

Church has condemned abortion from its earliest days

To the editor:

In the Catholic discussion on abortion, people sometimes are unclear about the issue of ensoulment and sometimes selectively quote theologians to support this position. This false thinking often surfaces in debates within Catholic circles concerning abortion and thus I would like to respond to this with two points.

First, from the earliest times abortion

has been condemned by the church, even at times associated with the same abhorrence as infanticide. The writings of the Didache, the Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas, St. Clement, Hypolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Council of Elvira, Innocent XI, Pius XI, Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and many others, including the Second Vatican Council, have condemned abortion. This condemnation was not dependent on

different theologians' theories regarding the time of fetal animation or ensoulment. Even when the church was debating different theories of when the soul entered the body, the condemnation of abortion was never affected by it. ...

Through the guidance of faith and tradition, the church knew that this life began because of God and would end with God, so it made little difference when, along this

chain, the link was broken. The end result was the same no matter when the abortion took place: A child was not born. It is because of the way the church looked so seriously at this developing life that the distinctions of direct and indirect abortion were developed when the mother's life was at stake, which modern science has made a rarity. The reason for this "principle of double effect" was to keep in tack with the strong church tradition which has never justified the intentional killing of an innocent life.

The second point has to do with quoting certain theologians (St. Thomas, Alphonsus Liguori) on abortion. Just as in the other areas of theology, like Scripture, we would not want to study this without modern discoveries, so too in this area of moral theology. Theologians like St. Thomas did not have the knowledge we have through the recent science of fetology. This has developed such amazing discoveries as realtime ultrasound scanning, Doppler apparatus, fetoscopy, ... and intrauterine surgery. ...

Whether we are talking about an early abortion or not, it is a life that we know for certain has brainwaves, a heartbeat and many other recognizable characteristics of a member of our human family. We must not let this unique, unrepeatable, infinitely precious life become forgotten or invisible in the abortion debate. No matter what decision a woman makes, it will be filled with pain. But our hope is that the pain will be life-giving for all those affected by the decision, including the unborn.

Father Jim Hewes
Geneseo

Abortion before ensoulment is a sin, but what kind?

To the editor:

Despite her obvious wish to present objectively the Catholic viewpoint on reproductive issues at the June 8 forum of Planned Parenthood, Mary Rose McCarthy ends by giving the impression that the Church is at sixes and sevens in this area (CC: June 15). Ambivalence yields even to error in the statement that on abortion the Church "has not reached a consensus."

Family planning activists in particular have often tried to discover some break in the centuries-long Catholic teaching that abortion is a grave sin against neighbor. The best summary I know of this doctrinal continuum is "An Almost Absolute Value in History," an essay by the noted legal historian Professor (now Judge) John T. Noonan Jr. Published initially in "The Morality of Abortion," (Harvard Univer-

sity Press, 1970), it was reprinted in 1985 in *The Human Life Review* (New York, IX, 125-78). Noonan shows that from apostolic times, when abortionists were called "killers" of the unborn (see *Didache*, 2.2), down to Vatican II, which called abortion and infanticide "horrible crimes" (see *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 51), there has been no fudging. If in the course of Catholic discussion of the subject there was a biological doubt as to when the embryo became human, the question asked was not whether abortion before ensoulment was not a sin (all agreed it was), but rather what kind of sin: a type of homicide or something else? Not only is it untrue, therefore, to say that, historically and doctrinally, a Catholic consensus is lacking on this subject; it is injurious to the right to life of all unborn children.

Polarized though these issues may be today, it would still be good to discuss them calmly in a public forum. But is a forum conducted by Planned Parenthood on its own terrain the best place to start?

Father Robert F. McNamara
St. Thomas the Apostle Church
Rochester

Lowering retirement age for priests is a logical move worth looking into

To the editor:

This letter is in response to Mr. David Kommeth's letter which appeared in the June 21, 1990, *Catholic Courier*.

Neither Mr. Kommeth nor the *Catholic Courier* reporters were in attendance at the May 19, 1990, Diocesan Pastoral Council meeting. If they had been at the meeting, they would have heard Father John Mulligan explain that when a priest retires he is not retiring from the priesthood but retiring from his administrative role.

The overwhelming majority of the 30 DPC members present spoke positively on the issue of reducing the retirement age at which a priest may receive a full pension from 70 years of age to 67. Several DPC members spoke of their own retirement and how it has enabled them to pursue ministries and interests they did not have time for when they were working. Some DPC members thought that the age should be lowered to 65 years of age. Many DPC members spoke of several "retired" priests who were just as active in their retirement as they were when they were

pastors. ...

