

ON THE VALUE *and* INVIOABILITY of HUMAN LIFE  
*Evangelium Vitae* (Acta Apostolicae Sedis 87 [1995] p. 515).

**Encyclical Letter Addressed by the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II To the Bishops Priests and Deacons Men and Women Religious Lay Faithful And all People of Good Will**

Ioannis Pauli PP. II Summi Pontificis "Evangelium Vitae" Litterae Encyclicae Episcopis, Presbyteris et Diaconis Religiosis Viris et Mulieribus Christifidelibus Laicis Universisque Bonae Voluntatis Hominibus de Vitae Humanae Inviolabili Bono

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## Evangelium Vitae

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*The Gospel of Life* is at the heart of Jesus' message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as "good news" to the people of every age and culture.

At the dawn of salvation, it is the Birth of a Child which is proclaimed as joyful news: "I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is. Christ the Lord" (*Lk* 2:10-11). The source of this "great joy" is the Birth of the Saviour; but Christmas also reveals the full meaning of every human birth, and the joy which accompanies the Birth of the Messiah is thus seen to be the foundation and fulfilment of joy at every child born into the world (cf. *Jn* 16:21).

When he presents the heart of his redemptive mission, Jesus says: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10:10). In truth, he is referring to that "new" and "eternal" life which consists in communion with the Father, to which every person is freely called in the Son by the power of the Sanctifying Spirit. It is precisely in this "life" that all the aspects and stages of human life achieve their full significance.

#### [2.] THE INCOMPARABLE WORTH of the HUMAN PERSON

2. Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the *greatness* and the *inestimable value* of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process which, unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise and renewed by the gift of divine life, which will reach its full realization in eternity (cf. 1 *Jn* 3:1-2). At the same time, it is precisely this supernatural calling which highlights the *relative character* of each individual's earthly life. After all, life on earth is not an "ultimate" but a "penultimate" reality; even so, it remains a *sacred reality* entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility and brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters.

The Church knows that this *Gospel of life*, which she has received from her Lord,<sup>1</sup> has a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person--believer and non-believer alike--because it marvellously fulfils all the heart's expectations while infinitely surpassing them. Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. *Rom* 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree. Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded.

<sup>1</sup> The expression "Gospel of life" is not found as such in Sacred Scripture. But it does correspond to an essential dimension of the biblical message.

### Introductio

1. Evangelium Vitae penitus implicatum insidet in Iesu nuntio. Ab Ecclesia amanter cotidie susceptum, animosa id oportet fidelitate enuntietur velut redditum nuntium hominibus cuiusvis aetatis et cuiuslibet cultus humani formae.

Incipiente ipsa hominum redemptione, infantis cuiusdam ortus tamquam laetifica omnino praedicatur res: "Ecce enim evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum, quod erit omni populo, quia natus est vobis hodie Salvator, qui est Christus Dominus, in civitate David" (*Luc.* 2, 10-11). Ut "magna" autem haec effunderetur "laetitia" Servatoris nimirum ipsius effecit exortus; attamen in Christi die Natali plena detegitur significatio ortus cuiusque hominis, proindeque messianicum illud gaudium videtur quasi fundamentum complementumque simul laetationis super omni nascente nomine (Cfr. *Io.* 16, 21).

Salutiferi muneris sui praecipuam exhibens partem dicit Iesus: "Ego veni, ut vitam habeant et abundantius habeant" (*Ibid.* 10, 10). De vita Ille revera loquitur "nova" atque "aeterna", quae ex communiione consistit cum Patre, ad quam unusquisque homo ultro in Filio vocatur per Sanctificantem Spiritum. Sed in tali nominatim "vita" plenum suum intellectum omnia consequuntur vitae humanae elementa ac tempora.

#### Incomparabilis personae humanae praestantia

2. Quandam in vitae plenitudinem homo invitatur quae fines prorsus terrestres eius egreditur vitae, quoniam participatione Dei ipsius vitae continetur. Supernaturalis huius vocationis excelsitas *magnitudinem* porro vitae humanae ac *pretium* temporali etiam in illius spatio aperit. Primaria namque conditio, principium ipsum et pars integrans totius et unici processus humanae existentiae est vita in tempore. Immerito quidem et inopinato illustratur idem processus pollicitatione vitae divinae et vitae dono renovatur, quod plenam sui consummationem aeterno consequetur in aevo (Cfr. *ibid.* 3, 1-2). Simul vero ipsa haec supernaturalis appellatio variantem vitae terrenae indolem effert viri omnis et mulieris. Est enim res non omnino "ultima" verum "proxima a postrema"; attamen sacra res est, nobis interea credita quam ex officii nostri conscientia custodiamus atque ad consummationem deducamus per amorem et nostri ipsorum donum Deo factum ac fratribus.

Novit Ecclesia illud *Evangelium vitae* sibi a Domino suo commendatum (Dictio *Evangelium vitae* ut talis in libris divinis reapse non invenitur. Ea tamen bene biblici nuntii necessariae parti respondet), intus resonare permovereque unumquemque hominem sive credit sive non, quandoquidem admirabili modo ei respondet, dum eius simul expectationes infinita quadam ratione excedit. Valet enim quilibet homo, inter difficultates licet ac dubitationes, ad veritatem tamen ex animo apertus adque bonitatem, adiutus rationis ipsius lumine et arcana gratiae impulsione, pervenire eo quidem usque ut legem naturalem in corde inscriptam (Cfr. *Rom.* 2, 14-15) agnoscat, sacrum vitae humanae bonum a primis initiis ad finem ipsum, necnon ius cuiusque adserat hominis ut hoc suum principale bonum summopere observatum videat. In eiusdem ideo iuris

In a special way, believers in Christ must defend and promote this right, aware as they are of the wonderful truth recalled by the Second Vatican Council: “By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being”.<sup>2</sup> This saving event reveals to humanity not only the boundless love of God who “so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (*Jn* 3:16), but also the *incomparable value of every human person*.

The Church, faithfully contemplating the mystery of the Redemption, acknowledges this value with ever new wonder.<sup>3</sup> She feels called to proclaim to the people of all times this “Gospel”, the source of invincible hope and true joy for every period of history. *The Gospel of God’s love for man, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel*.

For this reason, man--living man--represents the primary and fundamental way for the Church.<sup>4</sup>

### [3-4] NEW THREATS to HUMAN LIFE

3. Every individual, precisely by reason of the mystery of the Word of God who was made flesh (cf. *Jn* 1:14), is entrusted to the maternal care of the Church. Therefore every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt in the Church’s very heart; it cannot but affect her at the core of her faith in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, and engage her in her mission of proclaiming the *Gospel of life* in all the world and to every creature (cf. *Mk* 16:15).

Today this proclamation is especially pressing because of the extraordinary increase and gravity of threats to the life of individuals and peoples, especially where life is weak and defenceless. In addition to the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger, endemic diseases, violence and war, new threats are emerging on an alarmingly vast scale.

The Second Vatican Council, in a passage which retains all its relevance today, forcefully condemned a number of crimes and attacks against human life. Thirty years later, taking up the words of the Council and with the same forcefulness I repeat that condemnation in the name of the whole Church, certain that I am interpreting the genuine sentiment of every upright conscience: “Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who practise them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator”.<sup>5</sup>

agnitione hominum nititur consortio ipsaque politica communitas.

In Christum autem credentes praesertim hoc ius defendant opus est atque provehant, memores scilicet mirificae illius veritatis in Concilio Vaticano II commemoratae: “Ipse enim, Filius Dei, incarnatione sua cum omni homine quodammodo Se univit” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Etenim hoc in salutis eventu hominibus non modo amor Dei interminatus recluditur qui “sic... dilexit... mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret” (*Io.* 3, 16), verum et *incomparabilis singulorum hominum excellentia*.

Redemptionis arcanum sedulo ipsa perscrutata Ecclesia, novo semper cum animi stupore (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 10) illud bonum percipit seque vocari intellegit hominibus aetatum omnium hoc ad nuntiandum “evangelium”, spei insuperabilis originem verique gaudii pro unaquaque historiae aetate. *Amoris Dei erga homines Evangelium, dignitatis personae Evangelium atque vitae ipsius Evangelium unicum tandem sunt indivisibile Evangelium*.

Homo idcirco ipse, vivens nempe homo, praecipuam primamque Ecclesiae efficit viam (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 14).

#### Novae hominum vitae impendentes minationes

3. Maternis Ecclesiae curis committitur idcirco quisque homo propter Verbi Dei mysterium quod est caro factum (Cfr. *Io.* 1, 14). Quam ob rem fieri non potest quin omnis dignitatis hominum vitaeque ipsius minatio tamquam vocis imaginem in Ecclesiae intimo excitet animo, quin eam intra propriam fidem de redimente Filii Dei incarnatione percutiat, quin implicet illam suo in officio *Evangelium vitae* universum per orbem omnique proferendi creaturae (Cfr. *Marc.* 16, 15).

Insigniter autem illa nuntiatio nos hodie premit, quoniam duplicatae notabiliter et exasperatae minationes sunt hominum populorumque vitae instantes, praesertim quotiens imbecilla ea est nec apte defenditur. Antiquis acerbisque plagis miseriae, inediae, morborum pandemorum, bellorum et violentiae aliae iam novorum omnino generum ac modorum terrificorum accedunt.

Vehementer iam deflevit Concilium Vaticanum II, suo quodam in scripto tristius etiam nostra ad tempora pertinente, complura contra vitam humanam scelera et conata. Eisdem sententias in Nostram nunc suscipientes partem, triginta post annis, simili vi rursus universae Ecclesiae nomine, una cum illo conciliari congressu ista lamentamur crimina, nihil profecto dubitantes quin omnis rectae conscientiae veros interpretemur sensus: “Quaecumque insuper ipsi vitae adversantur, ut cuiusvis generis homicidia, genocidia, abortus, euthanasia et ipsum voluntarium suicidium; quaecumque humanae personae integritatem violant, ut mutilationes, tormenta corpori mentive inflicta, conatus ipsos animos coercendi; quaecumque humanam dignitatem offendunt, ut infrahumanae vivendi condiciones, arbitrarie incarcerationes, deportationes, servitus, prostitutio, mercatus mulierum et iuvenum; condiciones quoque laboris ignominiosae, quibus operarii ut mera quaestus instrumenta, non ut liberae et responsabiles personae tractantur: haec omnia et alia huiusmodi probra quidem sunt, ac dum civilizationem humanam inficiunt, magis eos inquinant qui sic se gerunt, quam eos qui iniuriam patiuntur et Creatoris honori maxime contradicunt” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 27).

<sup>2</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 10: AAS 71 (1979), 275.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 14 *loc. cit.*, 285.

<sup>5</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

4. Unfortunately, this disturbing state of affairs, far from decreasing, is expanding: with the new prospects opened up by scientific and technological progress there arise new forms of attacks on the dignity of the human being. At the same time a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crimes against life a *new and--if possible--even more sinister character*, giving rise to further grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems.

All this is causing a profound change in the way in which life and relationships between people are considered. The fact that legislation in many countries, perhaps even departing from basic principles of their Constitutions, has determined not to punish these practices against life, and even to make them altogether legal, is both a disturbing symptom and a significant cause of grave moral decline. Choices once unanimously considered criminal and rejected by the common moral sense are gradually becoming socially acceptable. Even certain sectors of the medical profession, which by its calling is directed to the defence and care of human life, are increasingly willing to carry out these acts against the person. In this way the very nature of the medical profession is distorted and contradicted, and the dignity of those who practise it is degraded. In such a cultural and legislative situation, the serious demographic, social and family problems which weigh upon many of the world's peoples and which require responsible and effective attention from national and international bodies, are left open to false and deceptive solutions, opposed to the truth and the good of persons and nations.

The end result of this is tragic: not only is the fact of the destruction of so many human lives still to be born or in their final stage extremely grave and disturbing, but no less grave and disturbing is the fact that conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the basic value of human life.

#### [5] IN COMMUNION with ALL the BISHOPS of the WORLD

5. The *Extraordinary Consistory* of Cardinals held in Rome on 4-7 April 1991 was devoted to the problem of the threats to human life in our day. After a thorough and detailed discussion of the problem and of the challenges it poses to the entire human family and in particular to the Christian community, the Cardinals unanimously asked me to reaffirm with the authority of the Successor of Peter the value of human life and its inviolability, in the light of present circumstances and attacks threatening it today.

In response to this request, at Pentecost in 1991 I wrote a *personal letter* to each of my Brother Bishops asking them, in the spirit of episcopal collegiality, to offer me their cooperation in drawing up a specific document.<sup>6</sup> I am deeply grateful to all the Bishops who replied and provided me with valuable facts, suggestions and proposals. In so doing they bore witness to their unanimous desire to share in the doctrinal and pastoral mission of the Church with regard to the *Gospel of life*.

