. His courageous witness to the world on behalf of these truths will gain even greater significance if it signals the beginning of the process by which these beliefs are made to come truly alive in the Catholic Church itself.

The Pope as Medicine Man

William Murchison

On the day I write these words, newspapers and talk shows teem with outraged or approbatory reactions to Sen. Bob Dole's attack on the entertainment industry. I will make clear in a minute why I begin an essay on the papal encyclical with a reference to presidential politics.

Says Dole: Hollywood's products, full of sex and violence, have a corruptive, debasing effect on our culture. Retorts Hollywood: 1) The senator exaggerates the number of corrupt, debasing products, and equally to the point 2) these products exist because people buy them.

Back away slowly from the political theatre where this chicken-or-egg drama unfolds. As we do so it becomes clear—at least to me it does—that both sides make valid points. Not least consequential of these is Hollywood's point—that people actually like these wretched movies and rap songs: otherwise they wouldn't pay good money to partake of them. The marketplace, in classical economic terms, sends signals (called sales), telling producers what to produce, or suggesting what people would want to buy if they knew it was there to be bought. "Hollywood is about entertaining large audiences," says the chairman of the MCA Motion Picture Group.

Well, yes. But on the subject of those audiences, much more needs saying. Back to *Evangelium Vitae*. In truth, the concerns of the Pope, the producer, and the presidential would-be intersect in a fascinating way. All address the same mass audience, but with different messages and intonations. The producer says, buy. The candidate says, vote. The Pope says—repent.

It is useful to juxtapose these various viewpoints as we try to understand, first, what the Pope is up to and, second, what he is up against.

Well, of course, we have already a strong sense of what he is up to—the recovery of our civilization's much-diminished respect for human life. John Paul II, in *Evangelium Vitae*, has given us a masterpiece of logical, loving, exhortation. A theological plow, one might call it. The blades, guided by a steady hand, heave obstacles to the right and the left. Behind lies a straight, deep furrow ready for seeding.

What then? John Paul is clearly not talking to hear himself talk. He

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hopes for effect. What effects might be expected? Will, for example, Hollywood's heart (if it has one) be touched? *Evangelium Vitae* outlines what the mass media should do—namely, “present noble models of life and make room for instances of people's positive and sometimes heroic love for others. With great respect they should also present the positive values of sexuality and human love, and not insist on what defiles and cheapens human dignity. In their interpretation of things, they should refrain from emphasizing anything that suggests or fosters feelings or attitudes of indifference, contempt or rejection in relation to life.”

Yes, but *why* should they? Because sensationalism and sordidness debase the creatures of God? That would be the theological way of putting it—the Pope's way. The entertainment industry is ill-prepared to hear such a message, and likewise the world at large.

The Pope speaks of a world formed by the mighty power of God, responsible on that account to God, and answerable to His righteous judgment. The entertainment industry sees a different world altogether—crazy, random, chaotic; a world whose hallmark is individual sovereignty, wherein a pope's voice is one voice and only one.

John Paul II speaks to a demi-pagan society reminiscent of the one St. Paul addressed on Mars' Hill, in Athens. Like the Apostle, the Pope presupposes the sovereignty not of individual consumers and tastemakers but of the One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of All Things Visible and Invisible. We know from eyewitness testimony what that came to in Athens: “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them.”

Some mocked, others scratched their heads wonderingly. The proclamation of the Gospel to the unbelieving and skeptical is always a dicey enterprise—and a magnificently essential one. *Evangelium Vitae* is deeper confirmation of what we have always known about this Pope: He understands the task at hand to be nothing more and nothing less than conversion, the turning of hearts to that new way which is the oldest way. When enough hearts are suitably reoriented, the rest will take care of itself.

The entertainment industry debate is pitched in terms of public duty vs. economic incentive and consumer sovereignty. Conversion overleaps all these factors. Suppose something like general conversion to the ideals John Paul lays out in *Evangelium Vitae*—respect for the “sacred reality” of human life, rejection of “the supremacy of the strong over the weak.” Suddenly a whole new style of art and entertainment comes into view. Beauty rather

than sordidness is affirmed; dignity and honor and generosity and self-sacrifice are made admirable. This is in part because the public desires such entertainments, voting for them with its dollars; it is in part because the artists themselves show forth the vision in their art.

Oh, yeah, sure. We can really see that, can't we? The Pope can see it, whether we ourselves can or not. That is what the encyclical is all about—showing us possibilities that discouragement and despair have rendered all but invisible. No worldly cynicism taints John Paul's viewpoint, because that viewpoint proceeds from outside the material world, where politics and propaganda are the decisive considerations, where men and women shake their fingers at each other in perpetual remonstrance. "Your" values, "my" values—the Pope rises magisterially above such petty disagreements. There is but one set of "values," he affirms. It is the Creator's.

To the sickbed of the modern world John Paul brings the only effective medicine—the message of repentance and conversion. In *Evangelium Vitae* there is only, as the Methodist hymn would have it, "the old, old story, of Jesus and his love."

Wait a minute. That must be the same story the modern world has rejected; otherwise we wouldn't have gotten in such a mess, right?

Who is the Pope to bring up this matter again? He is . . . the Pope.

This is what popes, and indeed all Christian ministers, do—at least when they live up to the vast responsibilities laid on them.

If the task is daunting and disheartening, no other method serves the purpose. Censorship, boycotts, political denunciations, stricter laws—methods and techniques of this sort prosper only up to a point. Who will censor the censors themselves?

The turning of hearts, the conversion of souls is the enterprise at hand. With magnificent conviction John Paul II beckons us forward: his emblem the Cross, his hope the everlasting one, that which the Apostle carried up Mars' Hill and down again.

The Statesman of Life

John F. Matthews

Many of us are old enough to have lived through what is popularly known as “The Holocaust.” A time when millions of innocent people were killed, not for anything they had done, but simply for being Jews, Gypsies or Slavs, or members of the wrong sect or class.

That particular slaughter was ended fifty odd years ago. But the massacre of the innocent and the vulnerable has by no means ceased. To the contrary, the whole monstrous “culture of death” has spread, multiplied, and been popularized and “legalized”—so that today being an unwanted unborn baby is more inescapably fatal than to have been a Jew or Gypsy in Nazi-dominated Europe or to be a Tutsi or Hutu in contemporary Rwanda.

And to be old and helpless in a time when more and more people and governments look with approval on euthanasia—which was the first “scientific” scheme of mass-murder implemented by the Nazis on their long, bloody road to genocide—is not a particularly hopeful situation, except for those members of the medical profession who may (like abortionists) get rich more easily by killing than by caring for or curing. Curing may often be impossible, and eventually *always* is, whereas killing is cheap, easy and *never* impossible, unless some moral sanction intervenes.

It is to remind us of the eternal validity of that moral sanction that Pope John Paul II has published his great encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.

In the whole history of religion this must be one of the boldest and wisest assertions of mankind’s supreme value—beginning in innocence and total dependence, progressing through growth, development, education and experience into the condition of being able to make those great choices of conduct and faith which determine our destinies—and then reaching the final expenditure of our share in this life, with the possibilities of repentance and forgiveness as critical factors in whatever *new* life lies ahead for us in Eternity.

In a century of powerful and influential leaders, ranging through characters as diverse as Hitler, Lenin, Mussolini, Churchill, Stalin, Ghandi, Roosevelt, and Mao, this Pope has turned out to be the *only* one wholly and unconditionally on the side of Life.

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All the others—quite typically—led their constituents in war (and sometimes in peace), but always with a basic commitment to the notion that unless their ideas triumphed, life was not worth living. For their social and political dreams (some right and honourable, some both horrible and insane), millions and millions were sent to their deaths in the belief that Communism or Fascism or multi-party Democracy (along with all sorts of other “isms” and “religions”) took *priority* over life—that life was not a value to be held sacred in and of itself, but something to be spent in advancing and preserving the authority and power of the Great Leaders and *theories* about life.

I think it safe to say that only John Paul II has put the priority on Life *itself*, and devoted the power of his extraordinary personality and his immensely potent position as Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church not only to the doctrines, dogmas and rituals of his “Holy Office” (in all of which he clearly believes with total sincerity) but also to the cause of Life.

Evangelium Vitae is not devoted to politics or power, or even to the achievement of an after-life. It *assumes* the Christian promise of eternity (not surprisingly), but what it celebrates and preaches is the value—the *sacred* value—of Life itself.

What is asserted here, in the name not only of the Church and its accumulated wisdom but also of the whole of humanity, is the right, from conception through to the natural end—for each of us to have a chance at life’s opportunities (however limited they may seem), and the right to choose the path of good or evil, of glory and salvation, or the chance of damnation, along with the possibility of repentance and forgiveness which makes the opportunity to experience the whole great adventure of “life as we know it” the only *real* civil right in all of human existence.

I am not a Catholic and, though I have found that a surprising number of people I most respect (intellectually, morally and personally) *are* devout members of the Church, there are matters of doctrine and dogma which I still find uncomfortably alien. I was, after all, brought up in the traditional Protestant belief that the claims of the Papacy are much too vast for credence. But as I notice again in this remarkable and remarkably-instructive encyclical, the Church does *not*, for instance, claim to know how babies will turn out as they grow up—or which lives (barely begun or nearly ended) are truly worth saving.

Only the racists, feminists and old-fashioned class-conscious Marxists claim, nowadays, to know who has a *right* to be born. Inconvenience, dependency, the wrong race, sex, caste and physical condition—all these

are the excuses and justifications offered for “termination”—which is to say death by abortion or euthanasia. It would be hard, I think, to find “claims” any vaster than these.

But what the Pope preaches is more modest, much less arrogant, infinitely less presumptuous. The modern notion that any woman has the divine and sacrosanct “right” to decide whether the child in her womb is worthy of life, worth all the bother, the pain, the tears, the exhaustion, the expenditure of love—that’s a piece of self-centered, almost psychotic Feminist dogma that really is, as John Paul II asserts, the ultimate Culture of Death.

Perhaps the most touching point in the encyclical is the Pope’s gentle reminder to women who have *had* abortions (and have regretted and repented) that they, too, are not damned, and may still, through God’s love and mercy, live in the hope of forgiveness and salvation.

It is the idea of “forgiveness” of course, which is perhaps the most difficult thing to believe in all of Christianity. One can comprehend the Pope’s extension of sympathy to the pathetically-deluded “mothers” who have submitted to abortion—but what about the doctors who do these “terminations?”

And indeed, what about *any* of us? The evil that we do, or sometimes *want* to do (even the best of us), the things we know we should have done and failed to do—who among us, if wholly honest, does not know that we often do not seem, even in our own eyes, much worth saving. As my grandfather was fond of quoting, “In a just world, which of us would ‘scape hanging?”

There’s a mystery in this, and in our obvious human aptitude for sin, with which the Church has always had to grapple. It is something which Pope John Paul II, in the mightiness and valour of his faith, has resolved, in this great message of his old age, in favour of the eternal and abiding Love which is the differentiating principle of that universal Christianity of which he has been so true and powerful an example.

What is promulgated in The Gospel of Life is the fundamental essence of the Christian message—the blessedness of children, the sanctity of their innocence, the profound commandment that *from conception onward they are to be protected and preserved, not destroyed or abandoned.*

It was, after all, the infant child’s total dependence on adult love and tenderness that was made the analogy of our adult dependence on the merciful and nurturing love of God. There had been religions a’plenty before Christianity, but none had ever discovered, somehow, the connection

between human infancy and vulnerability and the supreme parental benevolence of our Almighty Creator.

In a day when most prominent religious figures tend to waffle and equivocate on matters of morality and human responsibility, this Pope shines like a great beacon of honour and stability, boldly proclaiming the ancient realities of vice and virtue, and asserting without hesitation or timidity the obligations and priorities of Christian behavior.

And if there are things in this extraordinary encyclical of which a non-Catholic might not be entirely or easily persuaded (the near-total rejection of the death penalty and of *in vitro* fertilization, for instance, or, in the concluding passages, his traditional insistence on the intercessory powers of the Virgin Mary), still, for all of these things the Pope has provided interesting, rational (and often unexpected) arguments which demand attention.

In the end, really, it is hard not to think of John Paul II as not only the greatest Churchman of our time, but also as the wisest and most truly Christian leader the world has seen, perhaps, in centuries. Broadly ecumenical in the widest and best sense of the word, his great message of love, compassion and moral obligation deserves the support of everything that is human and humane in all of us.



*'Doesn't the night sky make you feel small
and insignificant?'*

THE SPECTATOR 20 July 1991

Culture of Life

The Sunday Telegraph

There is endless talk in the 1990s about the moral condition of society. Attention has moved from the economic debates of 15 years ago to an examination of the collective conscience. Western society resembles modern parents ruefully contemplating the waywardness of their child and asking: "Where did we go wrong?" The symptoms of the problem are real enough. They include crime and violence, divorce and illegitimacy, despair and drug addiction, and politicians are competing in their search for a remedy.

There is broad agreement that the cure must lie in some re forging of society's bonds and the beliefs that make those bonds possible. That is what phrases like "back to basics," "family values" and "community" are groping for. Mr. Tony Blair is trying to occupy the same ground with the emphasis on "duty" in his recent *Spectator* lecture. Leaders now agree that it is wrong to say, as free marketeers are caricatured as saying: "The Devil take the hindmost." We have seen too much of the Devil doing just that to want to see any more. And they agree too that it is equally wrong to regard state welfare as an absolute right. It is understood that for people to look after themselves they must also look after one another. They must develop "shared values."

