

**PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

# His Will — A United Family

In His valedictory at the Last Supper, Christ prayed that all who would dare to speak in His name and profess a way of life meriting the name Christian would share in the unity for which He prayed — a unity that would reflect His own oneness with His Father's will.



Almost 2,000 years have passed since He prayed in the presence of His disciples: "That all may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:21) And yet we still parade under His name in broken unity, in bigotry and dissension — all the while seeking His blessing.

Since 1909 the Catholic Church has set aside this week (Jan. 18 to 25) to pray for unity among Christian peoples. This octave of prayer takes on additional significance during this Holy Year of Reconciliation. Pope Paul VI has said: "We wish to proclaim and preach that the reconciliation of Christians is one of the principal aims of the Holy Year. For, before all men can be brought together and restored to the grace of God our Father, communion must be established between those who by faith have acknowledged and accepted Jesus Christ as the Lord of Mercy who sets men free and unites them in the spirit of love and truth. For this reason, the Jubilee year, which the Catholic Church has

accepted as part of her own custom and tradition, can serve as a most opportune period for spiritual renewal and for the promotion of Christian unity."

In the sincere hope that all of us will join other Christians in the observance of this week of prayer I have written to each pastor in the diocese a letter of exhortation to make this week a period of grace and have suggested ecumenical programs that can become a part of our continued striving for unity.

Ten years have passed since Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism and much has been accomplished for which we can be grateful. Dialogue, common study, common witness in social action, and common worship have brought us closer. But much remains to be done.

We must never forget that all of our best ecumenical efforts are doomed to frustration unless they are founded upon and supported by our devout prayers.

This Week of Prayer has had a most interesting history. Two Anglican priests, one English, the Rev. Spencer Jones, and the other an American, the Rev. Lewis Wattson, inaugurated an octave of prayer in 1908 for the reunion of their Church of England (the Episcopal Church in the U.S.) with the Roman Catholic Church. A year later Wattson became a Roman Catholic and later the founder of the Graymoor Friars who have made Christian unity one of the principal purposes of their order. He popularized the devotion among Catholics and attained

repeated papal approval and encouragement.

Meantime, in France, a priest, the Abbe Paul Couturier, wanted to extend the devotion so that Catholics would not just pray for other Christians but **with** them. He said, "Neither Catholic prayer, nor Orthodox prayer, nor Anglican prayer, nor Protestant prayer suffice. All of them are necessary, and all of them together."

This more truly ecumenical version of the Week of Prayer as proposed by Abbe Couturier gained prompt acceptance in churches throughout France, Germany, the Scandinavian countries and Holland. He asked all Christians to pray quite simply "for that unity which Christ wants his Church to have." He attached no strings to his prayer. He trusted God to answer the prayer in a way and at a time of God's own choosing.

In the United States, the Week is now sponsored by both the American Catholic bishops and by the National Council of Churches.

We read day by day the sad story of Northern Ireland where the division between Christians has led to such tragic consequences. Here in America we still have a long way to go before we heal the wounds of years of separation, hostility and misunderstanding. But I am convinced we are indeed headed in the right direction — that unity is indeed someday possible. As Pope John once said, I now repeat: "Let us hasten the coming of this blessed day by our prayers."

## U.S. Bishops Urge Right-to-Life Amendment

The following is a draft of a Pastoral Letter from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops intended for Jan. 22, the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision prohibiting states from restricting abortions during the first six months of pregnancy. It recaps some of the main ideas from the Vatican's recent Declaration on Abortion and the United States Catholic Conference before the Senate.

Two years have passed since the U.S. Supreme Court issued its abortion decisions permitting destruction of unborn human life virtually on request. The court's action has eroded respect for human life and established a climate of social permissiveness that has dramatically increased the number of abortions in the United States. It is estimated that there were perhaps 1.8 million abortions throughout the U.S. in 1974, and that the figure will increase to 2.4 million by 1980. This means that there will be one abortion for every two live births, a figure that has already been surpassed in the District of Columbia where officials estimate that the number of abortions is equal to that of live births.

One cannot be insensitive to this callous destruction of human life. There is no justification for such killing. The unpleasant fact is that the vast majority of abortions have nothing to do with preserving the life of the mother, but are performed for reasons of convenience. Perhaps the most tragic result of the Supreme Court's abortion decisions is the denial of protection for unborn human life during the earliest stage of its development on the grounds that such human life is somehow less meaningful than other human life. The "meaningful life" ethic has already demonstrated its effectiveness for the destruction of life in the hands of the Nazis and other exponents of totalitarianism.