4. Conturbans hic rerum prospectus, pro dolor, tantum abest ut imminuatur; ut potius distendatur: novis enim praebitis e scientifica technologicaque progressionem facultatibus oriuntur novae simul rationes dignitatem hominis temptandi, aliunde dum nova cultus humani figuratur atque confirmatur condicio, quae criminibus in humanam vitam addit antehac *invisam faciem et, si fieri quidem potest, multo etiam praviorem*, unde graves aliae nascuntur sollicitudines: namque a magnis iam publicae opinionis partibus quaedam adversus vitam purgantur delicta obtentu singularis iurium libertatis, eaque de causa non impunitas modo defenditur illorum, quin etiam approbatio publicis ab auctoritatibus, ut plena libertate parentur, immo subsidiis gratuitis ministeriorum valetudinis adiuventur. Inducunt sane haec omnia quendam penitus commutatam vitae ipsius aestimandae modum necnon necessitudinum inter homines iudicandarum. Quod enim normae multarum Civitatum, ab ipsis fortasse recedentes primariis Legum Fundamentalium principiis, nullo pacto puniunt aut legitimam etiam agnoscunt naturam talium usuum contra vitam, signum quoddam est, unde angor animi gignitur, nec levis sane causa gravis morum prolapsionis: quae olim unanimes consensione habebantur consilia criminosa communique proinde reiciebantur honestatis sensu, gradatim sociali iudicio accipiuntur. Ars ipsa medicina, quae natura suapte ac destinatione ad humanae vitae defensionem dirigitur necnon curationem, quibusdam suis rationibus et usibus promptiorem se usque exhibet ad hos actus contra personam iudicandos, sicque faciem detorquet suam, ipsa sibi contra dicit et eorum deicit dignitatem qui eam artem faciunt. Similibus porro in culturae legumque adiunctis graviores etiam demographicae sociales familiares quaestiones, quibus plures terrarum populi gravantur et quibus prudentissima debetur actiosaque ponderatio coetuum singulis in nationibus et inter nationes, obiciuntur falsis fallacibusque remediis a veritate sane abhorrentibus necnon ab hominum civitatumque vero bono. Exitus ad quem devenitur calamitosus prorsus est: si ipsa extinctio tot vitarum humanarum sive nascentium sive deficientium permovet nos atque conturbat, haud quidem minus movet id turbatque, quod conscientia ipsa, ita late propagatis condicionibus adfecta, aegrius et difficilius usque discrimen inter bonum et malum percipit iis in rebus quae principale tangunt vitae humanae bonum.

#### In communione cum cunctis orbis episcopis

5. Huic argumento, nempe rebus vitae humanae nostro tempore insidiantibus, studuit *Consistorium Cardinalium extraordinarium* Romae peractum inter diem IV et VII mensis Aprilis anno MCMXCI. Fusa accurateque agitata quaestione atque inspectis provocationibus in familiam hominum ac praesertim in christianam communitatem, unanimo consensu a Nobis flagitaverunt Cardinales ut, Beati Petri Successoris auctoritate, praestantiam humanae vitae inviolabilemque eius naturam denuo inculcaremus hodiernis in condicionibus ac temptationibus quae ei minantur.

Eorum Nos obsecuti precibus sub diem Pentecostes anno MCMXCI *epistolam singularem* Nostram cuique Fratri Episcopo inscripsimus ut, collegialitatis episcopalis adfectu incitatus, suam Nobis adiutricem adderet operam ad proprium aliquod de hac re contextendum documentum (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Epistula ad omnes fratres in Episcopatu de Evangelio Vitae*, die 19 maii 1991; *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIV, 1 (1991) 1293). Intimo ex animo universis Episcopis gratias habemus qui rite responderint

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Letter to all my Brothers in the Episcopate regarding the "Gospel of Life" (19 May 1991): *Insegnamenti* XIV, 1 (1991), 1293-1296.

In that same letter, written shortly after the celebration of the centenary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, I drew everyone's attention to this striking analogy: "Just as a century ago it was the working classes which were oppressed in their fundamental rights, and the Church very courageously came to their defence by proclaiming the sacrosanct rights of the worker as a person, so now, when another category of persons is being oppressed in the fundamental right to life, the Church feels in duty bound to speak out with the same courage on behalf of those who have no voice. Hers is always the evangelical cry in defence of the world's poor, those who are threatened and despised and whose human rights are violated".<sup>7</sup>

Today there exists a great multitude of weak and defenceless human beings, unborn children in particular, whose fundamental right to life is being trampled upon. If, at the end of the last century, the Church could not be silent about the injustices of those times, still less can she be silent today, when the social injustices of the past, unfortunately not yet overcome, are being compounded in many regions of the world by still more grievous forms of injustice and oppression, even if these are being presented as elements of progress in view of a new world order.

The present Encyclical, the fruit of the cooperation of the Episcopate of every country of the world, is therefore meant to be a *precise and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability*, and at the same time a pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: *respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!* Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!

May these words reach all the sons and daughters of the Church! May they reach all people of good will who are concerned for the good of every man and woman and for the destiny of the whole of society!

6. In profound communion with all my brothers and sisters in the faith, and inspired by genuine friendship towards all, I wish to *meditate upon once more and proclaim the Gospel of life*, the splendour of truth which enlightens consciences, the clear light which corrects the darkened gaze, and the unfailing source of faithfulness and steadfastness in facing the ever new challenges which we meet along our path.

As I recall the powerful experience of the Year of the Family, as if to complete the *Letter* which I wrote "to every particular family in every part of the world",<sup>8</sup> I look with renewed confidence to every household and I pray that at every level a general commitment to support the family will reappear and be strengthened, so that today too—even amid so many difficulties and serious threats—the family will always remain, in accordance with God's plan, the "sanctuary of life".<sup>9</sup>

To all the members of the Church, *the people of life and for life*, I make this most urgent appeal, that together we may offer this world of ours new signs of

Nobisque notiones magni pretii et consilia et propositiones commiserint. Ii sic quoque, consentientes videlicet sibi que penitus persuadentes, testati sunt se participes esse doctrinalis ac pastoralis Ecclesiae operis de *Evangelio vitae*.

Iisdem vero in litteris, paucis nempe diebus post centesimum celebratum annum a documento "Rerum Novarum", omnium animos traduximus singularem ad hanc similitudinem: "Quem ad modum priore saeculo suis principalibus in iuribus operariorum opprimebatur ordo cuius fortiter quidem causam defendebat Ecclesia, cum ipsius officii sacra iura personae praedicaret, sic nostra aetate, dum alius hominum ordo suo in iure ad vitam praecipuo opprimitur, sibi necesse percipit esse Ecclesia fortitudine inconcussa iis tribuere vocem quibus non sit. Eius nempe evangelica semper propria est vociferatio pro orbis pauperibus, quotquot periclitantur, aspemuntur suisque iuribus humanis suffocantur" (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Epistula ad omnes fratres in Episcopatu de Evangelio Vitae*, die 19 maii 1991; *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIV, 1 (1991) 1294).

Hodie autem hoc in primario iure ad vitam conculcatur hominum debiliū indefensorumque multitudo, quales nominatim sunt nondum nati infantes. Si superiore exeunte saeculo coram tum grassantibus iniustitiis haud Ecclesiae tacere licebat, eo quidem minus hodie silere licet, cum socialibus temporis transacti iniuriis, pro dolor nondum dissolutis, tot in locis per orbem graviores etiam offensiones adiunguntur atque oppressiones, quae cum elementis fortasse confunduntur alicuius novi constituendi terrarum ordinis.

Quocirca Encyclicae hae Litterae, quas sociata Episcoporum opera omni ex orbis Natione peperit, illuc videlicet spectant ut *vitae humanae excellentia eiusque inviolabilitas definite ac firme rursus adseveretur*, eodemque tempore ad omnes ac singulos, Dei ipsius nomine, appellatio vehemens dirigatur: *verere ac tuere, amato ac sustentato vitam, vitam omnem humanam!* Hac sola in via iustitiam reperies et progressionem, libertatem veram, pacem et felicitatem!

Ad universos utinam hae voces filios perveniant filiasque Ecclesiae! Utinam ad omnes bonae voluntatis homines pertingant, quibus bonum curae est uniuscuiusque viri ac feminae necnon totius societatis humanae sors!

6. Cum singulis in fide fratribus et sororibus intimo modo coniuncti sinceraeque erga omnes amicitia moti, *iterum Evangelium vitae ponderare cupimus atque enuntiare*, quod veritatis splendor est conscientias irradians, praeclarum lumen sanans obscuratum prospectum, fons firmitudinis ac fortitudinis inexhaustus nos hortans ut novis semper obviam procedamus nostro in itinere occurrentibus provocationibus.

Cum copiosa denuo perpendimus rerum experimenta per Annum pro Familia percepta, ipsi velut in doctrina perficientes *Litteras* a Nobis missas ad "unamquamque veram solidamque familiam cuiuslibet terrarum regionis" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Gratissimam Sane*, 4), respicimus nova quidem cum animi fiducia singulas communitates domesticas et optamus ut renascatur utque omni in ordine corroboretur omnium officium familiam sustinendi, unde hodie quoque ipsa – inter multas versans difficultates ac graves minationes – perpetuo ex Dei consilio servetur tamquam "vitae sacrarium" (EIUSDEM *Centesimus Annus*, 39). Singulis corporis Ecclesiae membris, *hominibus de vita ac pro vita*, intentissimam movemus hanc invitationem, ut nostro huic orbi nova ministrare coniunctim

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit., p. 1294.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane* (2 February 1994), 4: AAS 86 (1994) 871.

<sup>9</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 39 AAS 83 (1991), 842.

hope, and work to ensure that justice and solidarity will increase and that a new culture of human life will be affirmed, for the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love.

## [7-28] CHAPTER I

*The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground*

### PRESENT-DAY THREATS TO HUMAN LIFE

*"Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (Gen 4:8):*

#### [7-9] THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST LIFE

7. "God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he has created all things that they might exist... *God created man for incorruption*, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy *death entered the world*, and those who belong to his party experience it" (*Wis 1:13-14; 2:23-24*).

The *Gospel of life*, proclaimed in the beginning when man was created in the image of God for a destiny of full and perfect life (cf. *Gen 2:7; Wis 9:2-3*), is contradicted by the painful experience of *death which enters the world* and casts its shadow of meaninglessness over man's entire existence. Death came into the world as a result of the devil's envy (cf. *Gen 3:1,4-5*) and the sin of our first parents (cf. *Gen 2:17, 3:17-19*). And death entered it in a violent way, *through the killing of Abel by his brother Cain*: "And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (*Gen 4:8*).

This first murder is presented with singular eloquence in a page of the Book of Genesis which has universal significance: it is a page rewritten daily, with inexorable and degrading frequency, in the book of human history.

Let us re-read together this biblical account which, despite its archaic structure and its extreme simplicity, has much to teach us.

*"Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had not regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it'.*

*"Cain said to Abel his brother, 'Let us go out to the field'. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' And the Lord said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth'. Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me this day away from the ground; and from your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me'. Then the Lord said to him, 'Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold'. And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (*Gen 4:2-16*).*

8. Cain was "very angry" and his countenance "fell" because "the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering" (*Gen 4:4-5*). The biblical text does not reveal

possimus spei documenta et efficere simul ut iustitia augeat et necessitudinis iunctio inter homines, utque novus percrebrescat civilis cultus vitae humanae ad sinceram veritatis amorisque exaedificandam humanitatem.

## Caput I

### VOX SANGUINIS FRATRIS TUI

#### CLAMAT AD ME DE AGRO

#### Hodierna vitae humanae intentata pericula

**"Consurrexit cain adversus abel fratrem suum et interfecit eum" (*Gen. 4, 8*): in ipsa violentiae contra vitam origine**

7. "Deus mortem non fecit, nec laetatur in perditione vivorum. Creavit enim, ut essent omnia... *Deus creavit hominem in incorruptibilitate*; et imaginem similitudinis suae fecit illum. Invidia autem diaboli *mors introivit in orbem terrarum*; experiuntur autem illam, qui sunt ex parte illius" (*Sap. 1, 13-14; 2, 23-24*).

*Evangelio vitae*, quod iam initio exsonuit conditis ad Dei imaginem hominibus in vitae plenae perfectaeque sortem (Cfr. *Gen. 2, 7; Sap. 9, 2-3*), pertristis ille repugnavit eventus *mortis quae in mundum invasit* umbramque coniecit inanitatis in totam hominis vitam. Propter diaboli ipsius malevolentiam (Cfr. *Gen. 3, 1. 4-5*) ingressa est mors necnon progenitorum delictum (Cfr. *ibid. 2, 17; 3, 17-19*). Ac violenter intravit per *Abelis intereccionem a Cain fratre*: "Cumque essent in agro, consurrexit Cain adversus Abel fratrem suum et interfecit eum" (*Ibid. 4, 8*).

Prima haec nex illustri praebeatur eloquentia in libri Genesis exemplari pagina, quae cotidie sine intermissione, immo vero cum deprimente quadam repetitione retexitur in populorum annalibus.