But as soon as a serious attempt is made to define what those values might be, and to assert the existence of the moral order which people crave, trouble starts. The questions perplexing our elected leaders have recently been addressed, far more systematically than they have been able to do, by Pope John Paul II, notably in his recent encyclicals *Veritatis Splendor* and last week's *Evangelium Vitae*. On the whole, commentators have reacted unfavorably to both. One can predict the gist of their response with almost mathematical certainty—the Pope has made the Church more reactionary . . . he doesn't live in the real world . . . what about poor people who have too many children? . . . absolutism . . . time warp, etc. Many of these reactions make one wonder whether their authors have actually read the documents. All of them refuse to consider the essence of what the Pope is saying.

Which is odd, in a way, because if the unprejudiced modern reader

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approached *Evangelium Vitae* without worrying about the question of papal authority, he would find much that spoke to the problems of the age. The Pope warns of the existence of a “culture of death.” When Cain was challenged by God after he had killed Abel, he said: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” From then on the culture of death has been at work in society, denying each man’s responsibility for his brother and always working to destroy. That culture flourishes, says John Paul II, because man is reduced to being a mere “thing.” Society is “excessively concerned with efficiency” and comes to see individual people as having only instrumental importance. This leads to the separation of sex and love, the barbarities of the arms trade, and a lack of concern for the weak. Once the link between freedom and truth is broken, society is “at the mercy of the unrestrained will of individuals or the oppressive totalitarianism of public authority.”

Is this really so out of touch? Does it not notice and help to explain an apparent paradox of our age, that a culture unprecedentedly concerned with personal fulfillment also produces a sense of helplessness, loneliness and confusion? The Pope calls for a new way of life that asserts “the primacy of being over having, of the person over things.” Isn’t that a phrase Tony Blair would love to have thought of?

The reason for the hostility to the encyclical—apart from the natural hostility of atheists to the claims of religion and of some Protestants to the pretensions of the Pope—lies in where his logic leads him. If the love of each human life is a duty, and the foundation of a civilised order, it follows that “every crime against life is an attack on peace.” In modern, particularly Western, society those crimes against life are not committed chiefly in genocide or in war, although we are not free of either, but in abortion and euthanasia, the former now almost universally permitted in rich countries, the latter fast gaining acceptance. For anyone devoted to the “culture of life,” these should be peculiarly abhorrent acts because they cannot be justified as punishment of the guilty or by the dire necessity of self-defence: they are not only the destruction of life, but of innocent life, and that is what they remain even if they are carried out by people whose motives are compassionate. A child in the womb is totally in the care and trust of its mother, and her responsibility is correspondingly grave. A person at the end of life is probably in pain, probably old, and almost certainly “no use” to the world of getting and spending: all the more reason, then, for the respect for life to prevail over expediency. Instead, such killings are justified in the name of individual freedom, as if such freedom can hope for long to coexist with a readiness to kill individuals.

Even if the Pope is wrong in his moral conclusions, he is surely right in his analysis of our discontents in this sense—that a society that cannot agree about the value that should be put on human life has no common basis for the rest of its morality, and will therefore be disordered. But would it not be a good idea for those who call themselves liberals to be liberal-minded enough to consider the even more radical possibility that he *is* right? Unfortunately, those who dominate our moral culture believe that they are “anti-establishment” and progressive, and so they excoriate all attacks on their views as reactionary. Yet it is they who do not question, who assume that what the Age does is right just because the Age does it—and regard those who challenge them with a dismissive contempt worthy of the Pharisees.



'This Sunday I intend to talk about the seriousness of the population explosion.'

THE SPECTATOR 22 April 1995

A clean blast of the papal trumpet against the monstrous regiment of death

Paul Johnson

The modern world began early in the 19th century, when the great triad of technology, democracy and liberalism first got a grip on the western world. The rest of that brilliant century witnessed its apparent triumph—free societies, the end of slavery, miraculous improvements in public health, living standards, literacy, speed and safety of travel: steady advances which kept on accumulating right up to 1914.

Thereafter, the 20th century demonstrated the dark side of modernity, the way in which the demolition of ancient and no doubt inefficient and obscurantist political and social structures could open the gates to something infinitely more horrible: totalitarianism, the two competing progressive tyrannies of Communism and Nazism, what Evelyn Waugh called “the modern world in arms, huge and hideous.” From 1917, when totalitarianism first set up its rule in a major state to the final collapse of Soviet Communism at the end of the 1980s was three-quarters of a century, torn out of human history and made evil and barbarous.

Crueller things were done during those decades, on a larger scale and with more devilish refinement, than ever before in the sad story of mankind. It was a terrifying experience of the risks modernity holds. We have, I think, learned some at least of the lessons, though we have not yet finished clearing up the moral squalor—China is still a totalitarian state, and its gulag contains 20 million people, more than Stalin’s did at any one time.

Still, the totalitarian century is behind us, and we have learned to see the state as it is: useful, even friendly when small and chained, a mortal enemy when it breaks its constitutional bonds. That will not be the problem during the 21st century. But it is already evident what we shall have to fear. In our own century, we allowed vicious men to play with the state, and paid the penalty of 150 million done to death by state violence. In the 21st century, the risk is that we will allow men—and women too—to play with human life itself. And by play I mean to use and abuse and change the life-forces as though there were

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no laws except those we ourselves determine.

I was much struck last September by an exchange which took place at an Oxford conference on medical ethics which my wife organised at St. Anne's College. One of the speakers, Melanie Philips, used the phrase "the sanctity of human life." Another, a dauntingly clever philosopher, interjected, "Now wait a moment—let's look at that expression, 'the sanctity of life.' You may be right. Perhaps human life *is* sacred to us. But I don't know it as a fact. Prove it to me. *Why* should human life be sacred?"

I found this a chilling moment, and many of those to whom I described the exchange found it a chilling moment too. I had always thought that the sanctity of life was one of those "truths" which sensible men and women "held to be self-evident." It did not need to be proved. It just was. Proving it is not easy. I doubt if I could prove it. But then I do not need to prove it because I know it to be true as surely as I know I am a human being. I think most of us feel that way. There are a number of beliefs to do with behaviour and morality and civilisation which are so self-evident that the request to prove them creates uneasiness.

Yet that is precisely the kind of uneasiness we are going to experience in the 21st century. All kinds of axiomatic certitudes about human life will come under challenge from the innovators who plan to use new technology to "improve" the human condition, just as the Nazis and the Communists planned to use the state to improve it. There are of course continuities between the two forms of human and social engineering. The Nazi plan was to "cleanse" the human race by a form of eugenics which involved eliminating Jews, gypsies, Slavs and other types of *Untermenschen*. Communist eugenics involved eliminating the exploitative bourgeoisie and introducing a new, cleansed kind of human being, without acquisitive instincts. Looking back, it is hard, now, to decide which was the more dangerous kind of nonsense. Both involved mega-murder, and both rested on the assumption that those in authority have the right to make up the moral rules as they go along. The innovators who will endeavor to take power in the 21st century and change the rules about human life have, likewise, a contempt for absolute morality and a belief that morals and laws should be relative, and changed from time to time to suit the convenience of men and women.

They are having their will already. Last year in Britain alone 168,000 unborn children were lawfully destroyed, and the number of abortions which have been legally conducted in the world exceeds the numbers killed by both the Nazi and Communist tyrannies. At the other end of the life-span,

euthanasia is already lawful in the Netherlands, or at any rate unpunished, and efforts are being made to introduce it here and everywhere else. Abortion and euthanasia are merely the plinth on which the innovators intend, during the 21st century, to erect a system on which they will be allowed to do anything with human life which technology makes possible.

Pope John Paul II has chosen this moment to publish his new encyclical *The Gospel of Life*. It firmly restates the sanctity of human life as an absolute: it defends human life in all its manifestations in a manner which is robustly grounded in natural and divine law, unassailable, unalterable and eternal, and it identifies all acts terminating innocent human life, however speciously defended by courts and parliaments, by philosophers and even churchmen, as forms of murder. The Pope's teaching on human life is internally coherent and consistent, massively brave and unfashionable, a hard doctrine to follow—as all good teaching is—and will be resisted and ridiculed and cursed by all the evil forces of the modern world.

May this marvellous old man live to see the year 2,000, so that his frail but firm and clear voice can trumpet forth absolute truth at the very dawn of the 21st century before the agents of death get to work on it.

What Every Young Woman Should Know About Catholicism

Mary Kenny

It is often said, today, not only by opponents of the Catholic Church but not unusually by critics within the Church, that Catholicism in general, and Pope John Paul II in particular, are oppressive to women. Sometimes it is added, patronisingly, that the Holy Father holds these “male chauvinist” views because he is *Polish*.

To deal with the last matter first, it is not at all characteristic of Polish culture to be unenlightened about women. On the contrary: Poland has a particularly progressive history in the encouragement and education of women. Consider Marie Curie, the most famous female name in science, Nobel prize winner of 1911, and honoured by France in its pantheon of great minds. But although French by marriage, Marie Curie was, of course, Polish by birth and education—born Marie Skłodowska in Warsaw in 1867—and she became a scientist because long before British or American universities opened their portals to women, in Poland they were attending universities, becoming scientists, becoming doctors. In the 19th century, well before women in English-speaking countries were gaining access to medical school, women in Poland were graduating as doctors without any impediment. Nor, interestingly, had the Poles any false prudery about it being improper for a woman to study anatomy: Polish nuns had been nursing wounded soldiers in war since at least the 17th century, and had a perfectly practical approach to the ills of the human body.

The frequently-aired prejudice that Catholicism is “repressive” to women is partly an illustration of how unaware of history so many people are today. For historically, Catholicism was far more apt to be criticized for being “a woman’s religion.” An English Victorian Tory Prime Minister, indeed, described Catholicism (he was of course thinking of the Irish) as “A perfectly suitable religion for women and peasants.” Lecky, the great moral historian of the 19th century, was, as a Protestant, critical of Catholicism on several grounds, one of which was its “femininity.”

“It can hardly, I think, be questioned,” he wrote in his *History of European Morals*, “that in the great religious convulsions of the sixteenth century the feminine type followed Catholicism, while Protestantism inclined more to the masculine type. . . . Catholicism commonly softens,

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while Protestantism strengthens, the character; but the softness of the first often degenerates into weakness, and the strength of the second into hardness." Lawrence Stone (in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*), makes the point that the Protestant Reformation did women a considerable disservice: it curtailed and restricted women's education by closing down the convents (and thus many of the sources of women's learning as well as women's spiritual and even economic power—many of the great abbesses were also great landowners) and subjecting women more stringently to the command of the husband. "All the Magisterial Reformed churches stressed the subordination of wives to husbands, summed up in John Milton's terse description of sex-typed obligations: 'He for God only, she for God in him.'"

Historically, Catholic culture had been feminine culture not only in Lecky's sense, but also in the high visibility of women in the Church, as abbesses, as holy women, as nuns, as teachers, as married women who, once their own maternal duties were fulfilled, had a wide role in the Church and community. We can see this in the lives of the saints: consider St. Isabel of Portugal, who founded a shelter for homeless women back in the fourteenth century (a peace-maker, she also followed her son onto the battlefield to plead with him not to make war). St. Angela of Brescia in Italy, who died in 1540, spent much of her life as a travelling teacher and tutor and founded the Ursuline teaching order of nuns. Or St. Bridget of Sweden, mother of eight children, who founded the Bridgettine order and quite frequently travelled to Rome—in the 14th century—to give advice to the Pope. Or, indeed, St. Catherine of Siena, to whom Pope John Paul II is particularly devoted: she was born the seventeenth child, became a religious against her parents' wishes, a mystic, a mediator in the armed conflict between Florence and the papal government, a significant advisor to Pope Urban VI, and carried on a varied correspondence with a wide range of characters, including an English soldier.

Far from Catholic tradition being oppressive to women, Catholic history is full of energetic and enterprising religious women, and the Holy Father has shown himself appreciative of this tradition, particularly naming Catherine and that other very great doctor of the Church, Teresa of Avila, as exemplars. The Pope's biblical interpretations of the role of women both in the Old Testament and in the Christian Gospels emphasize very strongly both the dignity of women, and the *wholeness* of the woman as person. In *The Dignity of Women* Pope John Paul quotes with approval and full endorsement the words of Paul VI: "With Christianity, more than

in any other religion, and since its very beginning, women have had a special dignity, of which the New Testament shows us many important aspects . . . it is evident that women are meant to form a part of the living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not all their potentialities have yet been made clear."

Man and woman, says John Paul II, are quite clearly equal, or "human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image." And when St. Paul tells us that in Christ there is neither male nor female, he is referring to the spiritual nature of human beings. Since "God is spirit" there is no "feminine" nor "masculine" of the divine. "Thus even 'fatherhood' in God is completely divine and free of the 'masculine' bodily characteristics proper to human fatherhood." Pope John Paul II subscribes absolutely to the spiritual equality of male and female.

