

The Time of Renewal.

Part IV: The Value of Human Life, A Catholic View.

Survey Report

This is the fourth article in a nine-week series based on a recent opinion survey conducted by the Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

The sample questions to the right were taken from that part of the survey which deals with this week's topic: How do most Catholics feel about their faith and its relationship to the vital human issues of war, race, abortion and birth control?

Of all the social and moral questions covered by the survey, abortion is both the best understood and the most controversial. Unanimity was noticeably absent, with half of all Catholics feeling that abortion is sometimes appropriate for serious reasons, and a quarter maintaining that it can never be condoned.

Regarding action to be taken concerning abortion, 40% felt that a good Catholic should actively work to keep abortion illegal, 22% would support public education programs about the Church's position, while 13% said that the Church's position should affect only Catholics.

Most Catholics feel that they understand the Church's position reasonably well on current issues. Even those who do not fully understand them expect and want the Church to provide their with guidance that they can take into consideration when making decisions.

The following questions appeared in the recent Diocesan Time of Renewal Survey.

What do you consider appropriate action for a Catholic who feels strongly about the Southeast Asian War?

- Support the government without question
- Make his position known while supporting the rights of others to take different positions
- Take no specific action
- Participate in letter writing, supporting ads and other public education types of protest
- Participate in peaceful demonstrations and parades
- No opinion

Which one of these actions do you feel is most appropriate for a good Catholic in regard to legalization of abortion?

- Actively work for legislation to keep abortion illegal
- Support public education programs regarding the Church's position
- Consider the Church's position only affects Catholics
- Ignore the issue
- Don't Know
- Other (SPECIFY)

achieve school integration, a similar number believe that a white Catholic is within his rights to refuse to sell his home to a Negro.



Andrew Goodman, 20 year old civil rights

Under what circumstances do you think a good Catholic can disregard the Pope's condemnation of artificial birth control?

- If the woman's health is seriously endangered by pregnancy
- If the woman is married but does not want children
- If a couple cannot afford to provide for more children
- If the couple is not married and does not intend to marry
- Under no circumstances
- Other (SPECIFY)

The circumstances under which I think legalized abortion is appropriate:

- If the woman's health is seriously endangered as a result of the pregnancy
- If the woman became pregnant as a result of a rape
- If there's a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby
- If the family has a very low income and cannot afford more children
- If the woman is married and does not want any more children
- If the woman is not married and does not want to marry the man
- Under no circumstances
- Other (SPECIFY)

of all Catholics think birth control should be related to conditions such as family finances or the mother's health. And, a fifth feel that it is justified for the simple reason that no more children are wanted.

Regarding the Southeast Asian War, which was still active at the time of the survey, 36% of the Catholics said they felt a responsibility to express their views publicly, but also to tolerate the expression of differing opinions. Fewer than one in six felt that Catholics should support the government without question.

In general, the picture that the survey paints is one of diversity, conflictive

Church Commentary

"When God set about to create heaven and earth—the world being then a formless waste with darkness over the seas and only an awesome wind sweeping over the water—God said, 'I will make man in my image, after my likeness.' God looked at everything that He had made and found it very pleasing."

Of all visible creation, only man shares God's likeness. Human beings share God's power to create human life and human society—on this earth. God so loved this world, that He sent His Son to bring us the fullness of life. His Spirit lives in our hearts, urging us to make possible a full, rich, human life for all persons of every nation, race, and creed.



"Creation of Adam" by Michelangelo, from the Sistine Chapel.

Technology, government, and laws are tools made by people. They enable us to accomplish our God-given task of making possible a full, rich, human life for everybody. Real danger is present today. We may become the slaves of our own tools! Government can reduce man's freedom, rather than fostering it. Technology can assume a power all its own, reducing the person to the status of a cog-in-the-wheel. Human slavery was once enshrined in our nation's laws!

A person committed to the full and sacred value of all human life must speak about and act upon his beliefs. The struggle and confusion in doing this are reflected in the survey responses. Racism is a problem in our country.

to his Pope and his bishops—must actively resist the popular slogans which conceal hatred and racial

they see best. This kind of diversity is healthy in the Church.

But there are other moral questions, more directly relating to life itself. On these, Catholics should be in much closer agreement. In their new syllabus, "Basic Teachings for Catholic Religious Education" (Jan. '73), the American Catholic bishops wrote: "Respecting God's gift of life, the Christian cannot be anti-life. He must avoid the sins of murder, abortion, euthanasia, genocide, and indiscriminate acts of war. He must not use immoral methods of family limitation."

Happily, less than one in six Catholics in our diocese felt that they should "support the government without question" in reference to the Southeast Asian war. Hopefully, they have the same maturity to study and scrutinize carefully other social and economic policies and decisions of government, industry, and other organizations which influence public policy.

Life in our nation brings its share of struggles and burdens. Life in the nations of Asia, Africa, and South America is too often a clawing struggle to overcome hunger and disease. God loves this world—all people, all nations. We must together find new ways of sharing our wealth to make possible a full, rich, human life for everybody.

Clearly, a deeper education on the church's teaching about the value of all human life is needed. This must not stop at questions of sexual morality, or even of abortion. It must respond to everything which threatens the quality of human life. Poverty. Discrimination. Dishonest business. Dishonest politics. Oppression. Violence. War. Injustices of all kinds. The work of the Church—members and leaders—should be that of Christ. He came into the world that men might have life, and have it to the full.

Prayer.