Retractare una placet bibliorum paginam hanc quae, quantumvis vetustatem respiciat maximamque simplicitatem, doctrinis sese tamen uberrimam praestat.

*"Et fuit Abel pastor ovium et Cain agricola. Factum est autem post aliquot dies ut offerret Cain de fructibus agri munus Domino. Abel quoque obtulit de primogenitis gregis sui et de adipibus eorum. Et respexit Dominus ad Abel et ad munus eius, ad Cain vero et ad munus illius non respexit. Iratusque est Cain vehementer, et concidit vultus eius. Dixitque Dominus ad eum: «Quare iratus es, et cur concidit facies tua? Nonne si bene egeris, vultum attolles? Sin autem male, in foribus peccatum insidiabitur, et ad te erit appetitus eius, tu autem dominaberis illius».*

*Dixitque Cain ad Abel fratrem suum: «Egrediamur foras». Cumque essent in agro, consurrexit Cain adversus Abel fratrem suum et interfecit eum. Et ait Dominus ad Cain: «Ubi est Abel frater tuus?». Qui respondit: «Nescio. Num custos fratris mei sum ego?». Dixitque ad eum: «Quid fecisti? Vox sanguinis fratris tui clamat ad me de agro. Nunc igitur maledictus eris procul ab agro, qui aperuit os suum et suscepit sanguinem fratris tui de manu tua! Cum operatus fueris eum, amplius non dabit tibi fructus suos; vagus et profugus eris super terram». Dixitque Cain ad Dominum: «Maior est poena mea quam ut portem eam. Ecce eicis me hodie a facie agri, et a facie tua abscondar et ero vagus et profugus in terra; omnis igitur, qui invenerit me, occidet me». Dixitque ei Dominus: «Nequaquam ita fiet, sed omnis qui occiderit Cain, septuplum punietur!». Posuitque Dominus Cain signum, ut non eum interficeret omnis qui invenisset eum. Egressusque Cain a facie Domini habitavit in terra Nod ad orientalem plagam Eden" (*Gen. 4, 2-16*).*

8. Cain "iratus... est... vehementer" et "concidit vultus eius", quoniam "respexit Dominus ad Abel et ad munus eius" (*Ibid. 4, 4*). Causam tacet biblicus locus et quam



the reason why God prefers Abel's sacrifice to Cain's. It clearly shows however that God, although preferring Abel's gift, *does not interrupt his dialogue with Cain*. He admonishes him, *reminding him of his freedom in the face of evil*: man is in no way predestined to evil. Certainly, like Adam, he is tempted by the malevolent force of sin which, like a wild beast, lies in wait at the door of his heart, ready to leap on its prey. But Cain remains free in the face of sin. He can and must overcome it: "Its desire is for you, but you must master it" (*Gen 4:7*).

*Envy and anger* have the upper hand over the Lord's warning, and so Cain attacks his own brother and kills him. As we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "In the account of Abel's murder by his brother Cain, Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from the beginning of human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man"<sup>10</sup>

*Brother kills brother*. Like the first fratricide, every murder is a violation of the "spiritual" kinship uniting mankind in one great family,<sup>11</sup> in which all share the same fundamental good: equal personal dignity. Not infrequently the kinship "of flesh and blood" is also violated; for example when threats to life arise within the relationship between parents and children, such as happens in abortion or when, in the wider context of family or kinship, euthanasia is encouraged or practised.

At the root of every act of violence against one's neighbour there is a *concession to the "thinking" of the evil one*, the one who "was a murderer from the beginning" (*Jn 8:44*). As the Apostle John reminds us: "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother" (*1 Jn 3:11-12*). Cain's killing of his brother at the very dawn of history is thus a sad witness of how evil spreads with amazing speed: man's revolt against God in the earthly paradise is followed by the deadly combat of man against man.

After the crime, *God intervenes to avenge the one killed*. Before God, who asks him about the fate of Abel, Cain, instead of showing remorse and apologizing, arrogantly eludes the question: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (*Gen 4:9*). "I do not know": Cain tries to cover up his crime with a lie. This was and still is the case, when all kinds of ideologies try to justify and disguise the most atrocious crimes against human beings. "Am I my brother's keeper?": Cain does not wish to think about his brother and refuses to accept the responsibility which every person has towards others. We cannot but think of today's tendency for people to refuse to accept responsibility for their brothers and sisters. Symptoms of this trend include the lack of solidarity towards society's weakest members--such as the elderly, the infirm, immigrants, children--and the indifference frequently found in relations between the world's peoples even when basic values such as survival, freedom and peace are involved.

**9. But God cannot leave the crime unpunished**: from the ground on which it has been spilt, the blood of the one murdered demands that God should render justice (cf. *Gen 37:26; Is 26:21; Ez 24:7-8*). From this text the Church has taken the name of the "sins which cry to God for justice", and, first among them, she has included wilful murder.<sup>12</sup> For the Jewish people, as for many peoples of antiquity, blood is the source of life. Indeed "the blood is the life" (*Dt 12:23*),

muneris Cain Dominus anteposuerit Abel sacrificium; luculenter tamen docet, licet Abel donum praetulerit Deus, *colloquium cum Cain haudquaquam interrumpere illum*. Admonet igitur eum *commonetque libertatis propriae coram malo*: nullo modo in antecessum destinatur ad malum homo. Perinde atque Adamus antea, malefico ipse pellicitur peccati impulsu, qui veluti belua ferox ostio insidiatur cordis eius donec rapiat praedam. At liber esse Cain ante peccatum pergit. Valet is illud vincereque debet: "Ad te erit appetitus eius, tu autem dominaberis illius!" (*Ibid.* 4, 7). Superant Domini admonitionem *invidia et ira* sicque Cain adgreditur fratrem et necat. Legimus ideo in "Catholicae Ecclesiae Catechismo": "Scriptura, in narranda Abel occisione a fratre Cain perpetrata, inde ab exordio humanae historiae ostendit in homine irae et cupiditatis praesentiam, peccatum originale consecutarum. Homo parisi sui factus est inimicus" (*Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, n. 2259).

*Fratrem interficit frater*. Sicut in primo fratricidio evenit, in singulis deinde homicidiis violatur "spiritalis" *cognatio*, qua in unam conglobantur homines familiae (Cfr. S. AMBROSII *De Noe*, 26, 94-96: CSEL 32, 480-481), quandoquidem cuncti participes eiusdem praecipui boni sunt: parisi omnium dignitatis. Crebrius etiam "camis et sanguinis" violatur *cognatio*, cum pericula vitae vel intra ipsam parentum liberorumque necessitudinem oriuntur, prout in abortu accidit aut cum, latiore in domus affinitatisve regione, fovetur vel obtinetur euthanasia.

Cuilibet proximi violationi subest nimirum *concessio facta "logicae" maligni*, eius scilicet qui "homicida erat ab initio" (*Io. 8, 44*), uti apostolus commemorat Ioannes: "Quoniam haec est annuntiatio, quam audistis ab initio, ut diligamus alterutrum. Non sicut Cain: ex Maligno erat et occidit fratrem suum" (*1 Io. 3, 11-12*). Ita profecto fratris occisio a primo iam historiae humanae diluculo triste testimonium est quomodo celeritate mira progrediatur malum: hominis rebellionis in Deum in paradiso terrestri capitalis comitatur hominis contra hominem dimicatio.

Post scelus, *intercedit Deus ut ulciscatur interfectum*. In Dei conspectu, qui de Abelis exitu eum percontatur, Cain, non modo se non anxium et verecundum exhibet veniamque petit, verum arroganter etiam declinat quaesitum: "Nescio. Num custos fratris mei sum ego?" (*Gen. 4, 9*). "Nescio": mendacio sic studet Cain suum abscondere flagitium. Saepius quidem ita est factum et fit, cum utiles reperiuntur diversissimae quaeque sententiae rationesve ad purganda ac tegenda contra personam scelera atrocissima. "Num custos fratris mei sum ego?": nec fratrem cogitare Cain nec complere illud vult officium quo erga proximum quisque obligatur. Animum sua sponte cogitatio subit de hodiernis rerum propensionibus, quibus homo nempe in sui similem amittit omnem officiorum sensum; cuius rei documenta sunt tum deficiens coniunctionis adfectus erga debiliores societatis partes – quales sunt senes et aegrotantes migrantes et infantes – tum mens ipsa indifferens quae in rationibus inter populos crebrius deprehenditur, etiam cum de rebus agitur omnino praecipuis veluti de existentia ipsa et libertate et pace.

9. *At praeterire impune non potest Deus delictum*: agro ex ipso, ubi effusus est, postulat interfecti sanguis ut ille iustitiam reddat (Cfr. *ibid.* 37, 26; *Is. 26, 21; Ez. 24, 7-8*). Hoc ex loco collegit Ecclesia illam appellationem "peccatorum quae coram Deo vindictam clamant" quibus ante omnia voluntarium annumeratur homicidium (Cfr. *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, nn. 1867 et 2268). Iudaeis ipsis sicut aliis etiam

<sup>10</sup> No. 2259.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SAINT AMBROSE, *De Noe*, 26:94-96: CSEL 32, 480-481.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1867 and 2268.

and life, especially human life, belongs only to God: for this reason *whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself*.

*Cain* is cursed by God and also by the earth, which will deny him its fruit (cf. *Gen* 4: 12). *He is punished*: he will live in the wilderness and the desert. Murderous violence profoundly changes man's environment. From being the "garden of Eden" (*Gen* 2:15), a place of plenty, of harmonious interpersonal relationships and of friendship with God, the earth becomes "the land of Nod" (*Gen* 4:16), a place of scarcity, loneliness and separation from God. Cain will be "a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" (*Gen* 4:14): uncertainty and restlessness will follow him forever.

And yet God, who is always merciful even when he punishes, "put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him" (*Gen* 4:15). He thus gave him a distinctive sign, not to condemn him to the hatred of others, but to protect and defend him from those wishing to kill him, even out of a desire to avenge Abel's death. *Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity*, and God himself pledges to guarantee this. And it is precisely here that the *paradoxical mystery of the merciful justice of God* is shown forth. As Saint Ambrose writes: "Once the crime is admitted at the very inception of this sinful act of parricide, then the divine law of God's mercy should be immediately extended. If punishment is forthwith inflicted on the accused, then men in the exercise of justice would in no way observe patience and moderation, but would straightaway condemn the defendant to punishment.... God drove Cain out of his presence and sent him into exile far away from his native land, so that he passed from a life of human kindness to one which was more akin to the rude existence of a wild beast. God, who preferred the correction rather than the death of a sinner, did not desire that a homicide be punished by the exaction of another act of homicide".<sup>13</sup>

[10-17] "What have you done?" (*Gen* 4:10):  
THE ECLIPSE of the VALUE of LIFE

10. The Lord said to Cain: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (*Gen* 4:10). *The voice of the blood shed by men continues to cry out*, from generation to generation, in ever new and different ways.

The Lord's question: "What have you done?", which Cain cannot escape, is addressed also to the people of today, to make them realize the extent and gravity of the attacks against life which continue to mark human history; to make them discover what causes these attacks and feeds them; and to make them ponder seriously the consequences which derive from these attacks for the existence of individuals and peoples.

Some threats come from nature itself, but they are made worse by the culpable indifference and negligence of those who could in some cases remedy them. Others are the result of situations of violence, hatred and conflicting interests, which lead people to attack others through murder, war, slaughter and genocide.

And how can we fail to consider the violence against life done to millions of human beings, especially children, who are forced into poverty, malnutrition and hunger because of an unjust distribution of resources between peoples and between social classes? And what of the violence inherent not only in wars as such but in the scandalous arms trade, which spawns the many armed conflicts which stain our world with blood? What of the spreading of death caused by

antiquitatis populis sedes est sanguis vitae, immo vero "sanguis... anima est" (*Deut.* 12, 23), atque vita, humana praesertim, unum pertinet ad Deum: quocirca qui hominis adgreditur vitam, ipsi quadamtenus Deo infert manus.

A Deo maledicitur Cain atque etiam a terra ipsa, quae ei suos recusabit fructus (Cfr. *Gen.* 4, 11-12). Porro punitur, vastitatem colet et solitudinem. Vitae hominis ambitum funditus immutat mortifera vis. Tellus, sive "paradisus Eden" (*Ibid.* 2, 15), abundantiae regio necnon tranquillarum inter personas necessitudinum atque amicitiae cum Deo, evadit "terra Nod" (*Ibid.* 4, 16), "miseriae" locus ac solitudinis et longinquitatis a Deo. Erit Cain "vagus et profugus super terram" (*Ibid.* 4, 14): incerta instabilisque illum semper comitabitur condicio.