But of course when he turns to human nature, he perceives the male and female as different and complementary, a view that is entirely consistent with biology, psychology and human experience. He sees that the roles and vocations of the sexes *are* evolving and interprets all that in the light of the Creator's plan; but he values women for themselves, not as *ersatz* men: "In the name of liberation from male 'domination,' women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine 'originality,'" he writes. "There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not 'reach fulfillment,' but instead will *deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness*. It is indeed an enormous richness. In the biblical description, the words of the first man at the sight of the woman who had been created are words of admiration and enchantment, words which fill the whole history of man on earth." John Paul's view of women is not only respectful: it is also rather poetic.

The Pope irritates modern Political Correctness because he does not and will not subscribe to the fashionable but entirely erroneous and anti-scientific view that men and women are the same, save for a minor detail or two of genital engineering. Chromosome testing has proved that men and women *are* different down to every cell in their bodies, and all the research points to similar differences in brain structure. This is the Pope's approach too, but he emphasizes the positive in *Vive la différence*. "The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity," the Pope has written. "They are merely different. Hence a woman, as well as a man, must understand her 'fulfillment' as a person, her dignity and vocation, on the basis of these resources, according to the richness of the femininity which she received on the day of creation and

which she inherits as the 'image and likeness of God' that is specifically hers. The *inheritance of sin* suggested by the words of the Bible—'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'—*can be conquered* only by following this path. The overcoming of this evil inheritance is, generation after generation, the task of every human being, whether woman or man. For whenever man is responsible for offending a woman's personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and his own vocation."

Of course, as we understand instinctively, there is a wider agenda of opposition to the Holy Father because he has defended human life against the materialism of the birth controllers and population planners who tend to see the human race as a problem which must be reduced or eliminated. There are those—including liberal Catholics—who speak abrasively, even abusively, against John Paul II because they find his strictures vexatious and inconvenient to some elements of "personal choice." So be it. But it is an error to see either the Pope or the Catholic tradition—or indeed the Polish tradition in which he is formed—as being anti-woman. Catholicism, honoring Mary as co-redemptrix, Catholicism which developed chivalry in order to restrain and stigmatize violence against women, Catholicism which put women in the center of the divine order, in painting and in the stories of the saints as well as in Biblical scholarship, has and always has had an extraordinarily strong sense of the feminine. Not for nothing is its teaching authority called *Mater et Magistra*—"Mother and Teacher." It is in this context of cultural values and spiritual tradition that the Holy Father must be appreciated.

Habits Make the Woman

Lynette Burrows

It may be an apocryphal tale, but word has it that the Pope once made a little joke to the effect that the last socialist on earth would be an American nun. Alas, we know what he means, even in England! Whether he said it in fact or not, the joke is an acknowledgement of the trouble the Pope has had, and is having with a certain number of nuns. He did have rather similar problems with priests a few years ago, when they all seemed to be falling over themselves to be what *we* called “trendy” and *they* called “relevant.” But that phase seems to have passed its peak, at least in Britain. The young priests one meets nowadays are quite remarkably confident “Pope’s men,” and if one ever meets a clerical “swinger” he is almost always over fifty.

Father Michael Seed, the young priest who has received so many well-known people into the Catholic Church in the last few years, could be from another age in his dress, manner and opinions and yet, as *The Times* noted recently, such has been his success in converting the English upper classes to Catholicism that the expression “going to seed” has acquired a new meaning in London.

The same transformation has not happened to nuns, and one wonders why. It is probably true that the only nuns we ever hear from in the media are those high-profile types who grab the headlines because of their anti-papal views, and that the same ones crop up over and over again, in seemingly-unrelated areas of dissent. But it is also true that many schools and convents have had to close for want of new recruits to the religious life. What has been a sad disappointment is that they have not, as priests have done, produced a comparable, strongly traditional counter-movement which could demonstrate, beyond all argument, which approach was the more successful.

Unlike the Pope, whose advice and guidance his female critics in the religious life have spurned and belittled, these dissident nuns have completely misread the great battle that is currently taking place for the survival of the non-negotiable sanctity of innocent human life. They have slavishly followed instead the dictates of the fashionable world and have pursued an agenda set for them by feminists whose ideas underpin, and

Lynette Burrows, an English journalist and broadcaster, is perhaps best known for her book *Good Children* (which the *Financial Times* described as “so old-fashioned it is positively radical”).

indeed make possible, the great attack on the sanctity of human life that is enshrined in abortion and all its attendant evils.

It is a strange and almost eerie thing, the extent to which women are implicated in what the Pope describes in *Evangelium Vitae* as our “culture of death.” It is probably true to say that never before has a particular evil that has beset the world been so squarely the preserve of women. Men of course are implicated and, in a reversal of roles from the Garden of Eden, are the tempters and the agents. But in Western society, they could do nothing without women’s consent.

In the past, religious quarrels have fractured the peace innumerable times; struggles for land and power have occupied history for decades; slavery cast its shadow for centuries, as have other socio-political systems applied by tyrants. But women, since they have had their finger on the “destruct” button, have downed more people than were ever lost in a single war; four million in this country, more in Europe. That is the true monument to their emancipation in the twentieth century and if ever a phenomenon deserved the description of “Women’s Issue” it is this—literally and figuratively.

The Pope has picked up this ominous development in world culture and addresses its pivotal importance in *Evangelium Vitae*. The Catholic Church has always been criticized more for its opposition to contraception than because of its stance on abortion. Most people, if the truth be told, do not like abortion and know that they can only support it as long as they don’t see it. On contraception, they feel on firmer ground.

The encyclical insists upon the sanctity of human life at all stages of its development, whatever hardship is involved in its defense. As a matter of fact, the encyclical arrives at an opportune time: for many people, recent developments in the field of fertility have left many formerly sanguine supporters of contraception distinctly uneasy.

Contraception?—yes of course; every woman’s right, etc. and etc. So also the Morning After Pill?—Well, yes, as a last resort.

But if it is OK to kill a newly formed embryo, it must be OK to experiment with it. I mean, it cannot have any value or rights if it can be killed on the say-so of a fifteen-year-old girl and the ring of a chemist’s till. Think of the possible benefits.

Hang on though. Didn’t we execute German doctors for doing that, within living memory? Yes, but the German doctors were wrong, weren’t they? They killed people whom they decided were not fit to live. Lots of them. They killed people in hospitals, prisons and then in concentration camps. They started to do experiments on human beings—*then*

they moved on to embryos. Um! Is that worrying?

The Pope's big gun, though he is far too subtle to spell it out, is that it is all the same mind-set, informed by the same God-less principle, that human life is not sacred; therefore anything expedient is permitted. Even people without much imagination are beginning to see how it may be possible to arrive at the same moral position as the very clever and sophisticated Germans of 55 years ago, from the other end of the spectrum.

Against this background of the truly vital teaching of the Church on this matter, the word "betrayal" is appropriate to describe the public support given by those nuns and religious who have allied themselves with some of the ideas of feminism and used them to attack the Pope. It is no good their trying to distance themselves from the big issues of feminist doctrine, whilst using the language of the ghastly sisterhood in other areas where it suits them. It is using a brutal association as a means of intimidating those whom you mean to influence.

"You are either with Me, or you are against Me," said Jesus, and the time for compromise based on a misunderstanding of the opposition is gone. The backside of modern culture is firmly placed on the slippery slope and the momentum of our descent will soon become irresistible. The Pope knows this and has thrown everything into the fight that the media likes to travesty as the "politics of the sexual revolution."

His is a presence that has quickened the conscience of the world. Without him there would be no Opposition Party. None whatever—and yet his constant exhortations, which have been so crucial in drawing the attention of the world to the destruction of the moral order, have failed to galvanize the one, entirely female, organization within the Church.

Despite the enormous challenge presented by the moral free-fall all around them, the biggest movement amongst nuns is for the feminization of religion. In the face of the mighty struggle which is going on for the soul of mankind, they have raised their poor little banners inscribed with their habitual complaint, "Look at US!" Is it any wonder that the contemporary world hardly notices them?

However, there is an interesting angle of this perceived loss of the relevance of nuns, which is signified by the fact that, though they are only a minority, the only segment of them to have made any impact on the modern world are those who espouse the aggressive self-assertion of feminism. For the rest, probably the majority of them, we don't even know they are there.

We live opposite the University Botanic Gardens in Cambridge, on one

side of which is a large old-people's home run by nuns, and on the other a large girl's convent school. I do not know a single nun from either establishment, despite the fact that our large and improvident family all go to Mass every week. The nuns may go out occasionally but we have no way of knowing. They are there and almost certainly do good works every day of their lives. We know the Health Visitors in their blue uniforms and even greet the policeman by name. But the nuns are invisible.

There was a time when their presence in a community was strikingly visible. A nun in traditional regalia, gliding along like a boat under full sail, was a fine sight and one which instantly brought to mind a host of philosophical questions. Why were these women different? What made them choose to give up children and family in order to serve a community—what sort of faith was it that could sustain such a decision?

All these thoughts could be prompted merely by seeing a nun cross a street a hundred yards ahead. Such is the visual impact of costume, as the fashion world well understands. Clothing is a statement, an assertion which speaks to people without the necessity of an introduction. It is a vital resource when it comes to selling your ideas, and stating your credentials; as that guru of the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan, pointed out: "the medium is the message."

Once a nun no longer wears the recognizable dress of her calling, she forfeits not only the automatic mystique, which is really a form of unspecified respect, due to her role. She also cuts herself off from the accumulated respect earned by the generations of nuns before her. Without her habit, she is a woman who has to create her own image which is a very difficult thing to do, particularly when you do not have a lot of money. You end up looking pointlessly down-at-the-heel, rather than resolutely un-materialistic. Businessmen, lawyers, policemen and priests, all use a uniform dress to define their role, and it is impossible to imagine them without its help. On a more frivolous level, the hilarious scene in *The Blues Brothers* where the mountainous nun terrifies the two heroes at their old school, with a ferocity that is undaunted by the fact that the two are now grown men, owes its entire effect to the fact that her habit says everything you need to know about her, and her relationship with them.

Now, it is a well-known fact that women cannot live without the respect of others. It is probably biologically based, and is certainly deep in their psychology. Not being as physically strong as men, their equilibrium is maintained by means of their self-respect, which depends very much on the respect shown to them. There may be exceptions to this rule, but not

enough to base a policy on. Women are serious creatures because they are the agents of the serious business of producing and rearing the next generation.

Therefore, it was not a trivial thing that nuns did when they abandoned the adornment which had been the outward expression of their distinctive status. It was a very significant thing, and it left many of them unable to function in their role.

Many of them are, indeed, exceptional and dynamic women who would, in any other walk of life, either wear clothes which expressed this richness and difference—or a distinctive costume which would fulfil the same function. Having to go about dressed like unsuccessful social workers has undermined the ability of certain of them to relate to the world, and their morale has effectively collapsed. They look outside of their work as nuns to find something which will make people notice and acknowledge them.

Hence the attraction of feminism with its aggressive self-dramatization, the pretensions to almost occult powers and a thirsting after the power of men. The media beats a path to their doors because, even if they were the last women on earth to be feminists, it would be tremendously important to let the world know that they were Roman Catholic nuns!

It is very sad that something as seemingly small as appearance could have contributed to the demise of nuns as a radical and sorely needed force in society. I suppose the Bible prepares us for the phenomenon of large results from small mistakes, in the story of Adam and Eve and the apple. It is true that women, who are the rocks upon which families and communities are built, can yet, in another context, be completely destabilized by something small.

But when you think of it, that word “appearance” has a resonance that goes beyond its obvious meaning. The good Lord Himself did not disdain appearance when He made the world. The Habit of all those holy and devoted women who once wore it, would give the feminists who live without it now perhaps more than they know. They might even discover, from the number of people who talk to them simply because they know they are nuns, just how much they are needed by all those people that God had in His mind when He called them to serve not only Him, but us all.

John Paul II: Single Issue Voter

Paul Scalia

From the beginning, those involved in the anti-abortion movement have been accused of being “single issue” voters or, as one person told me, “single issue fanatics.” Our response has always been the same: of course we are; ours is the one issue upon which all others depend—it cannot be just one issue among many—life is *the* issue.

Evangelium Vitae, the Pope’s latest missive against the culture of death, shows that we are in good company. John Paul II is also a “single issue fanatic.” In fact, he expounds this position better than “the movement” ever has. In *Evangelium Vitae* he employs a combination of modern language, traditional philosophy, and ancient Christian proclamation to show that life *is* the primary issue in the world today.

And he knows how to address the modern world. Like a good father speaking to his children, the Pope calmly explains to modern society why it must protect life: for its *own* good. While everyone knows the importance of this issue for the Church, this Pope insists on its relevance for the Church’s opponents as well. All too often her foes describe the Church as sexist, authoritarian, out of date, and worse. They point to Her opposition to abortion and euthanasia as proof—while claiming that they themselves want only dignity, freedom, and equality. Well, *Evangelium Vitae* also proclaims the importance of human rights, freedom, democracy, and the dignity of the human person, thus addressing the concerns of the modern world. But the encyclical argues that the only way to attain these goods in a *true* sense is to foster a respect for life.

To be sure, John Paul understands freedom, justice and human rights differently from his opponents. This fundamental difference is the cause, not the symptom, of the opposition. But the fact remains that this Pope speaks the language of his opponents, and uses *their* agenda to gain a hearing in the modern ear.