Mr. Kommeth implies that it is not logical for the diocese to consider lowering the age at which a priest retires. Is it logical to expect a man of 67 or 70 years of age to be available 24 hours a day responding to pastoral emergencies, ministries, and administering a parish?

The fact remains, even with the present proposal, that the customary retirement age remains at 70; but that a priest who retires for a just reason at age 67 (effective after a three-year phase-in period) will not be penalized with a reduced pension; and yet that a priest may retire from administration as late as age 75, as the proposal acknowledges, is the age given in the Code of Canon Law. With all of these components built into this retirement policy proposal, it seems that Father Robert Schrader's comment at the spring, 1988, DPC meeting "We will look into it" was indeed one upon which action was taken.

Martha Jodoin
executive secretary
Diocesan Pastoral Council

Bishop's 'frame of mind' causes men to join priesthood elsewhere

To the editor:

I note that several times during the past year you have addressed the lack of vocations to the priesthood in the Diocese of Rochester and the fact that we are confronting a veritable crisis in the ministry. Are you aware that this year the Holy Father is ordaining three men to the priesthood, all from Rochester just for one congregation, the Legionaries of Christ? Perhaps Bishop Clark would like to copy the sort of witness the Legionaries give that makes young men desire to join them rather than become part of his presbyterate. The Second Vatican Council enjoined us to search for the signs of the times. These are indeed the ways in which God lets us know what He is up to.

I hope Bishop Clark reads these signs and comes to realize that he, and those who have his frame of mind, are the problem. Please don't tell us anymore that we have a crisis of vocations. The problem is not that God is not calling men to the priesthood but that the structures of the Church — that is, those in the hands of radical liberals — make it very difficult for anyone to respond to this call. Their solution — and who can blame them — is to look elsewhere. In His infinite mercy, God does provide.

Incidentally, you have not even acknowledged that these ordinations are taking place. A priest of this diocese suggested that the reason is that his would embarrass the powers that be to no end. I

prefer to believe that the reason is that you never heard about it. Can you clarify this for us?

Brian Sullivan
Bedford St.
Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: We learned of the Hopkins brothers' planned ordination to the Legionaries of Christ in Father Paul Cuddy's column last week, which unfortunately misidentified the order as Legionnaires of Christ.

However, the Hopkins family lives in Cazenovia, which is part of the Diocese of Syracuse, not Rochester. We will watch our wire service for news of the brothers' ordination this coming January.

descendants of Noah Webster, "orthodox" means "conforming to established doctrine." When one considers that doctrine in Catholicism comes from God — through the Holy Spirit, to the Church founded by Christ upon the rock of Peter and his magisterial successors — conformity is hardly constraining, but rather is precisely the "light burden" that our Founder promised that it would be. Thus orthodoxy, while it might be the "narrow road" less traveled, makes all the difference to those who have been refreshed by the liberating truth of our Savior. In fact, it becomes the only road to salvation for those who have been given the light to find it.

Interestingly, it appears that — apart from her apparent embrace of pacifism, a position which a close reading of *Gaudium et Spes*, (cf. Nos. 78, 79) does not support — Mary Ellen is in fact "orthodox," whether or not she is a moderate on political issues other than pro-life. We who are not ashamed of such adjectives welcome her, in hopes that she will not fear to march under Christ's banner of Truth, as she leads others to Him.

John F. Wagner Jr.
Rochester

Found National Rosary Congress inspiring

To the editor:

The National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., hosted the Third Annual National Rosary Congress on Sunday, June 10, to Saturday, June 16, 1990. A chartered bus carried about 30 from the Rochester area to the shrine, among whom were six members of St. Leo's Rosary Society. Many others from the Rochester area went by car or plane. Along with others, we witnessed the tears of Mary on the statue of Mary with the Christ Child in one of the side alcoves.

The week was devoted to prayer, highlighted by the Eucharistic celebrations and beautiful rosary meditations before the

Blessed Sacrament which was exposed throughout the night for adoration.

The homilies and conferences by well-known priests were thought-provoking and inspiring. The thought persists and lingers in my mind as one speaker referred to "a period of 10 years." "These are ten very important years. These are ten decisive years. I am asking you to spend them with Me because you are entering into the final period of the second Advent, which will lead you to the triumph of my Immaculate Heart in the glorious coming of my Son Jesus." (Our Lady Speaks, Sept. 18, 1988).

Lois A. Metherell
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