Misericors tamen usque Deus, etiam puniens, "posuit... Cain signum, ut non eum interficeret omnis qui invenisset eum" (*Ibid.* 4, 15): notam igitur ei addit, non sane eo pertinentem ut ceterorum hominum execrationibus obiciatur, sed ut protegatur is defendaturque adversus omnes qui eum interimere fortasse voverint etiam ut Abelis ulciscantur necem. Sua tamen ne homicida quidem dignitate destituitur cuius rei Deus ipse dat sese vadimonium. Hoc ideo ipso loco admirabile proditur misericordiae Dei iustitiae arcanum; quem ad modum narrat sanctus Ambrosius: "Cum parricidium esset admissum, hoc est scelorum principatus, ubi peccatum obrepit, statim et lex divinae mansuetudinis prorogari debuit; ne si continuo vindicatum esset in reum, homines quoque in vindicando nullam patientiam moderationemque servarent, sed statim reos supplicio darent... Repulit enim eum Deus a facie sua, et a parentibus abdicatum separatae habitationis quodam relegavit exsilio; eo quod ab humana mansuetudine transisset ad saevitiam bestiarum. Verumtamen non homicidius voluit homicidam vindicari, qui mavult peccatoris correctionem, quam mortem" (S. AMBROSII *De Cain et Abel*, II, 10, 38: CSEL 32, 408).

"Quid fecisti?" (*Gen.* 4, 10): **obscuratum vitae bonum**

10. Dixit Dominus ad Cain: "Quid fecisti? Vox sanguinis fratris tui clamat ad me de agro" (*Ibid.*). *Sanguinis vox per homines profusi haud desinit clamare* in aetates singulas, aliis quidem modis variisque et novis significationibus adhibitis.

Posita Cain a Domino interrogatio: "Quid fecisti?", quam declinare is non valet, ad hominem pariter convertitur nostri temporis, ut amplitudinis conscius sibi fiat gravitatisque illarum vitae violationum, quibus continenter res hominum gestae signantur; ut causas inquirat multiplices unde pariuntur et nutriuntur; ut serio quam maxime animo consecutaria perpenderit ex hisce adgressionibus profuentia in ipsam personarum populorumque existentiam.

Ex natura ipsa quaedam pericula cooriuntur, verum culpanda hominum neglegentia et socordia augentur, qui saepius remedium adferre possent; alia contra casuum sunt effecta violentiae et odii et inter se pugnantium studiorum, quibus adducuntur homines ut nece et bello, caede et stirpium occisione alios adorianur homines.

Quis autem illam non cogitet vim, quae vitae multorum milium millenorum hominum infertur praesertim infantium qui in miseriam rediguntur, ad minutum alimentum famemque ipsam propter opum iniquam inter populos et sociales ordines divisionem? aut violentiam ante bella ipsa in turpi iam insitam armamentorum mercatura, quae augescenti incremento favet armatarum tot dimicationum quibus

<sup>13</sup> *De Cain et Abel*, II, 10, 38: CSEL, 32, 408.



reckless tampering with the world's ecological balance, by the criminal spread of drugs, or by the promotion of certain kinds of sexual activity which, besides being morally unacceptable, also involve grave risks to life? It is impossible to catalogue completely the vast array of threats to human life, so many are the forms, whether explicit or hidden, in which they appear today!

**11.** Here though we shall concentrate particular attention on *another category of attacks*, affecting life in its earliest and in its final stages, attacks which present *new characteristics with respect to the past and which raise questions of extraordinary seriousness*. It is not only that in generalized opinion these attacks tend no longer to be considered as "crimes"; paradoxically they assume the nature of "rights", to the point that the State is called upon to give them *legal recognition and to make them available through the free services of health-care personnel*. Such attacks strike human life at the time of its greatest frailty, when it lacks any means of self-defence. Even more serious is the fact that, most often, those attacks are carried out in the very heart of and with the complicity of the family--the family which by its nature is called to be the "sanctuary of life".

How did such a situation come about? Many different factors have to be taken into account. In the background there is the profound crisis of culture, which generates scepticism in relation to the very foundations of knowledge and ethics, and which makes it increasingly difficult to grasp clearly the meaning of what man is, the meaning of his rights and his duties. Then there are all kinds of existential and interpersonal difficulties, made worse by the complexity of a society in which individuals, couples and families are often left alone with their problems. There are situations of acute poverty, anxiety or frustration in which the struggle to make ends meet, the presence of unbearable pain, or instances of violence, especially against women, make the choice to defend and promote life so demanding as sometimes to reach the point of heroism.

All this explains, at least in part, how the value of life can today undergo a kind of "eclipse", even though conscience does not cease to point to it as a sacred and inviolable value, as is evident in the tendency to disguise certain crimes against life in its early or final stages by using innocuous medical terms which distract attention from the fact that what is involved is the right to life of an actual human person.

**12.** In fact, while the climate of widespread moral uncertainty can in some way be explained by the multiplicity and gravity of today's social problems, and these can sometimes mitigate the subjective responsibility of individuals, it is no less true that we are confronted by an even larger reality, which can be described as a *veritable structure of sin*. This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable "culture of death". This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency.

Looking at the situation from this point of view, it is possible to speak in a certain sense of a *war of the powerful against the weak*: a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected in one way or another. A person who, because of illness, handicap or, more simply, just by existing,

orbis cruentatur? aut mortis sementem quae inconsiderata fit per aequilibratis oecologicae turbationem, per criminosam medicamentorum stupefactorum disseminationem, per propugnatas sexus adhibendi formas quae non solum morali sunt ratione reprobandae, verum tramites etiam agnoscendae gravium vitae periculorum? Plene non licet omnes plurimas recensere vitae humanae minationes, tot namque figuras sive apertas sive opertas illae hoc nostro tempore induunt!

11. At intenditur singillatim nunc mens nostra in *aliud genus adgressionum* quae vitam tum nascentem tum morientem tangunt, quae *novas alias antehac proprietates* praebent et *quaestiones unicae gravitatis movent*: idcirco quod facile paulatim in ipsa societatis conscientia indolem exstinguunt "delicti" atque etiam inopinate in se naturam recipiunt "iuris", adeo quidem ut poscant denique ut vere ac proprie *lege publica agnoscantur deindeque gratuito opere ipsorum valetudinis curatorum compleantur*. In adiunctis summe fortuitis, cum omni caret sui defendendi potestate, vitam illae violationes percutiunt. Et gravius adhuc multo illud est quod hae in vitam iniuriarum plerumque intra et per illam familiam patrantur quae sua ex natura destinatur ut "vitae sacrarium" existat.

Quo autem pacto exoriri potuit similis rerum condicio? Plura sunt ponderanda causarum elementa. In extremo veluti recessu ingens conspicitur ipsius cultus humani discrimen, unde dubitatio gignitur de primis cognitionis ac doctrinae moralis fundamentis ac difficilius proinde fit ut hominis significatio clare percipiatur eiusque iurium et officiorum. Huc variae exin maxime difficultates accedunt vitae et necessitudinum, adauctae societatis ipsius implicatae statu, in quibus singulae personae et coniugum paria et domus saepius solae suis cum angoribus deseruntur. Casus identidem peculiaris inopiae anxietatis vel desperationis incidunt, ubi de exsistentia labor, dolor ferme intolerabilis redditus, violationes acceptae, praesertim feminas adficiunt, faciunt ut consilia de protegenda ac promovenda vita aliquid flagitent nonnumquam quod virtutem quandam prae se ferat heroicam.

Partim saltem haec omnia explanant, quo modo vitae hodie aestimatio in se nescio quam "obscuracionem" seu eclipsim recipere possit, licet haud desinat conscientia illud vitae bonum tamquam sacrum designare et inviolabile, perinde ac demonstratur eo ipso quod contra orientem vel occidentem vitam scelera quaedam dictionibus medicinarum sapientibus contegere conantur, quibus oculi nempe avertantur ab eo quod hic tractatur ius ad exsistentiam alicuius definitae personae humanae.

12. Re quidem vera, etiamsi plures ipsae graves rationes disputationis hodiernae de socialibus causis quadamtenus explicare valent adfectionem illam late diffusae dubitationis moralis atque interdum etiam singulis in hominibus labefactae cuiusque sensum officiorum priorum, non minus tamen verum est consistere nos ante negotium multo amplius, quod haberi quidem licet verum propriumque *peccati institutum*, cuius nempe est culturam quandam iniungere adversus omnem hominum solidaritatem, crebrius congruentem cum germana "mortis cultura". Sedulo haec promovetur a fautoribus motuum magnorum culturalium oeconomicorum politicorum, qui notionem efferunt societatis ad efficiantiam propendentis.

Hac ideo ratione rebus iudicatis, loqui par est quodam modo *de potentium contra imbecillos bello*: etenim vita, quae magis poscit ut benevolentia, amore, cura suscipiatur, inutilis prorsus iudicatur aut censetur pondus intolerabile proindeque pluribus viis reicitur. Quicumque suam ob aegrotationem vel impeditonem aut, multo facilius, ob ipsam in terris praesentiam suam

compromises the well-being or life-style of those who are more favoured tends to be looked upon as an enemy to be resisted or eliminated. In this way a kind of “*conspiracy against life*” is unleashed. This conspiracy involves not only individuals in their personal, family or group relationships, but goes far beyond, to the point of damaging and distorting, at the international level, relations between peoples and States.

13. In order to facilitate the spread of *abortion*, enormous sums of money have been invested and continue to be invested in the production of pharmaceutical products which make it possible to kill the fetus in the mother’s womb without recourse to medical assistance. On this point, scientific research itself seems to be almost exclusively preoccupied with developing products which are ever more simple and effective in suppressing life and which at the same time are capable of removing abortion from any kind of control or social responsibility.

It is frequently asserted that *contraception*, if made safe and available to all, is the most effective remedy against abortion. The Catholic Church is then accused of actually promoting abortion, because she obstinately continues to teach the moral unlawfulness of contraception. When looked at carefully, this objection is clearly unfounded. It may be that many people use contraception with a view to excluding the subsequent temptation of abortion. But the negative values inherent in the “*contraceptive mentality*”--which is very different from responsible parenthood, lived in respect for the full truth of the conjugal act--are such that they in fact strengthen this temptation when an unwanted life is conceived. Indeed, the pro-abortion culture is especially strong precisely where the Church’s teaching on contraception is rejected. Certainly, from the moral point of view contraception and abortion are *specifically different* evils: the former contradicts the full truth of the sexual act as the proper expression of conjugal love, while the latter destroys the life of a human being; the former is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage, the latter is opposed to the virtue of justice and directly violates the divine commandment “*You shall not kill*”.

But despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree. It is true that in many cases contraception and even abortion are practised under the pressure of real-life difficulties, which nonetheless can never exonerate from striving to observe God’s law fully. Still, in very many other instances such practices are rooted in a hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality, and they imply a self-centered concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfilment. The life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception.

The close connection which exists, in mentality, between the practice of contraception and that of abortion is becoming increasingly obvious. It is being demonstrated in an alarming way by the development of chemical products, intrauterine devices and vaccines which, distributed with the same ease as contraceptives, really act as abortifacients in the very early stages of the development of the life of the new human being.

14. The various *techniques of artificial reproduction*, which would seem to

vocat in discrimen felicitatem vitae consuetudines eorum qui magis prosperantur, fere semper inimicus videtur arcendus aut omnino tollendus. Hinc genus quoddam prorumpit “*coniurationis contra vitam*”, quae non singulorum tantum hominum implicat necessitudines cum aliis hominibus et familia et coetibus, verum ulterius multo progreditur, ut iam in ordine omnium nationum perturbet coniunctionis rationes inter populos et Status.

13. Quo latius disseminetur *abortus*, immensae collocatae sunt pecuniae et usque etiam nunc collocantur, ut medicamina comparentur quibus, medicorum quovis neglecto subsidio, materno in utero fetus interfici possit. Qua in rerum provincia, fere id solum studere videtur scientifica inquisitio ut simpliciora usque et efficaciora contra vitam perficiantur instrumenta, eodemque tempore talia quibus cuilibet gubernationis rationi subducatur ipse abortus atque omni sociali obligationi.

Perhibetur saepe *anticonceptio*, quae tuta interea evaserit omnibusque pervia, efficientissimum esse contra abortum remedium. Accusatur exinde catholica Ecclesia ipsi favere abortui cum docere obstinata pergat illegitimam anticonceptionis naturam. At bene si introspicitur fallax reapse haec obiectatio ostenditur. Fieri namque potest ut abortus illecebram deinceps fugere cupientes ad haec instrumenta et consilia contra conceptionem quidam se conferant. Verumtamen falsa bonorum iudicia, quae ipsi “*menti contra conceptionem*” insunt – longe nimirum abhorrenti a responsali paternitatis ac maternitatis exercitatione, quae secundum plenam coniugalis actus veritatem completur – ea quidem sunt quae idem illud invitamentum etiam augeant, si vitae non optatae conceptus intervernerit. Cultura illa socialis, quae abortui favet, ibi insigniter percrebuit ubi Ecclesiae doctrina de anticonceptione repudiatur. Sine dubitatione *mala sunt nominatim diversa* anticonceptio atque abortus ipsa ratione morali: altera integram actus sexualis veritatem negat veluti amoris coniugalis propriam declarationem, hic alter vero hominis delet vitam; opponitur illa castitatis matrimonialis virtuti, hic iustitiae virtuti obicitur rectaque via divinum transgreditur praeceptum: “*Non occides*”.