Nonetheless, we affirm once

again that human life is precious and beyond simple material valuation. It is a gift from God which must be protected and sustained at every point of its existence. Particularly during the nine months of pregnancy the life of the child should be given special care and legal protection. Science provides ample evidence that the life initiated at conception is the life of a human individual who will pass through the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age unless destroyed prematurely by violence or disease. Scientific data abound to show the link between life and human development in the womb and the process of growth and maturity during the succeeding stages of human life.

These are some of the realities of human life that the Supreme Court chose to ignore in its death-dealing abortion decisions. Its closed-mindedness led the court to withdraw constitutional protection for the right to life of the unborn at the very time in history when mankind is otherwise particularly sensitive to violations of fundamental human rights.

These reasons among others have prompted the Catholic Bishops to call for an amendment to the Constitution of the United States that will assign legal personhood to the unborn child and assure the protection of the Constitution to each and every unborn human being from conception on. In testimony presented to the United States Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, the United States Catholic Conference explained the reasons and motivations for amending the Constitution:

"As Americans, and as religious leaders, we have been committed to a society governed by a system of law that protects the rights of individuals, and maintains the common good. As our founding fathers believed, we hold that all law is ultimately based on Divine

Law, and that a just system of civil law cannot be in conflict with the Law of God. The American system of constitutional law has proven to be a workable system of law, and one that has generally responded to the delicate balancing between defending the common good and human rights on the one hand, and according a due enjoyment of personal freedom on the other

"After much consideration and study, we have come to the conclusion that the only feasible way to reverse the decision of the court and to provide some constitutional base for the legal protection of the unborn child is by amending the Constitution. Moreover, this is a legal option consistent with the democratic process. It reflects the commitment to human rights that must be at the heart of all human law, international as well as national, and because human life is such an eminent value, the effort to pass an amendment is a moral imperative of the highest

## Bishops' President Hails International Women's Year

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — In remarks directed to the recognition of 1975 as International Women's Year, the president of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference declared here that "one of the most praiseworthy developments of our times has been women's growth in appreciation of their dignity and their essential equality to men."

Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin of Cincinnati said the Catholic Church, like other institutions, "has grown in awareness of and sensitivity to the rights of women." He warmly welcomed the United Nations-sponsored observance in the name of the bishops' conference and its Ad Hoc Committee on Women in Society and the Church.

order.

Since the Supreme Court decisions, the need for a constitutional amendment has become only more pressing. Attempts have been made to deny the constitutional protection normally accorded to doctors, nurses and hospitals for conscientious refusal to participate in abortion procedures. There is increasing pressure from some members of the scientific community to permit the use of aborted fetuses in laboratory research, free of any restrictions whatsoever. The courts continued to strike down laws, even those protective and regulatory measures considered by state legislatures to be within the parameters of the Supreme Court opinions. In the face of all this, the easy availability of unborn human life, and it further erodes respect for human dignity in our society. The violation of the right to life becomes acceptable, and in some cases, socially respectable.

He observed that while progress towards equality for women has been met with misunderstanding and even opposition, "many farsighted groups and individuals — men as well as women — have seen in the worldwide women's movement a manifestation of both a new stage in human culture and a contemporary expression of God's will for the human race."

"Many problems remain, however," he acknowledged. "In our own country the equality of women is an ideal which has yet to be fully realized in such fields as education and work. Exploitation of women, both subtle and overt, continues to be a reality. Belittling and degrading attitudes toward

It is increasingly evident that only a constitutional amendment offers any real hope to correct this situation. The passage of such an amendment remains the first order of business as a new Congress assembles for its legislative work. But political activity on the part of those who favor such an amendment must accelerate so as to keep the issue prominently before the Congress and other legislative bodies.

On this second annual observance of the fateful Supreme Court decisions, we must renew our determination to reverse the Supreme Court's abortion on demand decisions, to advocate the rights of the unborn in all our social and political processes, and to increase educational and humanitarian efforts to sustain and protect human life at every stage of its existence.

**\*Declaration on Abortion, Sacred Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, Nov. 18, 1974, Nos. 5, 8-13, 27.**

women are all too often encountered in the media and in everyday life."

"At the same time," Archbishop Bernardin noted, "some women, in their commendable determination to assert and claim their rights, have adopted positions on particular issues, such as the question of unborn human life, which are as selfish as the male chauvinism they rightly condemn."

He said the "challenge" to U.S. men is to increase their respect and support for women's rights, and the challenge for women is to "continue to work for equality without violating the rights of others who are least able to protect themselves."