

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

We Respect the Sacredness of Life

In my Pastoral Letter, Focus on the year 1977-1978 I brought to your attention our need to be concerned about the sacredness of every facet of life when I said, "We serve a God who never forgets those whom he has created in love. He has shared with every person on this earth the precious gift of life and his own Spirit. He tells us though a mother should forget her child, I will never forget you. I have written your name on the palm of my hand."



"We are a people who possess the mind and heart of Christ. He died for all men and women, loving us even though we are unworthy. He loves sinners, even to the point of dying for them to prove that there were no limits to the forgiving love of God."

"As a group of people we carry that message to the world today. We affirm in word and deed the God-given sacredness of human life. No life before our God is unwanted or condemned as worthless. No one is ever beyond conversion or a change of heart. Our God believes in human life, hopes in it, trusts in it. As a Church, we should do the same. This message is not popular today, but we need to act on it, in season and out of season."

Human life is our most precious gift and, in many ways, our most fragile possession. The beginning of each human life is an expression of God's creative love and also the basis of the value and dignity of the human person. Even in those who do not believe in God, the miracle of life is capable of awakening a sense of the sacred, an awareness of the inviolable quality of each human individual.

But no human being is totally isolated or sealed off — no one lives alone. People live in social relationships, and society expresses its appreciation of the value of human life by protecting the life of each and every member of the human family through

laws and social institutions. No life is of inferior value, beyond protection or sustenance. The law must be the guardian of each person's life and rights, and it must apply equally to all.

In recent years the sanctity of human life has been violated and denied in many parts of the world by programs of permissive abortion. In our own country more than one million unborn children are destroyed each year by abortion, a tragic witness of our unwillingness to love and care for others.

Permissive abortion may be symptomatic of a diminishing respect for all human life. As Pope Paul VI pointed out only one year ago, peace among nations will only be achieved "by recognizing the primacy of life as a value and condition for Peace."

Pope Paul returns to the theme that Peace and respect for life are interdependent in this year's WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE. The Holy Father emphasizes that "in our 'yes' to Peace there rings out a 'yes' to life. Human life is sacred from the moment it comes into existence. The law 'thou shalt not kill' protects this inexpressible miracle of human life with transcendent sovereignty. This is the principle that governs our religious ministry with regard to the human being. Accordingly, we cannot fail to disapprove of each and every offense against nascent life, and we must appeal to every Authority, and to everyone who has due competence, to work for the prohibition of procured abortion and for its remedy."

It is now five years since the Supreme Court abortion decisions virtually denied unborn children in the United States any effective legal protection for their right to life. But the 1973 decisions have not taken hold in the minds and hearts of people. Instead, they have given new determination and energy to millions of Americans who are keenly aware of life's continuity from conception onward and of the basic value of every human life.

In the past year the Supreme Court, giving further consideration to the abortion issue, decided that the state may favor normal childbirth over abortion and that there is no constitutional requirement for

government to pay for non-therapeutic abortions. The President of the United States and the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare have repeatedly stated their opposition to permissive abortion. And Congress has limited the circumstances for government funding of non-therapeutic abortions.

In the recent Congressional debates, it was argued that government-subsidized abortions are necessary to reduce welfare costs because each child born to a poor woman will be a continuing financial burden on the welfare system. This is an unjust and insulting way to speak of poor people.

Free abortion is no cure for poverty, nor is it the primary need of those who are poor. We cannot know that today's poor people will never be self-supporting. And even less can we know that the unborn children of the poor — if given the chance — will not grasp the opportunities for education and employment and overcome poverty. To turn to abortion as a "solution" distracts from the real solutions to the problems of the poor and generates attitudes contrary to human dignity and social justice.

Encouraging as some of these events of the past year may seem, there has been no real progress in providing protection for the right to life of the unborn child throughout pregnancy. In order to change the present situation of permissive abortion in our country and reestablish a legal basis for protecting the unborn, efforts to pass a constitutional amendment must go forward.

I urge all Catholics to take a more active role in implementing the U. S. Bishop's PASTORAL PLAN FOR PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES. This PASTORAL PLAN calls for continuing education to deepen our appreciation for the sanctity of life. It also calls for professional and voluntary efforts to meet the problems of women who might otherwise consider abortion. And it calls for active involvement in the democratic process — along with millions of other Americans — in establishing laws and social policies that protect and sustain all human lives, including the lives of unborn children.

Pope Paul's Message for the Day of Peace, Jan. 1

No to Violence, Yes to Peace

Following is the second part of Pope Paul's annual message of peace. The first part was printed in last week's edition.