Quamquam vero aliae sunt res tum natura tum morali pondere, arcte tamen inter se saepius iunguntur sicut unius arboris fructus. Verum profecto est incidere casus ubi quis ad anticonceptionem abortumque decurrat, impellentibus pluribus vitae difficultatibus, quae nihilominus non quemquam liberant umquam studio conatuque Legis Dei penitus adservandae. Plurimi tamen alii oriuntur casus, ubi consuetudines illae radicibus inhaerent alicui mentis adfectui, qui ad voluptatem propendet atque officia singulorum tollit de rebus sexus, et egoisticam praeponunt libertatis aestimationem, quae in vitae procreatione impedimentum aliquod cernit ne suum quis ingenium plene explicet. Vita ergo quae ex sexu coitu profluere posset ita inimica evadit omnino declinanda et unica fit abortus responsio quae potest reddi atque dissolvere difficultatem, si quando conata contra conceptionem sine effectu defecerunt.

Pro dolor, nexus proximus ille, qui in mente saltem hominum inter anticonceptionis usum intercedit et abortum, magis quidem eminent magisque in dies, terrifico quodam modo comprobatur ipsam per confectionem chemicarum tractationum et instrumentorum intrauterinorum et iniectionum intercutium, quae, tam facile distributae quam ipsa contra conceptionem instrumenta, idem prorsus reapse primis in stadiis crescentis vitae novi hominis efficiunt ac rationes abortivae.

14. Diversi similiter *modi generationis artificiosae*, qui ministerio vitae servire videntur quique crebrius hac ex

be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life. Apart from the fact that they are morally unacceptable, since they separate procreation from the fully human context of the conjugal act,<sup>14</sup> these techniques have a high rate of failure: not just failure in relation to fertilization but with regard to the subsequent development of the embryo, which is exposed to the risk of death, generally within a very short space of time. Furthermore, the number of embryos produced is often greater than that needed for implantation in the woman's womb, and these so-called "spare embryos" are then destroyed or used for research which, under the pretext of scientific or medical progress, in fact reduces human life to the level of simple "biological material" to be freely disposed of.

*Prenatal diagnosis*, which presents no moral objections if carried out in order to identify the medical treatment which may be needed by the child in the womb, all too often becomes an opportunity for proposing and procuring an abortion. This is eugenic abortion, justified in public opinion on the basis of a mentality--mistakenly held to be consistent with the demands of "therapeutic interventions"--which accepts life only under certain conditions and rejects it when it is affected by any limitation, handicap or illness.

Following this same logic, the point has been reached where the most basic care, even nourishment, is denied to babies born with serious handicaps or illnesses. The contemporary scene, moreover, is becoming even more alarming by reason of the proposals, advanced here and there, to justify even *infanticide*, following the same arguments used to justify the right to abortion. In this way, we revert to a state of barbarism which one hoped had been left behind forever.

**15.** Threats which are no less serious hang over the *incurably ill* and the *dying*. In a social and cultural context which makes it more difficult to face and accept suffering, the *temptation* becomes all the greater *to resolve the problem of suffering by eliminating it at the root*, by hastening death so that it occurs at the moment considered most suitable.

Various considerations usually contribute to such a decision, all of which converge in the same terrible outcome. In the sick person the sense of anguish, of severe discomfort, and even of desperation brought on by intense and prolonged suffering can be a decisive factor. Such a situation can threaten the already fragile equilibrium of an individual's personal and family life, with the result that, on the one hand, the sick person, despite the help of increasingly effective medical and social assistance, risks feeling overwhelmed by his or her own frailty; and on the other hand, those close to the sick person can be moved by an understandable even if misplaced compassion. All this is aggravated by a cultural climate which fails to perceive any meaning or value in suffering, but rather considers suffering the epitome of evil, to be eliminated at all costs. This is especially the case in the absence of a religious outlook which could help to provide a positive understanding of the mystery of suffering.

On a more general level, there exists in contemporary culture a certain Promethean attitude which leads people to think that they can control life and death by taking the decisions about them into their own hands. What really happens in this case is that the individual is overcome and crushed by a death

mente adhibentur, viam revera ad novas vitae violationes sternunt. Praeterquam quod accipi ob morales causas non possunt, etiam quia procreationem ipsam ab humana prorsus coniugalis actus complexione segregant (Cfr. CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Donum Vitae*), rationes istae technicae magnam praese ferunt nullius successus crebritatem: respicit ille defectus non tam seminationem verum subsequens germinis incrementum, quod tempore plerumque brevissimo ipsi obicitur mortis periculo. Praeterea gignuntur interdum plura germina quae necesse est ut in feminae inserantur uterum, haecque sic dicta "supernumeraria germina" exstinguuntur deinde vel ad investigationes usurpantur quae, sub medicae scientificaeve progressionis obtentu, redigunt vere vitam humanam in simplicem "biologicam materiam" de qua libere decernere licet.

*Inquisitiones* porro *praenatales*, quibuscum morales non coniunguntur difficultates si idcirco peraguntur ut necessariae nondum infantibus natis curationes forte parentur, nimium quidem saepe opportunitates fiunt ipsius suadendi perficiendique abortus. De abortu nempe agitur eugenetico, cuius apud plebem provenit defensio quadam ex sententia, quae perperam cohaerere existimatur cum "sanationis" postulatis, quaeque certis dumtaxat condicionibus vitam complectitur atque reicit limites impeditiones debilitates.

Secundum idem autem hoc iudicium eo usque quidam processerunt ut communissimas humillimasque curas, quin immo etiam escas, infantibus negaverint enatis gravi aliquo cum impedimento morbove. Prospectus insuper nostri temporis magis etiam animum perturbat, quandoquidem passim est suatum ut cum abortus iure una simul legitimum reddatur ipsum *infanticidium*, atque sic ad barbariam fit reditus quam confidebant homines iam in sempiternum esse devictam.

15. Haud vero minores intenduntur minationes pariter in *aegrotantes insanabiles* atque *morientes*, in socialibus et culturalibus rerum adiunctis quae, dum efficiunt ut accipiatur difficiliter et perferatur dolor, vehementius quidem homines illicunt *ut totum dissolvant dolendi negotium radicibus evellendo dolore*, morte videlicet praecipienda commodissimo quolibet tempore.

Id vero ad decernendum variae saepe concurrunt causae, quae infeliciter omnes ad terrificum hunc conspirant eventum. In aegrotante plurimum valere potest sensus ipse anxietatis et acerbitatis, immo etiam desperationis, quem aliquis acrem diuturnumque expertus dolorem percipit. Porro pertemptatur aequabilitas nonnumquam iam incerta vitae privatae ac familiaris, ut hinc aegrotus, etsi efficacioribus usque subsidiis providentiae medicae et socialis sustentatus, periculo obiciatur ne opprimi sese sua fragilitate sentiat; illinc vero in iis qui adfectu quodam inter se iunguntur valere possit pietatis sensus qui facile intellegitur quamvis perperam comprehendatur. Quodam praeterea morum habitu haec omnia exacerbantur, qui nullam in dolore significationem aut virtutem detegit, quin immo ut malum praecipuum censet quovis pretio propulsandum; quod tum maxime accidit cum religiosa desideratur rerum aestimatio qua iuvetur quis ut in bonam partem doloris arcanum interpretetur.

Attamen in toto cultus humani prospectu aliquid certe efficit ratio quaedam Promethei animi super homine qui sibi persuadet posse sic sese vita morteque potiri, cum de illis decernat, dum revera devincitur ac deprimitur interitu irreparabiliter clauso ante omnem sentiendi

<sup>14</sup> Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae*: AAS 80 (1988), 70-102.

deprived of any prospect of meaning or hope. We see a tragic expression of all this in the spread of *euthanasia*--disguised and surreptitious, or practised openly and even legally. As well as for reasons of a misguided pity at the sight of the patient's suffering, euthanasia is sometimes justified by the utilitarian motive of avoiding costs which bring no return and which weigh heavily on society. Thus it is proposed to eliminate malformed babies, the severely handicapped, the disabled, the elderly, especially when they are not self-sufficient, and the terminally ill. Nor can we remain silent in the face of other more furtive, but no less serious and real, forms of euthanasia. These could occur for example when, in order to increase the availability of organs for transplants, organs are removed without respecting objective and adequate criteria which verify the death of the donor.

16. Another present-day *phenomenon*, frequently used to justify threats and attacks against life, is the *demographic* question. This question arises in different ways in different parts of the world. In the rich and developed countries there is a disturbing decline or collapse of the birthrate. The poorer countries, on the other hand, generally have a high rate of population growth, difficult to sustain in the context of low economic and social development, and especially where there is extreme underdevelopment. In the face of overpopulation in the poorer countries, instead of forms of global intervention at the international level--serious family and social policies, programmes of cultural development and of fair production and distribution of resources--anti-birth policies continue to be enacted.

Contraception, sterilization and abortion are certainly part of the reason why in some cases there is a sharp decline in the birthrate. It is not difficult to be tempted to use the same methods and attacks against life also where there is a situation of "demographic explosion".

The Pharaoh of old, haunted by the presence and increase of the children of Israel, submitted them to every kind of oppression and ordered that every male child born of the Hebrew women was to be killed (cf. *Ex* 1:7-22). Today not a few of the powerful of the earth act in the same way. They too are haunted by the current demographic growth, and fear that the most prolific and poorest peoples represent a threat for the well-being and peace of their own countries. Consequently, rather than wishing to face and solve these serious problems with respect for the dignity of individuals and families and for every person's inviolable right to life, they prefer to promote and impose by whatever means a massive programme of birth control. Even the economic help which they would be ready to give is unjustly made conditional on the acceptance of an anti-birth policy.

17. Humanity today offers us a truly alarming spectacle, if we consider not only how extensively attacks on life are spreading but also their unheard-of numerical proportion, and the fact that they receive widespread and powerful support from a broad consensus on the part of society, from widespread legal approval and the involvement of certain sectors of health-care personnel.

As I emphatically stated at Denver, on the occasion of the Eighth World Youth Day, "with time the threats against life have not grown weaker. They are taking on vast proportions. They are not only threats coming from the outside, from the forces of nature or the 'Cains' who kill the 'Abels'; no, they are *scientifically and systematically programmed threats*. The twentieth century will have been

exspectationem omnemque spem. Calamitosam horum sensuum omnium testificationem in late prolata deprehendimus *euthanasia*, tecta quidem et praeperita aut quae palam peragitur vel iure etiam ipso permittitur. Haec vero, praeter quam ex adserta quadam misericordia de dolore alicuius patientis hominis, defenditur interdum ex certae utilitatis aestimatione, ob quam nempe nimia pro societate impendia infructuosa declinari debeant. Itaque suadetur ut nati deformes, graviter praepediti et invalidi, senes potissimum sibi providere non valentes, necnon insanabiliter aegrotantes tollantur. Neque silere hoc loco nos par est aliis de tectoribus, nihilo tamen minus veris et gravibus, euthanasiae modis. Accidere illi possunt cum, verbi gratia, ad organorum copiam transplantandorum augendam, ipsa auferuntur organa minime quidem normis obiectivis congruisque servatis de certa donatoris morte.

16. Porro alia huius aetatis res, quae minas secum adgressionemque importat vitae, est ipsa *demographica* quaestio. Aliis profecto in orbis regionibus aliter ea ostenditur: divites enim progressasque apud Nationes imminutio terrificae vel prolapsio animadvertitur nascentium; exhibent plerumque ex contrario pauperiores Civitates augescens usque quotam partem incolarum exorientium, quam aegre ferant condiciones minoris quidem oeconomici et socialis progressus vel etiam magnopere tardati incrementi. Nimirum multiplicatis Nationum egentium civibus desunt, universim per orbem, consilia et incepta communia -- seriae familiares et sociales propositiones ad culturae ipsius auctum, ad aequam opum effectiorem partitionemque -- dum contra in actum deduci pergunt politica adversus nascentes decreta. Anticonceptio, sterilizatio et abortus numerentur certissime oportet inter causas adiuvantes ut status existant magni natorum decrementi. Facile quis induci potest ut ad easdem fugiat rationes vitaeque violationes etiam in "demographicae explosionis" casibus.

Antiquus ille pharao, cum perciperet praesentiam et crescentem filiorum Israelis frequentiam adferre quandam terrorem, omnibus modis oppressit illos praecepitque ut mas omnis modo natus e mulieribus Hebraeis exstingeretur (Cfr. *Ex*. 1, 7-22). Eodem prorsus pacto plures sese gerunt hodie Nationum principes. Ii animadvertunt quoque veluti suppressionem nocturnam augmentum terrae incolarum, quod hodie accidit, ac metuunt propterea ne fertiliores ac pauperiores gentes ipsi prosperitati minentur et serenitati suorum populorum. Qua de causa malunt ipsi qualibet ratione provehere et iniungere vastissimam natorum moderationem quam suscipere atque dissolvere gravissimas has quaestiones, observata personae humanae familiarumque dignitate et inviolabili custodito ipso vitae iure in unoquoque homine. Subsidia quoque nummaria, quae parati esse dicuntur ad elargienda, inique regunt e praevio consensu in actionem contra natorum incrementum.