Thus *Evangelium Vitae* views the protection of life as integral to even the most radical ideas. The encyclical contains words of support for environmentalism, sex education, even a “new feminism.” (Ironically, the only one proposing an alternative to the disaster we call feminism is a 75-year-old celibate man!) He not only addresses the fashionable causes but also shows how they are best achieved by *his* cause. In short, the Pope says

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that if you want true justice, freedom, and dignity for all people—if you want what the world *says* it wants—then first protect life, which is the key to all these desires. Without respect for and, indeed, veneration of life, modern society will collapse.

Because life is central to what the world wants, John Paul reasons that the rejection of life is at the heart of modernity's failure. As *Evangelium Vitae* demonstrates, the Enlightenment not only caused philosophical breakdown, but its legacy also threatens life itself.

That John Paul rejects Enlightenment thought should surprise no one, certainly not anyone who has read his *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (or even *Time's* Man of the Year article). In *Evangelium Vitae*, after listing the many and various threats to human life, the Pope asks: "How did such a situation come about?" He answers with a litany of causes: subjectivism, individualism, materialism, a perverse idea of freedom, and—most of all, "*The eclipse of the sense of God*" [his emphasis]—all of them the children of the Enlightenment.

The implications of the Pope's message should frighten us. He says in effect that the present attacks on life, since they have the Enlightenment as their ultimate source, are not exclusive to anyone, and so cannot be assigned to a particular group or nation. The problem is modern culture itself. It is ironic that even as we still pursue aged Nazi leaders to punish their crimes, new and more destructive holocausts, such as abortion, flourish in our most "advanced" countries. We certainly must continue to condemn Nazi atrocities, but we can no longer view them as singular or exclusively German.

This century has witnessed similar and even greater crimes, perpetrated under Stalin, and Mao, and Pol Pot—not to mention the "politically-correct" horrors spawned by the likes of Margaret Sanger, or the "medicide" (i.e., doctor-induced "termination") personified by the evil Jack "Dr. Death" Kevorkian.

After his examination of the ubiquitous threats to life, John Paul focuses on the central problem: How can we change not just our behavior, but our entire culture? The issue of life is so central, and the source of the threats so deep, that the solution demands nothing less than a genuine and complete renewal, a "new evangelization," you might say. The Pope says exactly that: *Evangelium Vitae* is the latest installment in his script for the New Evangelization.

Some will call him "quixotic" for his crusade against the culture of death. After all, what could be more futile than his defense of life against

the lure of easy abortion and “cost-effective” euthanasia? In fact, the situation is far worse than we “moderns” think. As he has done throughout his pontificate, the Pope proclaims in *Evangelium Vitae* that the only way to attain the fulfillment sought by our culture—and to overcome the Enlightenment’s legacy—is to follow Jesus Christ. To a world engaged in a desperate and much-needed search for meaning, he constantly quotes the words of the Second Vatican Council: “Christ fully reveals man to himself.” Further, to a culture sick from the forbidden fruits of the Enlightenment, these words are, as the Pope says in his *Letter to Families* (1994), “the reply, so long awaited, which the Church has given to modern rationalism.” Life is central for the Holy Father because it begins and ends in Jesus Christ. Meaning that he is much more than a single-issue fanatic: he is a Christian.

In the final analysis, the novelty of *Evangelium Vitae* is not in the errors it condemns, or the teaching it proposes, but in its constant focus on Christ: it seeks to convince the world not only of the sanctity of life, but also of the truth of Christianity—it does not advance merely philosophical arguments against abortion and euthanasia.

Notice also that the encyclical does not content itself with a brief declaration of teaching, as *Humanae Vitae* did. Rather, the Pope gives an in-depth analysis of the problems *and* a plan for change. *Evangelium Vitae* is less about life than it is about *the Life*, which is why John Paul II places the *Evangelium* before the *Vitae*.



*'I see you're an atheist – have you thought
about the church?'*

“The wound in your heart”

David C. Reardon

I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.

Evangelium Vitae, Article 99

The casual reader of Article 99 in The Gospel of Life will appreciate the compassion with which John Paul II addresses women who have had abortions. But the real genius of this passage will be most fully appreciated by those women who have actually had an abortion, and also those who have worked to help such women overcome the grief and despair which are obstacles to healing and reconciliation.

For this writer, who has been studying the post-abortion experience for a dozen years, this powerful paragraph is both an impressive example of pastoral care and an important statement of practical theology. Why? Because abortion thrives in silence and darkness, a darkness sustained by fear—because above all else, those who have had abortions are fearful of condemnation. This fear drives them to contribute to the darkness with a variety of excuses, or to retreat in shame into the shadows of silence. But if, as the Pope seeks to do, we can reduce the fear of condemnation, and build up hope for healing instead, the silence can be broken, the excuses abandoned, and light replace the darkness. Then it might become possible that aborted women themselves would become, in the Pope's words, “the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life.” They

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are certainly qualified to describe abortion as the despoiler of women, not their liberator.

John Paul understands hearts which have been broken by sin. He knows they are vulnerable to the self-condemning despair which deprives souls of hope and can become an obstacle to repentance. Therefore, the Pope's pastoral goal is not to condemn those who have had an abortion, but rather to bless them with hope.

Hope, he teaches, is found not by hiding from the truth, but by facing the truth with an honest courage. Beyond acknowledging the death of one's child, it is also necessary to fully understand what happened. This includes recognizing the situational and personal factors (such as coercion, abandonment, and deception) which would mitigate one's own culpability. Confronting the truth, then, means confronting, and better understanding, ourselves. This is not an easy task. The courage needed to face the truth must be bolstered by the assurance that forgiveness is ready to be had from the "Father of Mercies."

But most impressive of all is the Pope's assurance to grieving mothers that, through God's mercy, "You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord." Consider what the Pope is saying: nothing is eternally lost, everything can be restored. How can this be? Because 1) you can be forgiven by both God *and your child*, and 2) your aborted child "is now living in the Lord." Your child is not dead, but is an immortal person who is alive forever, and resting in the bosom of Christ no less!

That single sentence is of tremendous importance. John Paul understands that women who have had abortions—and the men involved—can be trapped by despair into believing that, having deprived their child of the gift of life, there is no way to "repair" their mistake. And so their sin is "unforgivable," or at least, in justice, *should be* unforgivable. But the Pope responds that it is not the child who is deprived of life (for the child lives on in the Lord), but rather those who have not yet repented, who are without life.

The assurance that aborted children are living still is of special importance to Catholic women. Many have agonized over the fear that even if God forgives their sin, they have condemned their unborn children to an eternity in Limbo. But here the Pope is assuring mothers that such an exchange will not be necessary. Instead, "you will be able to ask forgiveness from your child."

The Pope's teaching here is an elaboration upon statements in the new Catechism (see Section 1261) which suggest that God has provided a means for admitting unbaptized innocents into heaven. Indeed, the official teaching documents of the Catholic Church exclude any theory which holds that salvation of unbaptized innocents is not possible.* Thus, the theological construct called Limbo, which once provided a practical example of how God *might* mediate His command that we be baptized with His demand for justice, is apparently being set aside in favor of an optimistic trust in God's mercy.

This confidence that God has provided a means for sanctification of unbaptized innocents is also supported by Scripture. Paul teaches that God's providence and mercy extend even to the unborn who have yet to do either good or evil (*Rom.*, 9: 11). Though all are stained by original sin, all whom Christ claims for Himself will live in Him (1 *Cor.*, 15: 22-23). That Christ should not claim the unborn as His own is hard to imagine—to man, it seems contrary to both reason and revelation. Jesus repeatedly expressed His special love of infants and children, saying: "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (*Luke*, 18: 15-16). And on another occasion, He stood a little child in the midst of His disciples and said: "It is no part of your heavenly Father's plan that a single one of these little ones shall ever come to grief" (*Matt.*, 18: 14; other renderings of this are that no child should ever "perish" or be "lost"). Not so incidentally, in both of these cases the children whom Jesus was holding were unbaptized.

The Pope's message to the parents of aborted children, the mercy of God, becomes an invitation to healing and a call to both earthly and heavenly life. But beyond building up women's confidence that "nothing is definitively lost" and assuring them of God's forgiveness, John Paul also encourages them to seek the help and support of those who can assist them in their emotional healing. In this advice the Pope is acknowledging that the profound effects of abortion extend beyond the spiritual realm. While absolution can remove the guilt, it takes the help of others to remove the shame. Only then can women draw upon their experience with abortion and become "eloquent defenders" of life.

*Vatican II documents include the dogmatic statement that "For since Christ died for all (*Rom.*, 8: 32) . . . we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). This statement would seem to weigh against the theory of Limbo. If an unborn child is denied the opportunity of baptism by water then the guarantee of "the possibility of being made partners" in Christ's redemption would require that some other means of sanctification be available.

On Fame in Print

Robert M. Patrick

I am now convinced that Pope John Paul II is famous.

Don't take my word for it. My conclusion is based on an article that appeared in the April 29 issue of *The Economist*; it was three full pages long, and all about this Pope—even the headline was simply **THE POPE**, in bold black type, that's all.

That may not impress you unless you know *The Economist*, so I'd better take a moment here to inform the unknowing. It's a weekly magazine, based in London, where its history goes back well over 100 years. But in my opinion (which is shared by many other shrewd observers, you *can* take my word for that), it is the most influential English-language magazine in the world. And it now goes all *over* the world too: You'll find it in Hong Kong as easily as in Paris, and probably in Katmandu as well (I don't personally know about that, though). In New York and Washington it's become the power-*chic* publication.

It's much bigger than our newsweeklies—covering the whole world is a big job—and features “special reports” like for instance “The Future of the Amazon” which always tell you a lot more than you want to know. But mostly it covers what's happening in crisply-written *short* pieces—the latest on O.J. Simpson in half a page (Imagine!), that kind of thing.

That's my point. Devoting three whole pages to one man is, for *The Economist*, shocking profligacy. Especially when the only “news” peg was *Evangelium Vitae*, which would ordinarily get covered in maybe a two-column box. But the editors obviously decided to use it to anchor an in-depth profile of John Paul II himself.

That's just what my Irish grandmother would call this Pope: Himself, the one everybody knows whom you're talking about. And that's pretty much the way *The Economist* writes about John Paul, with awe peeping through the prose. But then how else would you handle a subject if you had to report that “he is not interested in reaching an accommodation with secularism and relativism, but in defeating them”? Especially when you feel constrained to add: “To that end, he wants a church that is disciplined and outspoken—and, to judge by his actions, one remade in his image.”

The Economist is accustomed to looking *down*: all that happens, and the “world leaders” caught up in the action, are viewed loftily from above,

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from whence definitive judgments ink down onto the airspeed pages, the delphic *obiter dicta* often derided at home in London, true (fact is, *The Economist* is quite often just plain *wrong*), but received reverently in Singapore and the Saychelles.

So you can understand why the editors have trouble looking *up* at the Colossus of Rome as he strides comfortably above and beyond them. Such an *un*-accustomed position can cause the kind of stiff-necked prose that keeps cropping up in the article, like this petulant paragraph:

Thus, for John Paul to say in the late 20th century that a judgment must be “definitively held” cannot make it so. And, in an age of mostly free speech and mostly free media, where there is nothing the church can do to gag alternative views outside its own forums, this dogmatic approach may have cost the pope at least as much loyalty as it has won him.

Do you get the feeling that the editors don’t like competition in pontification? I do. I’m no expert, but I do read *The Economist* faithfully—no, better make that regularly, “faithfully” sounds wrong here?—it keeps me up to date on how much I don’t know (not to mention all the stuff I don’t *want* to know). And I’m persuaded that the editors do better at predicting which way the stock markets will go than they do at forecasting the rise and fall of loyalties they don’t understand.

That may be the trouble right there: they don’t understand. For all its world-wide reputation, *The Economist* remains quintessentially English, which may make the writing better, but not necessarily what lurks behind it. I keep odd quotations (it’s an old habit from my Boy Reporter days), and one that may be just the right one here came from an Englishman named Duff Cooper, a once-well-known crony of Winston Churchill (his wife, Lady Diana, was a great beauty of her time, I have her picture too), who once said “For the vast majority of English people there are only two kinds of religion: the Roman Catholic, which is wrong, and the rest, which don’t matter.”

That sure catches the tone of *The Economist* whenever it wrestles with Rome.

You get a strong whiff of it right at the start, in the short synopsis *The Economist* puts over major articles. Usually they are pretty *neutral*—you get the party line in the article itself. But this time the writer couldn’t wait:

Uncompromising to a fault, John Paul II has marked his church more deeply than any other pope has done in modern times. But if his dogmatic approach has inspired many Roman Catholics, it has dismayed and perplexed others

Leading with “Uncompromising to a fault” isn’t my idea of neutrality. And a little later he writes: “The most far-reaching way in which John

Paul II has sought to impose his authority has been through his public pronouncements and teachings.” That’s a bit much from a magazine that does *both* of those things every week, voluminously (the issue I’m looking at has over 100 pages in it!). Anyway, what is the Pope of Rome *supposed* to be doing if not preaching and teaching? That’s his job.

Pardon the vanity, but I think your servant has got it right: *The Economist* just doesn’t like this Pope’s competition. Consider this line: “Besides, for most Roman Catholics, the pope is far away.” Kind of wistful, isn’t it? You can just tell that the writer wishes John Paul *were* far away, instead of being everywhere at once, which is the perception this peripatetic Pontiff projects.