In this Message of Peace we are speaking about violence as the antagonistic term of peace, and we have not spoken about war. War still deserves our condemnation, even though today it is being rejected ever more widely; against a praiseworthy and ever more authoritative effort is being made, both socially and politically. Another reason is that war is being kept in check by the terrible nature of its own arms, which it would immediately have at its disposal in the extremely tragic eventuality that it should break out. Fear, which is common to all Peoples, and to the strongest ones especially, holds in check the eventuality that war might turn into a cosmic conflagration. And fear, which is more an imagined restraint than a real one, is accompanied, as we have said, by a lofty and rational effort being made at the highest political levels — an effort which must tend not so much towards balancing the forces of the possible contenders as towards showing the supreme irrationality of war, and at the same time towards establishing relationships between Peoples, which are ever more interdependent, with ultimate solidarity, and ever more friendly and human. God grant that it be so.

But we cannot shut our eyes to the sad reality of partial war, both because it is still raging in certain regions, and because psychologically it is not at all excluded in the uncertain possibility of contemporary history. Our war against war has not yet been won, and our "yes" to peace is rather something wished for than something real; for in many geographical and political situations which have not yet been settled in just and peaceful solutions the possibility of future conflicts remains endemic. Our love for peace must remain on guard; other prospects too, besides that of a new world war, oblige us to consider and exalt peace even outside the trenches.

And in fact we must defend peace today under what we could call its metaphysical aspect. This aspect is prior to and higher than the historical and contingent aspect of military ceasefires and of the external tranquillitas ordinis. We wish to consider the cause of peace as it is reflected in that of human life. Our "yes" to peace broadens out into a "yes" to life. Peace must be brought not only to the battlefields but wherever human existence is carried on. There is indeed there must be — also a peace that not only protects this existence from the threats of the

weapons of war but also protects life as such against every peril, every misfortune, every insidious attack.

As ministers of religion, we look on this very elect category of persons, devoted to the physical and mental health of mankind, with great admiration, with great gratitude and with great trust. In many ways physical health, the healing of sicknesses, the easing of pain, the energy of development and work, the duration of temporal existence, and even a great part of moral life depend on the wisdom and care of these protectors, defenders and friends of humanity. We are close to them and, as far as we can, uphold their toil, their honor and their spirit. We hope to have them in solidarity with us in affirming and in defending human life in those exceptional contingencies in which life itself can be jeopardized by deliberate and evil designs of the human will. In our "yes" to peace there rings out a "yes" to life. Human life is sacred from the moment it comes into existence. The law "Thou shalt not kill" protects this inexpressible miracle of human life with transcendent sovereignty. This is the principle that governs our religious ministry with regard to the human being. We are confident that we have as an ally the ministry of medicine.

We have no less trust in the ministry that has given rise to human life, the ministry of parenthood, in the first place that of motherhood. How delicate, how tender, how affectionate and how strong our words become! Over this field of nascent life peace spreads its first protecting shield. It is a shield endowed with the softest protection, but a shield of defence and love.

Accordingly we cannot fail to disapprove of each and every offense against nascent life and we must appeal to every authority, and to everyone who has due competence, to work for the prohibition of procured abortion and for its remedy. The mother's womb and the child's cradle are the first barriers that not only protect peace as well as life but also build Peace. The one who chooses peace in opposition to war and to violence automatically chooses life and chooses humanity in its profound essential demands; and this is the meaning of this message that we are again sending with humble yet ardent conviction to those accountable for peace on earth, and to all our brethren in the world.

But we must add a word for all the children. With regard to violence they are the most vulnerable sector of society, but they are likewise the hope of a better tomorrow. Through some kind and thoughtful in-

termediary may our message reach them, too.

Let us explain why. First, because in the message of Peace of previous years we have pointed out that we do not speak in our own name only but in the name of Christ, who is "the Prince" of Peace in the world and who said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Mt 5, 9). We believe that, without the direction and assistance of Christ, true permanent and world-wide peace is not possible. We also consider that the peace of Christ does not weaken people, does not make them timid and victims of others' arrogance, but rather renders them capable of struggling for justice and of settling very many questions with the generosity, indeed the genius of love.

The second reason. You children are often led to quarrel. Remember: it is a harmful vanity to want to appear stronger than your brothers and sisters, and friends by quarrelling, fighting, and giving way to anger and revenge. Everybody does it, you answer. No, it is wrong, we say to you. If you want to be strong, be so in spirit and in behavior. Learn to control yourselves; learn how to forgive and quickly make friends again with those who have offended you. In this way you will really be Christians.

The third reason. We think that when you grow up you must make a change in the way today's world thinks and acts, a world in which everybody is always ready to be different, to separate himself or herself from others and to fight them. Are we not all brothers and sisters? Are we not all members of the same human family? And are not all the nations obliged to get on well together and to create Peace?

You children of the new age must get used to loving everybody, to giving to our society the appearance of a community which is more noble, more honest, more unified. Do you really want to be human beings and not wolves? Do you really want to have the merit and the joy of doing what is right, of helping those in need, and of being able to do good works with the sole reward of a good conscience? Well then, remember the words which Jesus spoke at the Last Supper, the night before his Passion. He said: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13, 34-35).

Dear children, we greet you and we bless you. The password is: No to violence, Yes to Peace.