17. Spectaculum hoc tempore nobis praebent homines quod animum conterreat, si non rerum adiuncta tantum varia inspiciuntur, ubi vitam adgredi moluntur, sed ipse adgressionum earundem pro portione numerus, atque etiam multiplicia illa ac valida praesidia, quae iis adiungunt latus societatis consensus, frequens iuris permissus et ipse administratorum valetudinis concursus.

Quem ad modum vehementer Denverii ediximus ad octavam Diem Mundialem Iuventutis, "non decrescent progrediente tempore pericula in vitam intentata. Sed immensam contra sibi adsumunt amplitudinem. Neque de minis agitur extrinsecus imminetibus, ex naturae viribus vel a fratribus «Cain» qui fratres interimunt «Abel»; nullo modo: sermo potius est de *violationibus scientificae ordinateque dispositis*. Ludicabitur vicesimum

an era of massive attacks on life, an endless series of wars and a continual taking of innocent human life. False prophets and false teachers have had the greatest success”.<sup>15</sup> Aside from intentions, which can be varied and perhaps can seem convincing at times, especially if presented in the name of solidarity, we are in fact faced by an objective “*conspiracy against life*”, involving even international Institutions, engaged in encouraging and carrying out actual campaigns to make contraception, sterilization and abortion widely available. Nor can it be denied that the mass media are often implicated in this conspiracy, by lending credit to that culture which presents recourse to contraception, sterilization, abortion and even euthanasia as a mark of progress and a victory of freedom, while depicting as enemies of freedom and progress those positions which are unreservedly pro-life.

[18-20] “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” (Gen 4:9):  
A PERVERSE IDEA OF FREEDOM

18. The panorama described needs to be understood not only in terms of the phenomena of death which characterize it but also in the *variety of causes* which determine it. The Lord’s question: “What have you done?” (Gen 4:10), seems almost like an invitation addressed to Cain to go beyond the material dimension of his murderous gesture, in order to recognize in it all the gravity of the *motives* which occasioned it and the *consequences* which result from it.

Decisions that go against life sometimes arise from difficult or even tragic situations of profound suffering, loneliness, a total lack of economic prospects, depression and anxiety about the future. Such circumstances can mitigate even to a notable degree subjective responsibility and the consequent culpability of those who make these choices which in themselves are evil. But today the problem goes far beyond the necessary recognition of these personal situations. It is a problem which exists at the cultural, social and political level, where it reveals its more sinister and disturbing aspect in the tendency, ever more widely shared, to interpret the above crimes against life as *legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights*.

In this way, and with tragic consequences, a long historical process is reaching a turning-point. The process which once led to discovering the idea of “human rights”-- rights inherent in every person and prior to any Constitution and State legislation--is today marked by a *surprising contradiction*. Precisely in an age when the inviolable rights of the person are solemnly proclaimed and the value of life is publicly affirmed, the very right to life is being denied or trampled upon, especially at the more significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death.

On the one hand, the various declarations of human rights and the many initiatives inspired by these declarations show that at the global level there is a growing moral sensitivity, more alert to acknowledging the value and dignity of every individual as a human being, without any distinction of race, nationality, religion, political opinion or social class.

On the other hand, these noble proclamations are unfortunately contradicted by a tragic repudiation of them in practice. This denial is still more distressing, indeed more scandalous, precisely because it is occurring in a society which makes the affirmation and protection of human rights its primary objective and its boast. How can these repeated affirmations of principle be reconciled with

hoc saeculum ut aetas ingentium invasionum in vitam, ut interminata bellorum catena perpetuaeque innocentium vitarum humanarum caedis. Vates falsi et falsi praeceptores quam maximum consecuti sunt rerum successum” Praeter omnia illa proposita, quae multiplicia esse possunt ac fortasse etiam vim prae se ferre persuadendi sub solidarietatis titulo, consistimus reapse ante apertam “*coniurationem in vitam*”, ubi institutiones pariter omnium gentium implicari videntur, quae ex officio incitant et ordinant veros hominum motus ad anticonceptionem et sterilizationem et abortum dispergenda. Haud denique negari licet instrumenta socialis communicationis saepius huic adstipulari coniurationi, cum publicam apud opinionem illi menti fidem faciunt ac rationi, qua anticonceptionis sterilizationis abortus ipsiusque euthanasiae usus ostentatur perinde ac progressionis adeptaeque libertatis documentum, dum contrariae opiniones sine condicione ipsi faventes vitae tamquam libertatis progressionisque finguntur inimicae.

“*Num custos fratris mei sum ego?*” (Gen. 4, 9):  
improbabilis libertatis notio

18. Rerum hic prospectus ut cognoscatur poscit non dumtaxat in mortis phaenomenis suis peculiaribus, verum et in *multiplicibus causis*, quae eum efficiunt. Domini interrogatio: “*Quid fecisti?*” (Gen. 4, 10) Cain invitare videtur ut rem ipsam et facinus necis praetergrediator atque illius percipiat gravitatem in *rationibus*, quae inibi subsunt, et in *consecutionibus*, quae inde oriuntur.

Optiones adversum vitam nonnumquam oriuntur difficilibus ex condicionibus vel quidem gravissimis, ubi videlicet ingens est dolor, solitudo, nulla prorsus rei familiaris suppeditionis spes, animus fractus et futuro de tempore angor. Condiciones eiusmodi possunt etiam valde extenuare subiectivam responsalitem et congruenter ipsam conscientiam illorum qui has inducunt electiones per se flagitiosas. Hodie tamen talis quaestio longe praetergreditur personales condiciones, agnoscendas sane. Quae quaestio in ambitu cultus, societatis et rei politicae etiam locatur, ubi quidem seditiosiore et turbulentiore prae se fert speciem, cum eo tendatur, et iam vulgo magis ac magis spectetur, ut adversum vitam memorata facinora legitima habeantur *libertatis singulorum documenta, quae veluti persincera iura sint agnoscenda ac tuenda*. Hoc modo ad quoddam pervenit discrimen, ex quo calamitates et perniciis consequuntur, longus historicus processus, qui, postquam “*humana iura*” detegit – quae sunt cunctarum personarum propria atque omnes Constitutiones Civitatumque leges praecedentia – hodiernis temporibus in *admirabilem quandam repugnantiam* labitur: tempore ipso, quo sollemniter personae iura sancta edicuntur et vitae praestantia publice affirmatur, ad vitam ipsum ius re negatur et proculcatur, nominatim in vitae momentis praestantioribus, qualia sunt ortus atque obitus.

Hinc, hominum iura universaliter multifariam enuntiata atque multiplicia incepta quae inde oriuntur, significant per totum terrarum orbem moralem sensum confirmari, ad diligentiore vim dignitatemque tribuendam singulis hominibus, prout sunt homines, dempto discrimine generis, nationis, religionis, politicarum opinionum, socialis ordinis.

Illinc nobilibus his effatis infeliciter opponitur re miseranda ipsorum negatio. Quae quidem vel conturbantior est, immo flagitiosior, cum usu veniat in societate quadam, in qua humana iura confirmantur et custodiuntur, utpote cum eorum maximum sit propositum et gloriatio. Quomodo iteratae de principiis hae sententiae componi possunt cum vitae humanae

<sup>15</sup> Address during the Prayer Vigil for the Eighth World Youth Day, Denver, 14 August 1993, II, 3: AAS 86 (1994), 419

the continual increase and widespread justification of attacks on human life? How can we reconcile these declarations with the refusal to accept those who are weak and needy, or elderly, or those who have just been conceived? These attacks go directly against respect for life and they represent a *direct threat to the entire culture of human rights*. It is a threat capable, in the end, of jeopardizing the very meaning of democratic coexistence: *rather than societies of "people living together", our cities risk becoming societies of people who are rejected, marginalized, uprooted and oppressed*. If we then look at the wider worldwide perspective, how can we fail to think that the very affirmation of the rights of individuals and peoples made in distinguished international assemblies is a merely futile exercise of rhetoric, if we fail to unmask the selfishness of the rich countries which exclude poorer countries from access to development or make such access dependent on arbitrary prohibitions against procreation, setting up an opposition between development and man himself? Should we not question the very economic models often adopted by States which, also as a result of international pressures and forms of conditioning, cause and aggravate situations of injustice and violence in which the life of whole peoples is degraded and trampled upon?

### 19. What are the roots of this remarkable contradiction?

We can find them in an overall assessment of a cultural and moral nature, beginning with the mentality which *carries the concept of subjectivity to an extreme* and even distorts it, and recognizes as a subject of rights only the person who enjoys full or at least incipient autonomy and who emerges from a state of total dependence on others. But how can we reconcile this approach with *the exaltation of man as a being who is "not to be used"*? The theory of human rights is based precisely on the affirmation that the human person, unlike animals and things, cannot be subjected to domination by others. We must also mention the mentality which tends to *equate personal dignity with the capacity for verbal and explicit, or at least perceptible, communication*. It is clear that on the basis of these presuppositions there is no place in the world for anyone who, like the unborn or the dying, is a weak element in the social structure, or for anyone who appears completely at the mercy of others and radically dependent on them, and can only communicate through the silent language of a profound sharing of affection. In this case it is force which becomes the criterion for choice and action in interpersonal relations and in social life. But this is the exact opposite of what a State ruled by law, as a community in which the "reasons of force" are replaced by the "force of reason", historically intended to affirm.

At another level, the roots of the contradiction between the solemn affirmation of human rights and their tragic denial in practice lies in a *notion of freedom* which exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service of them. While it is true that the taking of life not yet born or in its final stages is sometimes marked by a mistaken sense of altruism and human compassion, it cannot be denied that such a culture of death, taken as a whole, betrays a completely individualistic concept of freedom, which ends up by becoming the freedom of "the strong" against the weak who have no choice but to submit.

It is precisely in this sense that Cain's answer to the Lord's question: "Where is Abel your brother?" can be interpreted: "I do not know; *am I my brother's keeper?*" (Gen 4:9). Yes, every man is his "brother's keeper", because God entrusts us to one another. And it is also in view of this entrusting that God gives everyone freedom, a freedom which possesses an *inherently relational dimension*. This is a great gift of the Creator, placed as it is at the service of the

insidiis usque multiplicatis et vulgo comprobatis? Quomodo hae declarationes conciliantur cum denegatione debiliorum, indigentiorum, senum, recens conceptorum? Hi conatus vitae tuendae sunt prorsus contrarii, atque simul *minarum instar sunt adversum iurium humanorum omnem cultum*. Minationes profecto sunt quaedam, quae tandem ipsum democratici convictus sensum labefactare possunt: ex "convictorum" societatibus, urbes nostrae societates evadere possunt exclusorum, derelictorum, depulsorum, interemptorum. Si autem in mundum universum oculos convertimus, quidni cogitemus personarum populorumque iura constituta, quemadmodum praecipuis in internationalibus congressionibus accidit, in vacuum oratoriam exercitationem redigi, nisi divitum Nationum caecus amor obtegatur, quae Nationes pauperes a progressu arcent, vel progressum cum generatione absurde vetanda copulant, homini progressionem opponentes? Nonne fortassis in quaestionem adduci debent ipsa quoque exemplaria oeconomica, quae saepe a Civitatibus recipiuntur etiam ob impulsiones et condiciones totum orbem adficientes, quae pariunt nutriuntque casus iniustitiae et status violentiae, ubi quarundam integrarum multitudinum vita humana deicitur et opprimitur?

### 19. Ubinam harum rerum admodum pugnantium inveniuntur radices?

Ipsae autem in conclusis culturalis moralisque ordinis aestimationibus inveniri possunt, initio ab illa mente sumpto, quae *subjectivitatis nimium extollens notionem et vel depravans, participem iurium solummodo agnoscit, qui incohata plenave quadam autonomia se ostendit seque ab omni aliorum ditione subducit*. At quomodo cum hac re *hominis exaltatio tamquam entis "nulli obnoxii"* componi potest? Humanorum iurium doctrina in eo ipso fundatur, quod homo, secus ac animalibus rebusque evenit, nemini mancipari potest. Mens illa quoque est in transitu significanda, quae *personalem dignitatem aequare conatur cum facultate communicationis verbalis claraeque, utique comprobatae et perceptae*. Plane liquet, rebus sic stantibus, nihil inesse in orbe terrarum loci, illi qui, ut nascituro vel morituro, constitutive debilis est natura, quique totus aliis personis obnoxius videtur atque ex iis stirpitus pendet et per mutam dumtaxat magnae reciprocatationis affectuum loquelam communicare valet. Quapropter vis est, quae fit ratio decemendi agendique inter personarum necessitudines et socialem convictum. At istud plane ei obstat quod historicæ Status iuris edicere voluit, communitatis videlicet instar in qua "vis rationes" substituuntur "rationis vi".

