

Encyclical is most memorable by this pope

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Pope John Paul II's 11th encyclical could become the most memorable of his pontificate.

Titled "The Gospel of Life," it forthrightly condemns abortion and euthanasia, the major attacks on human life at its beginning and end.

It also contains what several observers have called the strongest expression ever of church teaching against capital punishment: It says the cases of justifiable use of it today are "very rare, if not, practically nonexistent."

The new encyclical, dated March 25 and released March 30, carries three formal statements of church teaching against the taking of innocent life:

"By the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his successors, and in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral."

"By the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his successors, in communion with the bishops — who on various occasions have condemned abortion and who ... albeit dispersed throughout the world, have shown unanimous agreement concerning this doctrine — I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being."

"Taking into account (previously

stated) distinctions, in harmony with the magisterium of my predecessors and in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person."

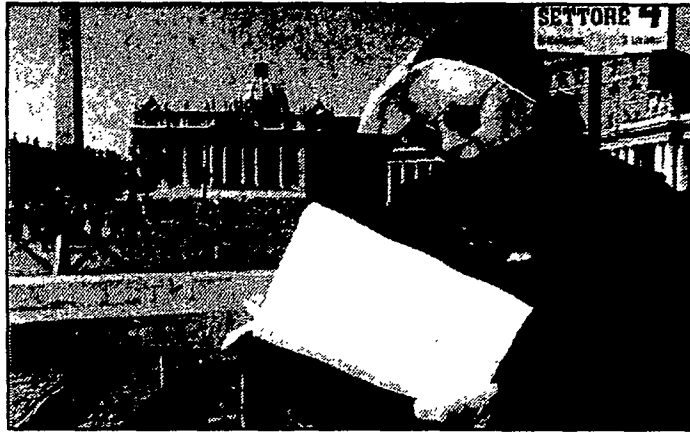
Pope John Paul called abortion and euthanasia trends part of an unprecedented "conspiracy against life."

Behind them, he said, is a "profound crisis of culture" in which crimes against life are made legal and justified "as legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights."

The pope framed his encyclical within a broader framework of the Gospel call to honor and protect the sacredness of human life at every phase and in every aspect.

Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago, who has long championed that "consistent ethic of life" approach in the United States, praised Pope John Paul for his use of that approach in the encyclical.

The pope also drew strongly on Scripture to develop the themes of the



AP/Wide World Photos

With St. Peter's in the background, a woman religious reads a copy of Pope John Paul II's encyclical on human life after it was publicly released at the Vatican March 30.

encyclical, employing less of the heavily philosophical, abstract language that has characterized his previous encyclical letters.

While the encyclical itself did not employ explicit language of infallibility in expressing its teachings, at a Vatican press conference introducing it, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said the teachings are plainly authoritative and deserve obedience.

"In the face of this text, one cannot seek refuge in formalistic discussions about what, when and where, and on what authority, all this is being taught," said Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The pope's call for consistency between the moral law and civil law pro-

voled some of the strongest initial reactions to the encyclical.

"One of the specific characteristics of present-day attacks on human life ... consists in the trend to demand a legal justification for them, as if they were rights which the state, at least under certain conditions, must acknowledge as belonging to citizens," he said.

"There is a need to recover the basic elements of a vision of the relationship between civil law and moral law. ... Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize," he said.

"Democracy," he commented, "cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality."

An immoral law cannot command obedience, he said, and those who object morally to laws authorizing abortion or euthanasia have "a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection."

Even in traditionally Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, some government officials objected to papal efforts to influence civil abortion law, while others said his was a needed voice for life.

EDITORS' NOTE: The Catholic Courier is planning to run a page-one article on diocesan reaction to the pope's latest encyclical in its April 20 issue. Those who would like to offer their viewpoints on the encyclical may call Rob Cullivan (on or after April 12) at 716/328-4340, or fax him your comments at 716/328-8640.

Easter services to air for stations to pick up

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Good Friday and Easter services led by Pope John Paul II will be broadcast live for pickup by TV and radio stations.

As in previous years, the Vatican will pay the uplink costs. Downlink expenses are expected to be borne by local stations.

The April 14 Good Friday, at which the pope will preside, will be broadcast live from 9:15 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Italian time from Rome's Colosseum.

Easter Sunday Mass will be celebrated by the pope and broadcast from St. Peter's Basilica from 10:30 a.m. to noon Italian time April 16. After the Mass, the pope will deliver his Easter message "urbi et orbi."

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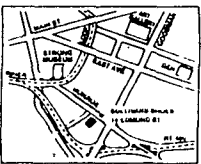
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