But you have to admire the professional competence *The Economist* brings to its appointed task of imposing its own viewpoint. As you would expect, a magazine with world-wide responsibilities is very concerned about “population control”—it supports the de-population programs beloved of the UN and our own President Bill Clinton—so it, er, naturally supports all forms of “birth control” (including of course the most efficient one, abortion). Confident that such views are shared by all “reasonable” people, the article zings the Pope with “He made a point of saying in ‘Evangelium Vitae’ that his bishops unanimously agreed with the church teaching on abortion. A similiar reference to a unanimity of opinion on birth control was conspicuous by its absence.”

The Economist spies other vulnerabilities as well. For instance, in our Age of Freedom, people are free to disagree, “particularly on matters that touch their own private lives directly”—you know, like *morality*. But the Pope just doesn’t get it: “He has no time for ‘cafeteria Catholicism’—the notion that people can pick and choose what papal rulings to obey.” He *is* a hard case.

Ours is also the Age of Democracy, which has, we are assured, triumphed globally in the wake of the Evil Empire’s collapse (of which, if I may say so, John Paul was the prime mover). Yet the Pope isn’t “prepared to concede that secular institutions”—for example “the ballot box”—are “a source of moral authority to rival his own.” He has “little use” for democracy in the Church itself, and actually believes that truth “is not revealed by majority vote”!

What can you do with someone as politically *incorrect* as that? Not much, obviously—such ideas, added to his outdated notions about “sexual ethics” (not *morality*, notice), make it easy to caricature John Paul as “a sexually obsessed celibate reactionary.” Take *that*, Pope!

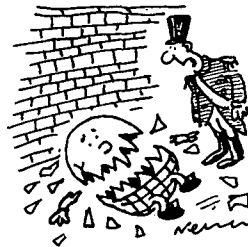
But in victory, *The Economist* turns magnanimous: to simply dismiss

John Paul like that would be to “miss the complexity that makes him so compelling.” How complex is he? Well, as the article recounts for us, he’s visited an Islamic country, and even entered a synagogue—and don’t forget that he went to prison “to forgive his would-be murderer, Mehmet Agca”—the man isn’t *all* bad, he’s just allowed his “larger message to be distorted” by what some German theologians and their ilk have called his “intense fixation” with contraception.

Even so, his “singular view of the world has brought him the biggest audience of any pope this century”—*The Economist* isn’t taking any chances, the fellow might just *win*, better to hedge your bet? Well, not exactly: after the patronizing praise, the editorialist slides back into judgment: “In the end, John Paul’s crusade to assert his authority has proved to be in part a matter of testing it to destruction.” Personally, I like that “in part” part. *What* part—the core of the immemorial papacy, or just some incidentals?—isn’t specified. It’s hard to improve on *that* hedge.

These things require an upbeat ending. You don’t sell papers with *all* doom and gloom. Then too there’s that world-wide Fan Club of John Paul’s out there, some of them might even be smart enough to read *The Economist*, you never know. On the other hand, it can be handled without saying anything upbeat about the incumbent: even if he does live 100 years, as the Poles would have it, Rome is likely to outlive him. Just so, the article ends with this barbed optimism: “A lighter touch from his eventual successor on the throne of Peter may prove to be a surer one.”

Surer for whom? Again, we aren’t told. My own surmise is, *The Economist* yearns just to be rid of this troublesome priest—it’ll worry about the *next* one later. I’m not a betting man myself, but if I were I’d bet on *much* later. No matter: the historical odds are that the next one will be just as popish, unless of course the proverbial Gates prevail, and I wouldn’t bet on that at all.



'I'm afraid you're too expensive to put back together again.'

THE SPECTATOR 18 March 1995

All You Need Is Life

Dominic Lawson

After only two and a half hours' labour Domenica emerged at lunchtime on Thursday 1 June, with a shocked, empty stare on her face. She was also completely blue and inert. "Slow coming round" was the midwife's later, written, observation. Only when the six-pound five-ounce form was finally bullied into breathing did I finally stop asking—in the useless way in which fathers drive busy midwives demented—"Will she be all right? Will she be all right?"

But even after my own abject panic was ended by hearing the first splutterings of a pair of tiny lungs, there remained in the room a faint but palpable tension. The duty pediatrician did not smile while she examined Domenica with what looked, even to my untrained eyes, like professional concern. Then she wheeled the little baby out of the room, and asked me to follow both of them down the corridor, to the office of the senior consultant.

He went through a similar rigmarole of clinical examination, all the while asking a series of seemingly irrelevant questions: What was the condition of any other of my children? What sort of pregnancy had this been? Perfectly normal, I said, except that my wife had broken her leg in four places, half way through her confinement, and was still on crutches. The consultant seemed not to hear this last remark, and interrupted my off-pat explanation of how Rosa had sustained a quadruple spiral fracture of her right leg while trying to get into her car.

"Yes, well, we have a problem."

"What?"

"I am certain that your daughter has Down's syndrome."

This came as an enormous relief. Since our second daughter, Natalia, had emerged last March too premature even for the magic of modern medicine, at 22 weeks' gestation, I had been morbidly anxious throughout the succeeding pregnancy. The consultant's "We have a problem" I instantly interpreted as "This one won't make it, either." His "Your daughter has Down's syndrome" sounded more to me like "But this one will live."

The doctor then repeated his earlier clinical examination, this time giving me an idiot's guide to my daughter's ten-minute-old body. "Here, you

Dominic Lawson is the editor of *The Spectator*, in which this article first appeared on June 17. It is reprinted here with permission. © 1995, The Spectator (1828) Ltd. (London).

see her grip is very weak. She is very floppy. Her head has three fontanelles, instead of the normal two. And, here, her tongue is very large. If you look at her eyes, you'll notice these epicanthal folds, and a slightly Asiatic appearance. If you look at her ears, you might be able to see how they are folded over at the helix. You notice, here, that there are some extra folds of skin behind her neck. Now, if you look at her feet, here, and here, you'll see that there is an unusually large gap between the big and first toes. These, I'm afraid, are all phenotypes of Down's syndrome. Now, to be absolutely certain, we can take a blood sample, and do a chromosomal analysis. But that would be a formality in this case, and is not necessary for my diagnosis."

Two emotions coursed through me as the consultant gave me a guided tour of the stigmata of Down's syndrome. The first was anger. While I understood that the doctor was only doing his professional duty—to explain as clearly and as quickly as possible the condition of his patient—I wanted to shout out, "This is my daughter you are prodding, not some random strip of flesh." The second emotion was love.

This surprised me. While I love my eldest daughter, Savannah, it took me many months to do so. During the earliest part of her life I found her endlessly fascinating, and a source of great pride, but I did not feel the pang of love. I gather that this is quite common among new fathers. Or, at least, that is what I told my wife. Yet now, after so little and so strange an introduction, I felt an intense, almost physically painful love for this third daughter.

It would be a sin of omission not to record that in the succeeding days I did not also feel a sense of grief. Grief at the thought that Domenica's life expectancy is not much more than half her elder sister's. Grief at the thought that she will almost certainly not experience the joy of having children herself. But this grief always co-existed with the feeling of elation which accompanies birth. It is a dizzying mix of emotions, this combination of sadness and elation, and I suspect it is appreciation of this that lies behind the anxiety with which some friends approach us. They want to sympathise and they want to congratulate, but how do they do both at the same time?

My wife has experienced a different form of grief, which, say all the textbooks, is absolutely characteristic of mothers in this predicament. They grieve for the loss of the child they thought they were carrying. Many mothers-to-be seem to have a very clear idea of the nature of the person who is squirming and kicking in their belly. That person does not have Down's syndrome, with all the attendant problems, both physical and

mental. But this sense of two different people, the imaginary perfect child and the real handicapped one, is, of course, no more than a powerful illusion.

It is not even as though Down's syndrome is something which afflicts normal children in the womb, as a result of stress or illness, although that was what many doctors tended to believe until 1959, when a French professor named Lejeune declared that the characteristic features of Down's syndrome were genetic in origin. He discovered that the Down's children had 47 chromosomes in every DNA molecule, instead of the normal 46, and this extra genetic material, amounting to no more than about 50 to 100 genes in all, was the cause of all the differences which later come to light—the sort of differences which my daughter's pediatrician was so anxious to explain to me.

The DNA make-up of a person is settled almost at the moment of conception, when the female and male nuclei, which contain the chromosomes that will endow the offspring with his or her hereditary characteristics, fuse to form a single nucleus. The extra characteristics of the future Down's baby are caused during the first cellular subdivision of that nucleus, when 47 chromosomes are created rather than 46. This cellular self-multiplication is then repeated constantly for approximately 266 days, at the end of which you have a baby ready for delivery.

It is worth spelling this process out because it demonstrates first, that the Down's baby is as much a product of his or her parents' genes (and of their parents') as any other child, and second, that there is no sense in which the Down's baby could ever have been constructed in any other way, once conception had occurred. There is no possible alternative Domenica Lawson without Down's syndrome. That is her identity, her very essence, along with all the other genes she has inherited from us.

Her elder sister was formed by a different merging of the same parental genes, along more orthodox lines, on the night of the Conservatives' victory at the last general election. And the extraordinary similarities of these two girls, at least as babies, also illustrates how wrong it is to think of Down's children as something "other," a mere aberration of nature. Despite all the peculiarities outlined by Domenica's pediatrician, she looks like a twin of her sister, as I am constantly reminded by the picture of Savannah aged two weeks which I carry in my wallet. They have a number of identical facial expressions. And, exactly as Savannah did, Domenica sleeps in an absurd parody of deep thought, with her right fore-finger resting on her top lip and her right thumb appearing to prop up her chin.

One visitor, a good friend who has the endearing habit of uttering

exactly what is on her mind, exclaimed with relief upon seeing Domenica, "Oh I was so frightened about what she would look like. But she looks just like her sister." I do not repeat all this out of parental pride—but to make the point, again, that the Down's children are not monsters formed at random. Of course Domenica's intellectual and physical progress will never be as rapid or fluent as her sister's, and it will doubtless cost both her and us enormous amounts of effort. But the point is, she will continue to develop, however slowly, along lines which will reveal her to be a true mixture of the genes which her parents married in order to perpetuate.

And yet. And yet a whole industry has been developed to make it increasingly improbable that children like Domenica Lawson will be allowed to live. The National Health Service advises all mothers-to-be over 35 to undergo medical procedures which extract fluid from around the foetus, which is then subjected to chromosomal analysis. The NHS provides this service free because the probability of Down's syndrome—far and away the commonest form of congenital mental handicap in the population—appears to grow rapidly when the mother's age increases beyond the mid-thirties.

But these procedures, either chorionic villus sampling or amniosentesis, have a significantly higher statistical risk of causing miscarriage than the 36-year-old mother has of carrying a Down's syndrome baby. The chances of that woman having a Down's baby, regardless of whether or not she has already had such a child in the past, is about one in 300. But even the less risky of the two procedures pressed on middle-aged women by the NHS, chorionic villus sampling, will, in about one case in a hundred, produce a spontaneous abortion.

According to Dr. Miriam Stoppard's *Pregnancy and Birth Book*—which is by no means hostile to these procedures—"very occasionally CVS may lead to rupture of the amniotic sac, infection and bleeding. Even so, the procedure only seems to increase the risk of miscarriage by 1 per cent." Even so? Only 1 per cent? It is amazing that these facts are meant to reassure us. There is method in this madness, however. The NHS will provide, gratis, an abortion, if their tests show that the mother is expecting a Down's baby; an abortion even well after the normal legal limit of 24 weeks into the pregnancy, "if there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped."

This is nothing less than the state-sponsored annihilation of viable, sentient foetuses. In the People's Republic of China, the authorities wait until

such children are born naturally, before starving them to death. In Hitler's Germany, even before the final solution to the Jewish "problem," the Nazis were exterminating wholesale the mentally retarded. In this country the weeding-out process is done before birth, and only with the parents' consent. I do not think, however, that this constitutes a triumph for democracy.

To the extent that this policy is more than half-baked eugenics, it is, to take the most charitable interpretation, based on the utilitarian idea that the child born with a physical or mental handicap will be an unhappy person, so unhappy that he or she would have been better off dead. One needs only to state this proposition to understand how presumptuous it is.

Not surprisingly I have, in the past week, been told by a number of well-meaning people that "they"—meaning children with Down's syndrome—"are particularly happy people." I have no idea if this is true, and I am inherently suspicious of such generalisations. But I see no reason why Domenica should be an unhappier person than her older sister, despite the extra chromosome which she has in her every cell.

Yet one or two acquaintances have still asked us, "Didn't you have the tests?" My wife says she thinks it will be difficult to remain friends with such people. I think they are merely missing the point, although it is a very important point.

Of all the letters which I have received since Domenica was born, perhaps the one which grasped this point best was from a fellow-atheist who wrote, after approving of our not "having the tests": "The reason why [such a decision] is admirable, of course, is that the sanctity of life is not just some obscure abstract principle. A life is a life, and every life can be filled with all kinds of positive things and real happiness—as I am sure your daughter's will be."

At the moment, however, the happier of our children is the elder. She hated being the only child. Indeed she would often wail, heart-rendingly, "I am so only! I am so only!" She is not only any more.