Alio in ordine, contrariorum radices, quae inter hominum iura sollemniter constituta intercidunt et calamitosam eorum re destitutionem, *libertatis quadam notione* nituntur quae absolute individuum extollit atque ad proximum iuvandum pleneque accipiendum eique inserviendum minime ordinat. Si quidem verum est orientis vitae finientisve oppressionem colore nonnumquam infici aliquo iniqui amoris alterius vel humanae pietatis, tamen neq̄ari non potest hanc culturam mortis, in universum, libertatis doctrinam quandam demonstrare prorsus individualisticam, quae evasura est in libertatem "fortiorum", contra debiles qui ad interitum destinantur.

Hoc ipso sensu Cain responsum solvi potest, qui Domino interroganti "Ubi est Abel frater tuus?": "Nescio. *Num custos fratris mei sum ego?*" (Gen. 4, 9). Ita quidem, omnis homo "custos fratris sui" est, cum Deus homini hominem committat. Et hac quoque pro demandatione Deus cunctis hominibus dat libertatem, quae *essentialem necessitudinis rationem* secum fert. Magnum est ipsa Creatoris donum, in servitio locata personae eiusque perfectionis per sui ipsius



person and of his fulfilment through the gift of self and openness to others; but when freedom is made absolute in an individualistic way, it is emptied of its original content, and its very meaning and dignity are contradicted.

There is an even more profound aspect which needs to be emphasized: freedom negates and destroys itself, and becomes a factor leading to the destruction of others, when it no longer recognizes and respects *its essential link with the truth*. When freedom, out of a desire to emancipate itself from all forms of tradition and authority, shuts out even the most obvious evidence of an objective and universal truth, which is the foundation of personal and social life, then the person ends up by no longer taking as the sole and indisputable point of reference for his own choices the truth about good and evil, but only his subjective and changeable opinion or, indeed, his selfish interest and whim.

20. This view of freedom *leads to a serious distortion of life in society*. If the promotion of the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy, people inevitably reach the point of rejecting one another. Everyone else is considered an enemy from whom one has to defend oneself. Thus society becomes a mass of individuals placed side by side, but without any mutual bonds. Each one wishes to assert himself independently of the other and in fact intends to make his own interests prevail. Still, in the face of other people's analogous interests, some kind of compromise must be found, if one wants a society in which the maximum possible freedom is guaranteed to each individual. In this way, any reference to common values and to a truth absolutely binding on everyone is lost, and social life ventures on to the shifting sands of complete relativism. At that point, *everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining*: even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life.

This is what is happening also at the level of politics and government: the original and inalienable right to life is questioned or denied on the basis of a parliamentary vote or the will of one part of the people--even if it is the majority. This is the sinister result of a relativism which reigns unopposed: the "right" ceases to be such, because it is no longer firmly founded on the inviolable dignity of the person, but is made subject to the will of the stronger part. In this way democracy, contradicting its own principles, effectively moves towards a form of totalitarianism. The State is no longer the "common home" where all can live together on the basis of principles of fundamental equality, but is transformed into a *tyrant State*, which arrogates to itself the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenceless members, from the unborn child to the elderly, in the name of a public interest which is really nothing but the interest of one part.

The appearance of the strictest respect for legality is maintained, at least when the laws permitting abortion and euthanasia are the result of a ballot in accordance with what are generally seen as the rules of democracy. Really, what we have here is only the tragic caricature of legality; the democratic ideal, which is only truly such when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person, *is betrayed in its very foundations*: "How is it still possible to speak of the dignity of every human person when the killing of the weakest and most innocent is permitted? In the name of what justice is the most unjust of discriminations practised: some individuals are held to be deserving of defence and others are denied that dignity?"<sup>16</sup> When this happens, the process leading to the breakdown of a genuinely human co-existence and the disintegration of the State itself has already begun.

To claim the right to abortion, infanticide and euthanasia, and to recognize that

donationem et alterius acceptionem; cum autem veluti absolutum quiddam sumitur cuiusque singillatim hominis, tum libertas exinanitur primigenia significatione eiusque vocatione dignitateque impugnatur.

Pars quaedam etiam praestantior manet aestimanda: libertas se ipsa pernegat, se ipsa delet, se ipsa ad alium interimendum comparat, cum non agnoscit neque *constitutivum veritatis vinculum* servat. Quotiescumque a quavis traditione auctoritateque eximere se cupiens libertas ante vel primaria se claudit indicia obiectivae et communis veritatis quae personalis socialisque vitae est fundamentum, sequitur ut persona veluti unum et indubitabile iudicium in rebus eligendis iam non veritatem de bono maloque capiat, sed suam subiectivam mutabilemque opinionem, vel etiam suum ipsius commodum et libidinem suam.

20. Hac in libertatis notione, *socialis convictus funditus detorqueatur*. Si provectioni sui ipsius autonomiae absolutae ambitu terminatur, necessario alter negatur, tamquam inimicus arcendus habitus. Hoc modo societas individuorum coacervatio quaedam fit, qui alius prope alium seiunctim ponuntur, mutuo dempto vinculo: unusquisque ab alio dissidens se vult extollere, immo sua commoda ut praepolent cupit. Attamen pro alterius similibus commodis medium quiddam est aliquo modo inveniendum, si desideratur ut in societate quam summa libertas unicuique praestetur. Non amplius sic habetur bonorum communium ratio absolutaeque veritatis pro omnibus: socialis vita absoluti relativismi in cedenti sabulo inambulare audet. Tunc *omnia sunt conventionalia, omnia venalia*: primum quoque capitalium iurium, ius videlicet vitae.

Hoc ipsum re accidit etiam in ambitu qui propius republicas et civitates complectitur: primigenium atque non alienabile vitae ius agitur vel negatur per contionis suffragia perque voluntatem partis populi, licet maioris partis. Exitiabilis est exitus relativismi cuiusdam, qui aperte dominatur: "ius" desinit esse tale, quandoquidem in dignitate personae inviolabili iam non solide fundatur, sed valentioris voluntati subicitur. Hoc modo populare regimen, praeter suas regulas, substantialis totalitarismi curriculum decurrit. Civitas non est amplius "domus communis", ubi omnibus substantiali quadam cum aequalitate exigere vitam licet, sed *tyrannica Civitas* fit, quae debiliorum inermiorumque vitam temperare audet, ab infante adhuc non nato ad senem, alicuius publicae utilitatis nomine, quae quidem nihil est aliud nisi nonnullorum commodum.

Omnia evenire iure omnino servato videtur, saltem cum leges quae patiuntur abortum vel euthanasiam democratica ratione decernuntur. Reapse tantum funesta legis species ob oculos versatur, et optimus ordo democraticus, qui profecto is est cum singularum personarum dignitatem agnoscit et tutatur, *suus in ipsis capitibus proditur*: "Quomodo fieri potest, ut cuiusque personae dignitas adhuc tractetur, cum debilior persona sinitur occidi et innoxior? Cuius iustitiae nomine inter personas maximum fit discrimen, cum earum aliae dignae existuntur quae defendantur, aliae contra quae hac dignitate exuantur?" Cum hae insunt condiciones, vires iam illae inducuntur quae ad verum humanum convictum disciendum compellunt aequae ac ad civilem conciliationem dissipandam.

Abortus, infanticidii, euthanasiae ius assumere, idque

<sup>16</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Participants at the Study Conference on "The Right to Life and Europe", 18 December 1987: *Insegnamenti*, X, 3 (1987), 1446-1447.

right in law, means to attribute to human freedom a *perverse and evil significance*: that of an *absolute power over others and against others*. This is the death of true freedom: “Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin” (*Jn 8:34*).

[21-24] “*And from your face I shall be hidden*” (*Gen 4:14*):  
THE ECLIPSE of the SENSE of GOD and of MAN

21. In seeking the deepest roots of the struggle between the “culture of life” and the “culture of death”, we cannot restrict ourselves to the perverse idea of freedom mentioned above. We have to go to the heart of the tragedy being experienced by modern man: *the eclipse of the sense of God and of man*, typical of a social and cultural climate dominated by secularism, which, with its ubiquitous tentacles, succeeds at times in putting Christian communities themselves to the test. Those who allow themselves to be influenced by this climate easily fall into a sad vicious circle: *when the sense of God is lost, there is also a tendency to lose the sense of man*, of his dignity and his life; in turn, the systematic violation of the moral law, especially in the serious matter of respect for human life and its dignity, produces a kind of progressive darkening of the capacity to discern God’s living and saving presence.

Once again we can gain insight from the story of Abel’s murder by his brother. After the curse imposed on him by God, Cain thus addresses the Lord: “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me this day away from the ground; and *from your face I shall be hidden*; and I shall be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me” (*Gen 4:13-14*). Cain is convinced that his sin will not obtain pardon from the Lord and that his inescapable destiny will be to have to “hide his face” from him. If Cain is capable of confessing that his fault is “greater than he can bear”, it is because he is conscious of being in the presence of God and before God’s just judgment. It is really only before the Lord that man can admit his sin and recognize its full seriousness. Such was the experience of David who, after “having committed evil in the sight of the Lord”, and being rebuked by the Prophet Nathan, exclaimed: “My offences truly I know them; my sin is always before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned; what is evil in your sight I have done” (*Ps 51:5-6*).

22. Consequently, when the sense of God is lost, the sense of man is also threatened and poisoned, as the Second Vatican Council concisely states: “Without the Creator the creature would disappear . . . But when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible”.<sup>17</sup> Man is no longer able to see himself as “mysteriously different” from other earthly creatures; he regards himself merely as one more living being, as an organism which, at most, has reached a very high stage of perfection. Enclosed in the narrow horizon of his physical nature, he is somehow reduced to being “a thing”, and no longer grasps the “transcendent” character of his “existence as man”. He no longer considers life as a splendid gift of God, something “sacred” entrusted to his responsibility and thus also to his loving care and “veneration”. Life itself becomes a mere “thing”, which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation.

Thus, in relation to life at birth or at death, man is no longer capable of posing the question of the truest meaning of his own existence, nor can he assimilate with genuine freedom these crucial moments of his own history. He is concerned only with “doing”, and, using all kinds of technology, he busies himself with programming, controlling and dominating birth and death. Birth and death, instead of being primary experiences demanding to be “lived”,

ex lege agnoscere, idem est ac libertati humanae *perversam iniquamque significationem* tribuere: scilicet *absolutam potestatem supra alios et contra alios*. At haec germanae libertatis est mors: “Amen, amen dico vobis: Omnis, qui facit peccatum, servus est” (*Io. 8, 34*).

“*A facie tua abscondar*” (*Gen. 4, 14*): Dei sensus hominisque obscuratio

21. In altioribus radicibus perquirendis certaminis inter “*culturam vitae*” et “*mortis culturam*”, consistere non possumus coram perversae libertatis opinione, quam supra memoravimus. Ipsum cardinem attingere debemus illius dirae vicis, quam nostrae aetatis homo experitur: *Dei sensus hominisque obscuracionem*, quiddam scilicet proprium socialis culturalisque mentis, quae saecularismo imbuatur, qui suis invadentibus flexuris ipsas christianas communitates temptare non desistit. Qui hac rerum condicione afficitur, vitiosi illius circuitus turbine facile capitur: cum quis Dei sensum amittit, *amissurus est quoque sensum hominis*, eius dignitatis eiusque vitae; continuata autem moralis legis violatio potissimum in gravi re vitae observandae eiusque dignitatis, efficit ut gradatim obscuretur facultas percipiendi vivificantem salutiferamque Dei praesentiam.

Iterum narrationem de Abel a fratre necato repetere possumus.

Postquam maledictum est ei a Deo, Cain sic Deum alloquitur: “*Maior est poena mea quam ut portem eam*. Ecce eicis me hodie a facie agri et a *facie tua abscondar* et ero vagus et profugus in terra; omnis igitur, qui inveniit me, occidet me” (*Gen. 4, 13-14*). Cain autem arbitratur peccato suo ignosci a Domino non posse suamque sortem necessario illuc perducere, ut nimirum debeat “*abscondi procul*” ab eo. Si quidem Cain dicit “*maior est*” culpa mea, ipse propterea novit se esse ante Deum eiusque aequum iudicium. Revera Dei tantum in conspectu suum peccatum agnoscere potest homo eiusque gravitatem plane intellegere. Id ipsum David experitur, qui postquam “*malum coram Domino fecit*”, a Nathan propheta increpitus (Cfr. 2 *Sam. 12, 11-12*), clamat: “*Iniquitatem meam ego agnosco, et peccatum meum contra me est semper*. Tibi soli peccavi et malum coram te feci” (*Ps 51 (50), 5-6*).