25 Years After:

“California Dreamin’” Becomes a Reality

John Muggeridge

It has now been a full quarter century since *California Medicine*, the official journal of the California Medical Association, published a landmark editorial (in its September, 1970 issue, to be exact) headlined “A New Ethic for Medicine and Society.”¹

What was most impressive about this particular expression of American medical opinion was its author’s candor: he refused to hide behind euphemisms. There were, he wrote, “certain new facts and social realities” which had undermined “the long held Western ethic of intrinsic and equal value for every human life regardless of its stage, condition or status” to such an extent that “abortion is becoming accepted by society as moral, right, and even necessary.” The fact that most Americans still clung to the obsolescent “pro-life” ethic had, he explained, forced champions of the new “quality-of-life” ethic to equivocate.

For example, they had to “separate the idea of abortion from the idea of killing, which continues to be socially abhorrent.” No matter that making this distinction had led them into “a curious avoidance of the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous whether intra- or extra-uterine until death”; while the two ethics continued to coexist, resorting to some such “schizophrenic sort of subterfuge” was necessary.

It was easy enough, of course, for *California Medicine*’s editorialist to speak candidly about abortion. As a subscriber to “the new ethic of relative rather than of absolute and equal values,” he was quite untroubled by the fact that abortion kills. What else could you expect it to do? No, his concern was to make sure that abortion, together with all other necessary population control measures, would kill *usefully*.

Which is where doctors came in. In a world where “man exercises ever more certain and effective control over his numbers, and uses his always comparatively scarce resources to provide the nutrition, housing, economic support, education, and health care in such ways as to achieve his desired quality of life and living,” a doctor’s job would be

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to apply the new ethic.

Not that they would come to it without previous experience: "Medicine's role with respect to changing attitudes toward abortion"² as well as "the part physicians have played in evaluating who is and who is not to be given costly long-term renal dialysis" had, claimed *California Medicine*, already accustomed doctors to "placing relative values on human lives." But *triage* as currently practiced in hospital intensive-care units was a mere foretaste of the sort of therapeutic pruning that human communities could expect in the future, according to this deadly-serious editorialist, because ". . . as the problems of birth control and birth selection are extended inevitably to death selection and death control" and governments, on the advice of scientists, found themselves having to make ever more drastic decisions about "when and when not to use scarce resources," doctors would roam the world distributing death certificates to young and old, so the editorial implied, with the same degree of professional equanimity that foresters display when they put yellow x's on the trees that need felling in overcrowded timberlands.

What brought "A New Ethic For Medicine and Society" to the fore was *Roe v. Wade*. That decision, handed down scarcely twenty-eight months after the now-famous editorial had appeared, displayed the very same "schizophrenic sort of subterfuge" that *California Medicine* advocated in order to cushion the impact on American society of the revolutionary re-writing of traditional morality. Justice Harry Blackmun's majority opinion in *Roe*, with all its talk of "potential life," "persons in the whole sense" and "persons capable of meaningful life" and even persons whose existence remains nothing more than a "theory of life," is a studied collection of phrases which curiously avoid the facts of modern fetology. What could be a clearer example of separating the idea of abortion from the idea of killing than the court's insistence that, even after an unborn baby becomes "viable,"³ his mother may legally abort him if going on with the pregnancy would adversely affect her physical, emotional, psychological or familial well-being? Something the law lets you do to fend off the blues can't really be *killing*.

No wonder, then, that when Senator James L. Buckley defended his proposed Human Life Amendment before the U.S. Senate in May, 1973, he not only quoted extensively from "A New Ethic" but also had the entire editorial read into the *Congressional Record*. Senator Buckley's point was that *Roe v. Wade* endorsed *California Medicine*'s utilitarian morality; hence the need for a Human Life Amendment. "We as a people," he said, "have

been committed by seven men to the 'new ethic'" which "because of the finality of their decisions" and "because there are now no practical curbs on the killing of the unborn to suit the convenience or whim of the mother," meant that "those who continue to believe in the old ethic have no recourse but to resort to the political process."⁴

Senator Buckley was certainly right that *Roe* declared open season on America's unborn. Even the self-professed *pro*-abortion legal scholar, John Hart Ely, criticized the decision for having deprived unborn babies of constitutional protection. Courts, he argued, when they are reviewing legislation that favors men over women, naturally take into account the fact that "compared with men, very few women sit in our legislatures." In judging the abortion cases, then, should not the Supreme Court have come down even more heavily on the weaker party's side? After all, as Professor Ely pointed out, "*No* fetuses sit in our legislatures."⁵

And remember that, as far as the humanity of the unborn is concerned, Professor Ely remained obstinately agnostic. He wanted to legalize abortions, even though honesty compelled him to admit that choosing to have one "ends (or if it makes a difference, prevents) the life of a human being other than the one making the choice."⁶ The truth is, Professor Ely's argument doesn't require that there be a difference between ending and preventing the life of a human being. In his opinion, a state must be allowed to ban the destruction of "fetuses," whatever their degree of personhood, "For it has never been held or even asserted that the state interest needed to justify forcing a person to refrain from an activity, *whether or not that activity is constitutionally protected*, must implicate either the life or the constitutional rights of another person."⁷ Dogs, Professor Ely reminds us, "are not 'persons in the whole sense'" nor do they possess constitutional rights, but governments can still pass laws which prohibit killing them. If the state says "No," you can't kill dogs or, for that matter, burn draft cards, even in the exercise of your First Amendment right of political protest.⁸

Moreover, this business of comparing unborn children to dogs and draft cards is far more than just an exercise in faculty-lounge facetiousness. Professor Ely makes no attempt to hide the fact that thinking about abortion troubles him. He wants to legalize it because "the mother, unlike the unborn child, has begun to imagine a future for herself."⁹ "But God knows," he admits, "I'm not *happy* with that resolution." Abortion, for him, is "too much like infanticide on the one hand, and too much like contraception on the other, to leave one comfortable with any answer; and the moral issue it poses is as fiendish as any philosopher's hypothetical."¹⁰

What made Professor Ely bare his soul in this way? Coming out of the closet as a conscience-stricken pro-abortionist could only weaken his credibility. He claimed to be attacking *Roe v. Wade* purely on constitutional grounds. Why, then, give vent to moral qualms about abortion? Wouldn't he have been wiser to stick to his most powerful weapons—logic and scholarship—rather than leaving the impression that what he was fighting for was not the Constitution but rather his own peace of mind? Perhaps not. Questions of legality and morality don't come apart that easily. The Declaration of Independence, for example, enshrines belief in the sanctity of human life. So Professor Ely is being perfectly consistent when he combines worrying about what abortion does to unborn children with challenging the Supreme Court's decision to invalidate most State laws prohibiting it. Either abortion is not killing, or *Roe v. Wade* needs reversing.

But things haven't worked out that simply. On the killing question, *Roe* refused to take sides. Justice Blackmun wouldn't say when human life begins, on the grounds that "when those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at a consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer." That was a nice cop-out. Blackmun avoided having to perform what *California Medicine* calls "The very considerable semantic gymnastics which are required to rationalize abortion as anything but taking a human life" without coming across as someone who thinks that women must be allowed to exercise their "constitutional right to privacy" even if in so doing they commit infanticide.

But *Roe*'s refusal to take into account the evidence of contemporary fetology provides an even nicer cop-out for abortionists. Invoking it is their equivalent to pleading the Fifth Amendment. They *know* that babyhood predates birth; they even know by how long, having access to the very same imaging equipment that taught Doctor Bernard Nathanson he had presided over 70,000 deaths. No matter. The Supreme Court of the United States refuses to speculate on when human life begins, so why should they? And it's not as if what they're doing has any tincture of criminality. On the contrary: unborn Americans must survive without legal protection for seven months before a State has *any* compelling interest to justify restricting their predators' assault on them. In fact, far from violating the laws of God and man, abortionists, according to *Roe*, have an essential role to play in upholding them. They are civil-rights activists. Certainly it is in this light that the abortionist, Doctor Damon Stutes (of

Reno, Nevada) regards himself.

Interviewed at his new million-dollar clinic (equipped with steel doors, bullet-proof glass and the latest surveillance systems—he calls it his “bunker”), Stutes told *Time* magazine “With me, it is primal. Abortion is a lifesaving operation. The pro-life movement is 100% responsible for these shootings. They are the ones killing people.” *Time* obviously agrees that the only casualties of abortion are abortionists and their underlings: reporting John Salvi’s double murder in Boston last January, *Time* calculated that “Salvi’s rampage brings to five the number of abortion-clinic killings in the past two years.”¹¹ One is reminded of a conversation between Huck Finn and Aunt Sally. Huck, who has to explain his lateness, is describing an imaginary steamboat accident

“ . . . We blowed out a cylinder head.”

“Good gracious! anybody hurt?”

“No’m. Killed a nigger.

“Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt”

What Huck, Aunt Sally, Stutes and *Time* have in common is their proficiency in doublethink, i.e., “the power,” as George Orwell defines it in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously and accepting both of them.” Of course, only a madman *publicly* adheres to philosophical opposites. What an experienced doublethinker learns to do is opt for the particular version of reality recommended by his party or situation. But the act of self-deception he thus involves himself in must be *conscious*.¹² Otherwise, says Orwell, it would not be carried out with sufficient precision; on the other hand, it has to be self-deceiving to avoid bringing with it “a feeling of falsity and hence of guilt.” This then is doublethink: to know what abortion does to unborn babies, and at the same time promote it as a way of emancipating women; to disregard the three million unborn deaths in U.S. abortion clinics over the last two years, and protest instead against escalating violence at the clinics—but above all, to quote in defense of all such apparent inconsistencies *Roe*’s conclusion that “the word ‘person’ as used in the Fourteenth Amendment does not include the unborn,” even though experience and science teach you that it does.

Perhaps the worst part of *Roe* is that it *entrenches* doublethink. In May the Christian Coalition, wishing to offer *some* measure of protection to pre-born Americans, proposed that the law place limits on abortions after 26 weeks of pregnancy. “How hypocritical of these self-proclaimed anti-abortion Christians not to worry about what happens *before* six and a half months!” one could not help thinking. They had no choice. It’s only after

the second trimester when, according to *Roe*, the health risks of abortion begin to exceed those of childbirth, that “. . . a state may regulate the abortion procedure to the extent that the regulation reasonably relates to the preservation and protection of maternal health.” As things stand, no anti-abortion law, however carefully worded, can take effect until seven months into pregnancy because only then, according to Justice Blackmun, is “potential life” viable, and therefore a subject of compelling interest to the State.

Roe’s fuzzy science not only works against anti-abortionists, it’s also a godsend to their opponents. Think what hay they have been able to make, for example, out of Justice Blackmun’s contention that the job of ascertaining when human life begins belongs to philosophers and theologians; it turns the argument over fetal humanity into a religious one, on a par with quarrels over the date of Easter or the meaning of “consubstantial”; thus anti-abortionists, however much they may claim to champion truth and reason, really *are* in the business of promoting a particular religious viewpoint, while a legislature that succeeds in restricting abortion has indeed made a law respecting the establishment of religion.

Just so, Kate Michelman, of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, said of the Christian Coalition’s 26-week limit: “It’s about establishing a theocracy in this nation.” Ridiculous, yes, but fully in keeping with the spirit of *Roe*. When the courts are on your side, even balderdash works in your favor. So successful have Michelman and her media amplifiers been in theologizing the anti-abortionists’ appeal to science, that today the very expression “unborn baby” has a sectarian ring to it.

But why do pro-abortionists still have to pretend? A quarter of a century should surely have been long enough to get us used to the idea that humanity needs culling. *California Medicine* thought that even 1970 was not too early for doctors “to examine this new ethic, recognize it for what it is” and “prepare to apply it in a rational development for the fulfillment and betterment of mankind in what is almost certain to be a biologically-oriented world society.” History has made only one word in this prophecy redundant: almost. Machinery for creating a biologically-oriented world society is already in place; and so is its apostolate, as outlined in *California Medicine*, to convert all men to what Pope John Paul II calls “the culture of death.”

That culture’s missionaries, sent forth by Planned Parenthood International,¹³ the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, the World Health Organization, not to mention the Clinton Administration, have been hard at

work preaching the unsacredness of human life in school classrooms, “family-planning” agencies, and Third World medical stations.¹⁴

Yet, as we all know, the make-believe goes on. Occasionally, pro-abortionists forget to doublethink,¹⁵ as President Clinton himself did when he said during the presidential election campaign that he wanted abortion to be “rare” (Why should a *good* be rare?). But generally speaking, they manage to keep control of reality with as much aplomb as any veteran worker in Oceania’s Ministry of Truth.

Consider, for example, the authors of “Families in Focus,” a report issued by the Population Council this May, and obviously intended to discount the Pope’s warning that the evils of abortion, contraception and divorce are undermining family life. Its very title suggests that any approach to family studies other than their own secular humanist one is *out of focus*. The report, says a review of it by Tamar Lewin for the *New York Times* Service,¹⁶ dispels the myth—which nobody I have talked to in the last twenty years subscribes to—that “the family is a stable and cohesive unit in which father serves as economic provider and mother serves as emotional care giver.”

Lewin quotes a sociologist who claims (and again you could have fooled me) that the rising economic status of women and “changes in the gender-based division of labor” have put a strain on family life. Husbands, it appears, are the villains. Wives contribute more to the family income, and have less to spend on themselves. Moreover, “studies of parent-child interaction found no society in which fathers provided more child care than mothers.” The solution? Teach men to “behave more like women with regard to their children.” Give them paternity leave, and encourage them “to become involved in pre-natal classes”—but whatever you do, *don’t* let them exercise paternal rights over the unborn children you have persuaded their wives to abort, and *don’t* listen to them when they complain about the blackmail international agencies use to get them to cut down on their fertility.¹⁷ It is as if someone had advised Louis XVI that he could save the Bastille by offering its inmates a more meaningful recreation program.

Revolution and doublethink go together. Most people are deeply conservative. What they want their government to provide them with is room to conduct business as usual. This is why engineers of social change have to prevaricate. Their only hope is to pretend to be on the side of tradition while devoting all their energies to destroying it. *California Medicine* understood what intellectual duplicity it would take to get us to accept a world in which the right to life was no longer inalienable.

But the message hasn't got through to us. After twenty-five years of semantic gymnastics, we still haven't managed to separate the idea of killing from the idea of abortion. The trouble is, our society cannot do without abortion, so its apologists have had to go on shutting their eyes to science and logic. It's at this point that *California Medicine's* editorialist gets things wrong. He predicted that changes in technology would force us to revise our thinking about homicide. What we have revised our thinking about is sex. The sexual revolution is the true revolution of our times. And abortion is its dirty little secret. Promiscuity leads to bloodshed, whether at the hands of abortionists, or from the use of abortifacient contraceptives. But thanks to *Roe v. Wade*, promiscuity is now a constitutionally protected behavior. So we have to doublethink about its consequences. If Justice Blackmun is right, then the wages of sin can't be death.

Anyone hurt?

No'm. Aborted two million babies.

NOTES

1. The *Human Life Review* has reprinted the entire *California Medicine* editorial five times, and its contributors have quoted from it countless times. Excerpts from it appear in five of seven general works on abortion on my bookshelf (of the other two, one is Canadian, and the other was written before September, 1970).
2. The use of the blanket term "medicine" implies that doctors who, in accordance with their Hippocratic oaths, retain the traditional understanding of abortion, are out of touch with current medical technology.
3. According to the *Roe v. Wade* decision, viability is "usually placed at seven months." See John T. Noonan, Jr., "Why a Constitutional Amendment," (*Human Life Review* 1:1 Winter 1975: 26).
4. Senator James Buckley, "A Human Life Amendment," (*Human Life Review* 1:1 Winter, 1975: 14). Chief Justice Warren Burger's famous reassurance that "plainly the Court today rejects any claim that the Constitution requires abortion on demand" has not prevented over twenty million American women from successfully demanding abortions since *Roe*.
5. Professor Ely's italics. See John Hart Ely, "The Wages of Crying Wolf" (*Human Life Review* 1:1 Winter, 1975: 52).
6. Ibid, 46.
7. Ibid (Professor Ely's italics).
8. Ibid, 47.
9. Ibid, 48. One doesn't like to be picky, but how does Professor Ely know that an unborn baby is incapable of imagining the future for *herself*?
10. Ibid. Interestingly enough, it was still possible in April, 1973 (when the above-quoted article appeared in *The Yale Law Journal*), for a pro-abortion liberal such as Professor Ely not to be happy with contraception.
11. *Time* magazine, Jan. 9, 1995.
12. Nobody is better at conscious self-deception than Huck Finn.
13. Anyone who worries that the term "culture of death," as applied to the activities of P.P.I. might be libelous, should remember that Margaret Sanger, Planned Parenthood's founder, saw birth control as a way of eliminating "mental defect, feeble-mindedness, low mental calibre morons, defectives, [and] paupers"(from Planned Parenthood advertisements used to promote a birth control conference in Chicago in 1923), quoted in Robert G. Marshall and

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Charles A. Donovan, *Blessed Are The Barren: The Social Policy of Planned Parenthood* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1991, 274). Harold Laski, the British leftwing social scientist, cast an even wider death net when he wrote to Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes praising the Supreme Court for upholding Virginia's law sterilizing Carrie Buck (*Buck v. Bell*) against her will and calling for the sterilization of "all the unfit, among whom I include all fundamentalists (ibid. 320)." Even if Laski is joking here, he obviously shared *California Medicine's* utilitarian approach to such procedures as sterilization and abortion.

14. Eyewitnesses report that in rural areas such facilities often have a more plentiful supply of condoms than of antiseptics.
15. This happened even under Stalin. The late Malcolm Muggeridge remembered being told by a Soviet Censor in 1932: "You can't say that because it's true."
16. Carried by the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, May 31, 1995.
17. Doesn't the right to privacy include the right to have a child as well as the right to destroy it?



'A lot of you vegetarians profess surprise
that we have souls.'

THE SPECTATOR 13 November 1993

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[The following article first appeared in the Commentary section of the Washington Times on May 26, and is reprinted here with permission of the author. Mr. Novak, a prolific author, is currently director of social and political studies at the American Enterprise Institute; he received the Templeton prize (for "Progress in Religion") last year.]

Pope John Paul II's Winning Ways

Michael Novak

Last week Pope John Paul II turned 75 years old. He passed this milestone on the run (as it were) leaving for a weekend trip to the Czech Republic and Poland. It is as if he is only three-quarters of the way to the traditional wish expressed in the Polish song: "Stolat, Stolat!—may you live 100 years!"

This weekend, without a pause for breath, the pope will issue a new encyclical on ecumenism. This has been one of the central themes of his papacy. Pope John Paul II has visited synagogues, given diplomatic recognition to Israel, and led the way in Catholic-Jewish friendships and exchanges of courtesies. He has said he hopes to see unity—in some form—between Eastern and Western Catholics from Rome to Constantinople and Moscow before end of 2000. He has visited with Protestants and other churchmen on nearly every trip abroad.

Moreover, of the 263 popes who have preceded John Paul II, none has visited so many different places on this planet. Love him or hate him, no other pope has been paid so much attention by crowds around the world—and by the media. Last year in Manila, the largest audience in human history—said to have numbered almost 5 million people—assembled to see him.

Last year more people also read a book by a pope than ever before in history, when Pope John Paul II published his unofficial reflections, "Crossing the Threshold of Hope," a book of a type almost never undertaken by a pope in the past. Prognosticators predicted a bust, since most papal books (even by this pope) have sold poorly. Instead, the book topped the bestseller list in the United States for 13 weeks and sold more than a million copies here, as well as a million more worldwide.

The formal letters that popes address to the larger world—"encyclicals"—often disappear without public trace, and most do not sell well. Historically, there have been exceptions—Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1881), and John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (1961). But three of Pope John Paul II's most recent encyclicals—*Evangelium Vitae* (1995), *Veritatis Splendor* (1994), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991)—have each sold hundreds of thousands of copies in the United States. Each has been the subject of intense worldwide discussion. Two of his earlier ones, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) and *Laborem Exercens* (1981), were the subject of wide debate in the secular press.

In this century, probably no one except Winston Churchill has so towered over the international media as Pope John Paul II has. He has been the subject

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of innumerable magazine covers, television shows, book review sections and front-page articles. He has been regularly listed among the most admired people in the world. In the United States alone, those who see him in a "favorable" light form a very large majority—74 percent. Catholics are said to be divided about him, but polling data show that only 6 percent of Catholics have an "unfavorable" view. (Most of these must be the people who write about him.)

Mikhail Gorbachev said that the transformation of the Soviet empire could not have occurred without this man as pope. During crucial years, Pope John Paul II and President Reagan had a warm relationship based on mutual respect (and the shared experience of having been the intended targets of assassination attempts). By all reports, despite their serious disagreements, Pope John Paul II has also taken a liking to Bill and Hillary Clinton.

A friend of mine was recently present at a meeting of women preparing for the Beijing Conference later this year and told me that the leaders of the conference were quite explicit: "Make no mistake, our enemy in Beijing is the pope and the Catholic Church."

The most frequently mentioned criticism of Pope John Paul II is that on church matters (sometimes affecting all humanity) he is "rigid" and "inflexible." But such adjectives may not be fairly applied.

Liberals do not usually call Abraham Lincoln "rigid" or "inflexible" in his opposition to slavery. For Lincoln, it was a matter of right and wrong: "A nation cannot be half slave and half free." Often, when writers use the word "principled," they mean they agree. When they don't agree with the principle, they write "rigid" or "inflexible."

If you look at the matter from his point of view, the pope has very little room for choice. Consider for a moment the list of things on which he is said to be "rigid." These include: traditional Catholic teaching on abortion; the sinfulness of homosexual acts; and the sinfulness of extramarital heterosexual acts. These matters are not within his choice. They are part of the inheritance of faith, which it is his duty to uphold, no matter how popular or unpopular this might make him. These are not matters within his, or any other pope's, discretion.

On a secondary list, there are also three questions: whether methods of artificial birth control may be used; whether women may be ordained priests; and whether ordained priests must be bound to the idea of a life of dedicated virginity. On only one of these questions, whether all priests may be bound to the ideal of virginity, does the pope have room for choice. There is no doubt that some priests always have been, and always will be, called to it; but obligatory celibacy for all priests is a discipline arising from historical experience.

To be sure, there is some debate in Catholic circles about whether women can legitimately be ordained priests. The tradition, as well as common teaching until the most recent two decades, tells unhesitatingly against it.

The pope's support for natural family planning (made easier these days by

new technologies), combined with opposition to artificial methods of contraception, is also contested. Some hope that the Church will change its long and constant teaching, and have been quite imaginative in inventing arguments to that effect. So far, they have not offered sound arguments.

In brief, at 75, Pope John Paul II is principled. Psychological explanations about his stands seem too limp: that he is Polish or that his mother and father died before he was 21. The pope has led a very full and enthusiastic and triumphant life. He is principled because he has rock-solid convictions, based on intellectual inquiry. He has taught and written about these questions for years. It is not easy to invent arguments he has not already tested.

Finally, this former actor, poet, playwright and skier spends hours every day in prayer; he is a man of prayer. As much as possible, he lives consciously in God's presence. That is the source of his humor, even his *joie de combat*.

In history, there have been good popes and bad popes, but this is one that even many of his staunchest critics concede is a great one.

Quite possibly, in a final burst of creativity, his best decade is just beginning.



'My cross is heavier than yours.'

THE SPECTATOR 14 May 1994

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[What follows is the transcription of an address given by the late Malcolm Muggeridge to a symposium, held in San Francisco in July, 1978, to mark the tenth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, the encyclical of Pope Paul VI on artificial contraception. It is reprinted here with permission. (For more information on the symposium, please see the note at the end of this article.)]

On *Humanae Vitae*

Malcolm Muggeridge

I find myself in a way in a curious position. After all, I'm not a Catholic. I haven't that great satisfaction that presumably most of you have. At the same time, I have a great love for the Catholic Church, and I've had from the beginning a feeling stronger than I can convey to you that this document, *Humanae Vitae*, which has been so savagely criticized, sometimes by members of your church, is of tremendous and fundamental importance, and that it will stand in history as tremendously important. And that I would like to be able to express, and I'm happy to have occasion this evening to express, this profound admiration that I have for it; this profound sense that it touches upon an issue of the most fundamental importance and that it will be, in history, something that will be pointed to both for its dignity and for its perspicuity.

It happens, ten years ago, that I found myself in the position of introducing a discussion on *Humanae Vitae* in a B.B.C. television program on a Sunday evening. And I can remember it very vividly. The people who are assembled for these discussions or panels on the B.B.C. fall, usually, into various categories which are invariable: you generally have a sociologist from Leeds; you also have a life-purist usually with a mustache; you also have a knockabout clergyman of no particular denomination and enormous muttonchop whiskers; and you have, I regret to say, also, usually, a rather dubious father, which we had on this occasion, when I really very much wanted to have someone who was a passionate supporter of *Humanae Vitae*. However, I did have someone whom you're going to be fortunate enough to hear in the course of this symposium, and that was Dr. Colin Clark, who has so marvelously and effectively dealt with what I consider to be one of the great con tricks in this whole controversy of contraception and related matters: the population explosion. So *he* was a great solace and comfort.

And then, in the course of presenting the program, something happened which gave me inconceivable delight and which was also, in its way, extremely funny (because I often think that the mercy and wisdom of God comes to us more in humorous episodes than in solemn ones). In this program as the various people spoke for the first time, a short description of them was appended. And there had been prepared, to append to Dr. Colin Clark's appearance, "Father of eight." But by a happy chance, this description got shifted to the "dubious father," so that *he* appeared on the program as a father of eight. You must agree with me that

somewhere or other there is the hand of a loving God who also has, as an all-loving God must necessarily have to look after a human race such as ours, a tremendous sense of humor. Anyway, that was that.

Now, tonight I find myself, ten years later, in the position of being responsible for what is called the "keynote address." And after thinking about it and scribbling down a few notes (that I'm glad to say I haven't brought with me), I wondered what sort of a keynote address I could hope to present to a gathering, most of whose members would certainly know far more about the matter than I do, and be far better versed in assembling the pros and cons of it.

And then, a rather interesting and, indeed, uplifting thought struck me, that of course I couldn't hope to deliver a keynote address on this particular subject because the keynote address had already been delivered 2,000 years ago.

In other words, this matter which, as I've said, is of such tremendous importance, is an integral part of the revelation that came into the world in the Holy Land, that stupendous drama which has played such a fantastic role in the story of 2,000 years of Christendom: the birth, the life, the ministry, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ as recounted in the Gospels. That was the keynote address for the matter before us this evening.

And after all, that keynote address, having been given to the world in those marvelous words of the fourth Gospel that the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; that Word, that keynote address for all the centuries of our Western civilization, was itself carried by the Apostle Paul to a Roman world which was as bored, as derelict, as spent, as our civilization often seems today. Carried to it, to animate it, to bring back the creativity which had been lost, to fill the world with great expressions in music, in architecture, in literature, in every sort of way, of this great new revelation.

Now why do I think that this was veritably our keynote address? Because, in that revelation, an integral part of that revelation—also something that was wonderfully novel and fresh to a tired and jaded world—was the sacramental notion. So that out of, for instance, the simple need of men to eat and drink came the Blessed Sacraments; and similarly, out of the creativity in men, their animal creativity, came the sacrament of love which created the Christian notion of family, of the marriage which would last, which would be something stable and wonderful in our society, out of which it came. And which has endured through all those centuries until now when we find it under attack. In my opinion, what has brought about, in the first case, this great weakening of the marvelous sacrament of reproduction, has been precisely what *Humanae Vitae* attacks and disallows. The procedures whereby eroticism, by its condition which is lasting love, becomes relegated to be a mere excitement in itself. And thereby are undermined not just relations between this man and that woman, but the whole shape and beauty and profundity of our Christian life.

Humanae Vitae recognized this and asked of Catholics what many of them

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were unable to accord, that they should not fall into this error, that they should eschew this dangerous procedure which was now being made available in terms at once infinitely simple, but also infinitely more dangerous. Namely, the birth pill. Now whether, and how far, and to what extent this inhibition is or can be or will be acceptable, it's not for me to say. What I want to say tonight, as a non-Catholic, as an aspiring Christian, as someone who, as an old journalist, has watched this process of deterioration in our whole way of life—what I want to say is that in that encyclical the finger is pointed on the point that really matters. Namely, that through human procreation the great creativity of men and women comes into play, and that to interfere with this creativity, to seek to relate it merely to pleasure, is to go back into pre-Christian times and ultimately to destroy the civilization that Christianity has brought about.

That is what I want to testify to, as just one individual who has been given the great honor of coming and starting off your discussions. If there is one thing I feel *absolutely certain* about, it is that. One thing that I know will appear in social histories in the future is that the dissolution of our way of life, our Christian way of life and all that it has meant to the world, relates directly to the matter that is raised in *Humanae Vitae*. The journalists, the media, write and hold forth about the various elements in the crisis of the Western world today: about inflation, about over-population, about pending energy shortages, about detente, about hundreds of things. But they overlook what your church has not overlooked, this basic cause: the distortion and abuse of what should be the essential creativity of men and women, enriching their lives, as it has and does enrich people's lives—and when they are as old as I am, enriches them particularly beautifully, when they see as they depart from this world their grandchildren beginning the process of living which they are ending. There is no beauty, there is no joy, there is no compensation that anything could offer in the way of leisure, of so-called freedom from domestic duties, which could possibly compensate for one-thousandth part of the joy that an old man feels when he sees this beautiful thing: life beginning again as his ends, in those children that have come into the world through his love and through a marriage which has lasted through 50 and more years. I assure you that what I say to you is true, and that when you are that age there is nothing that this world can offer in the way of success, in the way of adventure, in the way of honors, in the way of variety, in the way of so-called freedom, which could come within a hundredth part of measuring up to that wonderful sense of having been used as an instrument, not in the achievement of some stupid kind of personal erotic excitement, but in the realization of this wonderful thing—human procreation.

Now, of course, when *Humanae Vitae* was published to the world and was set upon by all the pundits of the media, it was attacked as being a failure to sympathize with the difficulties of young people getting married. That was the basis on which the attack was mounted. But, it was perfectly obvious, and Colin Clark will remember from that symposium, with which the coming of *Humanae Vitae*

was celebrated by the B.B.C.—it was mentioned then that contraception was something that would not just stop with limiting families. That in fact, it would lead inevitably, as night follows day, to abortion and then to euthanasia. And I remember that the panel jeered when I said particularly the last, euthanasia. But it was quite obvious that this would be so. That if you once accepted the idea that erotic satisfaction was itself a justification, then you had to accept also the idea that if erotic satisfaction led to pregnancy, then the person concerned was entitled to have the pregnancy stopped. And, of course, we had these abortion bills that proliferated through the whole Western world. In England, we have already destroyed more babies than lives were lost in the first World War. Through virtually the whole Western world there now exists abortion on demand. The result has been an enormous increase in the misery and unhappiness of individual human beings and again, the enormous weakening of this Christian family.

II should mention to you that the point has been reached in England where a bishop has actually produced a special prayer to be used on the occasion of an abortion. You know, one of the great difficulties in being editor of *Punch* was something that I hadn't envisaged when I took the job on. And that is that whenever you tried to be funny about somebody, you would invariably find that something they actually did was funnier than anything that you could possibly think of. I really don't know how you could get a better example of it than a bishop solemnly setting to work to produce a measured prayer on the occasion of murdering a baby. But that is actually what has happened.

Now we move on to the next stage in this dreadful story. And it's all this that is implicit in the encyclical we're talking about. If it is the case that the only consideration that arises is the physical well-being of individual people, then what conceivable justification is there for maintaining at great expense and difficulty the people who are mentally handicapped, the senile old. I myself have long ago moved into what I call the "N.T.B.R. belt." And the reason I call it that is because I read about how a journalist who had managed to make his way into a hospital ward had found that all the patients in the ward who were over 65 had "N.T.B.R." on their medical cards. And when he pressed them to tell him what these initials stood for, he was told "Not to be resuscitated."

Well I've been in that belt for some ten years, so I know that as sure as I can possibly persuade you to believe, this is what is going to happen: governments will find it impossible to resist the temptation with the increasing practice of euthanasia, though it is not yet officially legal, except in certain circumstances I believe, for instance, in this state of California. The temptation will be to deliver themselves from this burden of looking after the sick and imbecile people or senile people, by the simple expedient of killing them off. Now this, in fact, is what the Nazis did. And they did it not, as is commonly suggested, through slaughter camps and things like that, but by a perfectly coherent decree with

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perfectly clear conditions. And, in fact, it is true that the delay in creating public pressure for euthanasia has been due to the fact that it was one of the war crimes cited at Nuremburg. So, for the *Guinness Book of Records*, you can submit this: that it takes just about 30 years in our humane society to transform a war crime into an act of compassion. That is exactly what happened.

So you see, the thought, the prayer, the awareness of reality behind *Humanae Vitae* has, alas, been amply born out precisely by these things that have been happening. I feel that Western man has come to a sort of parting of the ways (and that as time goes on you who are much younger will realize this), in which these two ways of looking at our human society will be side by side, and it will be necessary to choose one or the other. On the one hand, the view of mankind which has all through the centuries of Christendom been accepted in one form or another by Western people: that we are a family; that mankind is a family with God who is the father. In a family you don't throw out the specimens that are not up to scratch. In a family you recognize that some will be intelligent and some will be stupid, some will be beautiful and some will be ugly. But what unites the family is the fatherhood of God.

Now, what our way of life is now moving towards is the replacement of this image of the family by the image of a factory farm in which what matters is the economic prosperity of the family and of the livestock, so that all other considerations cease to be relevant. And you will find that this terrible notion increasingly occupies the minds of people and becomes acceptable to them.

There is something else that is envisaged in the encyclical that we are talking about. I wanted to say to you how desperately sorry I am that Mother Teresa won't be here at this gathering. Partly because it's always an infinite joy for me to see her, because it would have been an infinite joy for you to hear her, but also because her feelings about what I'm talking about are of the strongest and the deepest, which is why she agreed to come. Her work—and to me this has been one of the great illuminations of life—her work itself is a sort of confutation of all the calculations behind this humanistic, scientific view of the world, of life, which the media and other influences are foisting upon our Western people. She considers it worthwhile to go to infinite trouble to bring a dying man in from the street in order that perhaps only for five minutes he may see a loving Christian face before he finally dies. A procedure which, in scientific terms or humanistic terms, is completely crazy, but which I think increases enormously the beauty and the worthwhileness of being a human being in this world.

Similarly with children. She boasts—and the boast is true I can assure you—that their children's clinic has never under any circumstances refused, however crowded it might be, to take in a child that wants to come there. I don't know if you saw the television program that was made about her called "Something Beautiful for God," but in it, there is one episode that always sticks in my mind. And that is when I was walking up the steps with her and there was a little baby that had just been brought in, so small that it seemed almost inconceivable that

it could live. And I say rather fatuously to Mother Teresa, "When there are so many babies in Calcutta and in Bengal and in India, and so little to give them, is it *really* worthwhile going to all this trouble to save this little midget?" And she picks up the baby in the film and she holds it, and she says to me, "Look! There's life in it." Now that picture is exactly what *Humanae Vitae* is about.

I could talk until Kingdom Come about it and it wouldn't give such a clear notion as just that episode does. "Look! There's life in it." And life comes from God. Life, any life, contains in itself the potentialities of all life, and therefore deserves our infinite respect, our infinite love, our infinite care. All ideas that we can get rid of manifestations of life which may be inconvenient or burdensome to us, that we can eliminate from our carnal appetites the consequences of carnality in terms of new life; all these notions are of the devil. They all come from below. They are all from the worst that is in us.

Just think of a Mother Teresa holding up the tiny baby with that triumphant word, "Look! There's life in her." And that's what we Christians have got to think about and hold on to in times when all that signifies is and will be under attack.

II don't want to close what I've been saying to you tonight leaving the impression with you that I feel pessimistic. Of course, I can see, as anyone must who looks at what's going on in the world, the terrible dangers. Pascal puts it very well, you know. He said that when men try to live without God—which is what, in fact, is happening in the Western world now, men and women are trying to live without God—Pascal says when they do that, there are two inevitable consequences: either they suppose that they are gods themselves and go mad (and we have seen enough of that in our time), or they relapse into mere animality. And of course, what Pascal himself didn't see is that even to say they relapse into animality is a kind of gloss on what truly happens. It is something much worse than animality. It's not losing the sacramental idea of carnality, of eating, in order to have the mere animal idea, but it is moving from the sacramental notion to the really sick notion of treating something that is by its nature related to this human creativity as itself a pleasure, and a pleasure that we should demand to have.

Now I don't want you to think that in pointing that out I'm merely indulging in pessimism. Because it is not so. It is not possible to love Christ and to love the Christian faith and to see what it has done for Western man in the last 2,000 years without feeling full of hope and joy. Not possible. Of course it is possible that the particular civilization that we belong to can collapse, as others have. Of course it is possible that what is called Christendom can come to an end. But Christ can't come to an end. And when we look around, even in this somber world of today, we have to notice one enormously hopeful thing. And that is, that the efforts to create this world without God, whether through the means of shaping men and controlling men and molding men into a particular sort of human

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being, as the Communists have sought to do, or by the mere acceptance of libertinism, of self-indulgence, as Western people have sought to do, in both cases, have proved a colossal failure. From Communist countries we had the voice of someone like Solzhenitsyn. In his recent speech at Harvard, which was a marvelous speech, he said that out of the great suffering of the Russian people would come some new great hope and understanding that the world lacked. And that out of the very failure of our efforts in the West to escape from the reality of God by the absurdities of affluence, we might expect men to recover their sense of what is real and to escape from a world of fantasy.

You know, it is a funny thing. When you are old there is something that happens that I find very delightful. You often wake up about half past two or three in the morning when the world is very quiet and, in a way, very beautiful. And you feel half in and half out of your body. As though it is really a toss-up whether you go back into that battered old carcass that you can actually see between the sheets, or make off to where you see in the sky, as it were, like the glow of a distant city, what I can only describe as Augustine's City of God. It is a strange thing, but you are aware of these two things: of the old battered carcass and your life in it and this wonderful making off. And at that moment, in that sort of limbo between those two things you have an extraordinarily clear perception of life and everything. And what you realize with a certainty and a sharpness that I can't convey to you is first of all, how extraordinarily beautiful the world is; how wonderful is the privilege of being allowed to live in it, as part of this human experience; of how beautiful the shapes and sounds and colors of the world are; of how beautiful is human love and human work, and all the joys of being a man or a woman in the world. And at the same time, with that, a certainty past any word that I could pass to you, that as a man, a creature, an infinitesimal part of God's creation, you participate in God's purposes for his creation. And that whatever may happen, whatever men may do or not do, whatever crazy projects they may have and lend themselves to, those purposes of God are loving and not hating. Are creative and not destructive. Are universal and not particular. And in that awareness, great comfort and great joy.

NOTE

The symposium on *Humanae Vitae* was sponsored by the St. Ignatius Institute at the (Jesuit) University of San Francisco, and organized by the then-director of the Institute, Father Joseph Fessio, S.J. Other participants included the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar and Dr. Colin Clark of Oxford, a well-known authority (as Mr. Muggeridge noted) on world population concerns. Another scheduled participant, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, was unable to attend. Muggeridge spoke about the book he wrote, *Something Beautiful for God*, which was based on a BBC television program he filmed with her in India; it was published in this country by Harper & Row.

As he noted, Malcolm Muggeridge was not a Roman Catholic when he delivered this address; he was received into the Church some five years later. He died in 1990.

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