22. Quapropter, cum Dei sensus amittitur, hominis quoque sensus urgetur et polluitur, quemadmodum presse asseverat Concilium Vaticanum II: “*Creatura enim sine Creatore evanescit*... Immo, per oblivionem Dei ipsa creatura obscuratur” (*Gaudium et Spes, 36*). Homo iam non percipit se prae terrenis creaturis “*mystice alium*” esse; ipse unum ex multiplicibus animantibus se existimat, summum velut vivens quiddam, quod celsissimam perfectionem est adeptus. In orbe conclusus physicae suae structurae, quodammodo fit “*res*” nec iam indolem percipit “*transcendentem*” sui modi “*existendi ut hominis*”. Sic tamquam eximum Dei donum non amplius iudicat vitam, rem quandam “*sacram*” suae responsalitati ideoque amabili custodiae creditam suaeque “*venerationi*”. Ipsa plane fit “*res*”, quam sibi veluti suum ipsius mancipium vindicat, gubernabile prorsus et tractabile.

Proposita ideo ante oculos vita quae nascitur et quae moritur, non amplius valet homo interrogari de verissimo suae vitae sensu, accipiens videlicet vera cum libertate haec decretoria suae “*vitae*” momenta. Eum solummodo “*faciundi*” tenet cura, atque ad omnes artes se conferens, ortum obitumque supputare, temperare et gubernare sollicito contendit. Experientiae hae, quae primigeniae requirunt ut “*agantur*”, res fiunt

<sup>17</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes, 36*.

become things to be merely “possessed” or “rejected”.

Moreover, once all reference to God has been removed, it is not surprising that the meaning of everything else becomes profoundly distorted. Nature itself, from being “*mater*” (mother), is now reduced to being “matter”, and is subjected to every kind of manipulation. This is the direction in which a certain technical and scientific way of thinking, prevalent in present-day culture, appears to be leading when it rejects the very idea that there is a truth of creation which must be acknowledged, or a plan of God for life which must be respected. Something similar happens when concern about the consequences of such a “freedom without law” leads some people to the opposite position of a “law without freedom”, as for example in ideologies which consider it unlawful to interfere in any way with nature, practically “divinizing” it. Again, this is a misunderstanding of nature’s dependence on the plan of the Creator. Thus it is clear that the loss of contact with God’s wise design is the deepest root of modern man’s confusion, both when this loss leads to a freedom without rules and when it leaves man in “fear” of his freedom.

By living “as if God did not exist”, man not only loses sight of the mystery of God, but also of the mystery of the world and the mystery of his own being.

23. The eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a *practical materialism*, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism. Here too we see the permanent validity of the words of the Apostle: “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct” (*Rom* 1:28). The values of *being* are replaced by those of *having*. The only goal which counts is the pursuit of one’s own material well-being. The so-called “quality of life” is interpreted primarily or exclusively as economic efficiency, inordinate consumerism, physical beauty and pleasure, to the neglect of the more profound dimensions--interpersonal, spiritual and religious--of existence.

In such a context *suffering*, an inescapable burden of human existence but also a factor of possible personal growth, is “censored”, rejected as useless, indeed opposed as an evil, always and in every way to be avoided. When it cannot be avoided and the prospect of even some future well-being vanishes, then life appears to have lost all meaning and the temptation grows in man to claim the right to suppress it.

Within this same cultural climate, the *body* is no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world. It is reduced to pure materiality: it is simply a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency. Consequently, *sexuality* too is depersonalized and exploited: from being the sign, place and language of love, that is, of the gift of self and acceptance of another, in all the other’s richness as a person, it increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts. Thus the original import of human sexuality is distorted and falsified, and the two meanings, unitive and procreative, inherent in the very nature of the conjugal act, are artificially separated: in this way the marriage union is betrayed and its fruitfulness is subjected to the caprice of the couple. *Procreation* then becomes the “enemy” to be avoided in sexual activity: if it is welcomed, this is only because it expresses a desire, or indeed the intention, to have a child “at all costs”, and not because it signifies the complete acceptance of the other and therefore an openness to the richness of life which the child represents.

In the materialistic perspective described so far, *interpersonal relations are seriously impoverished*. The first to be harmed are women, children, the sick or

potius quaedam, quas tantum “possidere” aut “respuere” intendit homo.

Omissa ceterum omni necessitudinis ratione cum Deo, non cuiquam admiratio movebitur, quod omnium inde rerum significatio funditus detorta evadit ac natura ipsa, iam non amplius “mater”, potius ad quandam redacta est “materiam” quibuslibet tractationibus obnoxiam. Huc perducere certa aliqua videtur consequentia technica et scientifica in culturalibus nostri temporis adiunctis iam dominans, quae nempe notionem ipsam veritatis de rebus creatis agnoscendae pernegat aut consilii divini de vita reverenda. Id quod haud minus est verum, cum anxietas de consecrariis talis “libertatis sine lege” nonnullos in contrariam impellit sententiam “legis sine libertate”, prout, verbi causa, in quibusdam evenit opinionibus doctrinisque, ubi licere omnino negant quemvis in naturam interventum, tamquam si agatur de eius “divinizatione” quae tamen rursus ignorat ex consilio ipsius Conditoris pendere naturam.

Vivens reapse “perinde ac si Deus non sit”, non modo a Dei mysterio, verum etiam a mundi ipsius arcano suaeque vitae aberrat.

23. Dei hominisque sensus obscuratio necessario ad *materialismum practicum* ducit, in quo individualismus, utilitarismus et hedonismus grassantur. Hinc etiam manifestatur perpetuo valere quod dicit Apostolus: “Et sicut non probaverunt Deum habere in notitia, tradidit eos Deus in reprobum sensum, ut faciant, quae non conveniunt” (*Rom.* 1, 28). Sic pro bonis ab esse inducuntur bona ab *habere*.

Unum viget propositum, scilicet corporalis commodi consecutio. “Vitae qualitas”, ut aiunt, magna vel tota ex parte habetur rei familiaris felicitas, inordinata consumendarum rerum fruitio, venustas et vitae corporis usus, altioribus existentiae qualitibus neglectis rationalibus, spiritalibus et religiosis.

Hoc in rerum prospectu *dolor*, quo necessario humana vita oneratur et ceteroqui est personalis progressus pars, quadam “nota censoria” afficitur, tamquam inutilis res respuitur, immo tamquam malum semper et ubique vitandum depugnatur. Cum autem is superari non potest et futurae saltem valetudinis exspectatio evanescit, tum vita omnem sensum amittere videtur et in homine adolescit cupiditas iuris praesumpti eius intermendae.

Eodem semper in prospectu culturali, *corpus* iam non sumitur sicut realitas prorsus personalis, signum scilicet et locus necessitudinis cum aliis, cum Deo et cum mundo; ad meram redigitur materialitatem: simplex habetur organorum coaeratio, functionum viriumque ad meram voluptatis efficientiaeque rationem adhibendarum. Quam ob rem *sexualitas* quoque paene nudatur adque instrumentum quoddam redigitur: ex signo, loco et voce amoris, donationis scilicet sui ipsius et acceptionis alterius secundum cunctas personae divitias, magis magisque fit occasio et instrumentum dominationis sui ipsius necnon propriarum libidinum voluptatumque studiosa satisfactio. Depravatur ita et corrumpitur sexualitatis humanae primigenius sensus ac duae significationes, coniunctionis videlicet et procreationis, quae in ipsa coniugalibus actus natura continentur, artificiosae seiunguntur: hac sane ratione coniunctio violatur atque fecunditas subditur viri mulierisque arbitrati. *Procreatio* tunc fit “inimica”, quae in sexualitate agenda vitari debet: si forte eligitur, sumitur tantum quia proprium desiderium significat, vel directo propriam voluntatem “quacumque ratione” filium habendi, non quia alium prorsus accipere vult, ideoque vitae divitias sumere, quas filius secum fert.

In materialistico ambitu hucusque proposito, *inter personas necessitudines magnam imminutionem experiuntur*. Detrimentum primi accipiunt mulier, puer,

suffering, and the elderly. The criterion of personal dignity--which demands respect, generosity and service--is replaced by the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness: others are considered not for what they "are", but for what they "have, do and produce". This is the supremacy of the strong over the weak.

24. *It is at the heart of the moral conscience* that the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, with all its various and deadly consequences for life, is taking place. It is a question, above all, of the *individual* conscience, as it stands before God in its singleness and uniqueness.<sup>18</sup> But it is also a question, in a certain sense, of the "moral conscience" of *society*: in a way it too is responsible, not only because it tolerates or fosters behaviour contrary to life, but also because it encourages the "culture of death", creating and consolidating actual "structures of sin" which go against life. The moral conscience, both individual and social, is today subjected, also as a result of the penetrating influence of the media, to an *extremely serious and mortal danger*: that of *confusion between good and evil*, precisely in relation to the fundamental right to life. A large part of contemporary society looks sadly like that humanity which Paul describes in his Letter to the Romans. It is composed "of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (1:18): having denied God and believing that they can build the earthly city without him, "they became futile in their thinking" so that "their senseless minds were darkened" (1:21); "claiming to be wise, they became fools" (1:22), carrying out works deserving of death, and "they not only do them but approve those who practise them" (1:32). When conscience, this bright lamp of the soul (cf. *Mt* 6:22-23), calls "evil good and good evil" (*Is* 5:20), it is already on the path to the most alarming corruption and the darkest moral blindness.

And yet all the conditioning and efforts to enforce silence fail to stifle the voice of the Lord echoing in the conscience of every individual: it is always from this intimate sanctuary of the conscience that a new journey of love, openness and service to human life can begin.

[25-28] "You have come to the sprinkled blood" (cf. *Heb* 12: 22, 24):  
SIGNS of HOPE and INVITATION to COMMITMENT

25. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (*Gen* 4:10). It is not only the voice of the blood of Abel, the first innocent man to be murdered, which cries to God, the source and defender of life. The blood of every other human being who has been killed since Abel is also a voice raised to the Lord. In an absolutely singular way, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, *the voice of the blood of Christ*, of whom Abel in his innocence is a prophetic figure, cries out to God: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God ... to the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (12:22, 24).

It is *the sprinkled blood*. A symbol and prophetic sign of it had been the blood of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, whereby God expressed his will to communicate his own life to men, purifying and consecrating them (cf. *Ex* 24:8; *Lev* 17:11). Now all of this is fulfilled and comes true in Christ: his is the sprinkled blood which redeems, purifies and saves; it is the blood of the Mediator of the New Covenant "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (*Mt* 26:28). This blood, which flows from the pierced side of Christ on the Cross (cf. *Jn* 19:34), "speaks more graciously" than the blood of Abel; indeed, it expresses and requires a more radical "justice", and above all it implores

aegrotus vel patiens, senex. Iudicium dignitatis personalis proprium – scilicet observantiae, gratuitatis et servitii – substituitur efficientiae, functionalitatis utilitatisque iudicio: alter aestimatur non prout sic "est", sed prout aliquid "habet, facit et efficit". De dominatu agitur fortioris in debiliorem.

24. *Ipsa in intima morali conscientia* pericitur Dei hominisque sensus obscuratio, multiplicibus suis pemiciosisque de vita consecutionibus. Ante omnia *cuiusque conscientia* in medio ponitur, quae una et non iterabilis sola Dei in conspectu stat (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 16). At agitur quoque ratione quadam de *societatis* "conscientia morali"; ipsa quodammodo est responsalis non modo quia tolerat vel consuetudinibus vitae adversantibus favet, verum quia et "mortis culturam" alit, quippe quae ipsas "structuras peccati" adversum vitam efficiat et confirmet. Conscientia moralis, tum personalis tum socialis, etiam ob instrumentorum socialis communicationis praepotentes virtutes, *pergravi mortiferoque* periculo hodie subditur: *permixtionis* scilicet *boni mali*que, quod attinet ad idem fundamentale vitae ius. Hodiernae societatis tanta pars infeliciter cum ea aequatur humanitate, quam in Epistula ad Romanos describit Paulus. Componitur hominibus "qui veritatem in iniustitia detinent" (*Rom.* 1, 18): quandoquidem Deum deseruerunt et terrenam civitatem sine eo condi posse iudicarunt, "evanuerunt in cogitationibus suis", ideo "obscuratum est insipiens cor eorum" (*Ibid.* 1, 21); "dicentes se esse sapientes, stulti facti sunt" (*Ibid.* 1, 22), operum mortis artifices facti sunt et "non solum ea faciunt, sed et consentiunt facientibus" (*Ibid.* 1, 32). Cum conscientia, lucens scilicet animae oculus (Cfr. *Matth.* 6, 22-23), dicit "malum bonum et bonum malum" (*Is.* 5, 20), iter persollicitae depravationis et caliginosissimae moralis caecitatis iam est ingressa.

Verum condiciones et conatus ad silentium iniungendum Domini vocem includere non valent quae in cuiusque hominis conscientia insonat: hoc ipso ex intimo conscientiae sacrario novum amoris iter explicari potest, ad vitam humanam accipiendam et ministrandam.

"Accessistis ad sanguinem aspersionis" (Cfr. *Hebr.* 12, 22, 24): *spei signa et ad officium invitatio*

25. "Vox sanguinis fratris tui clamat ad me de agro" (*Gen.* 4, 10). Non vox dumtaxat sanguinis Abel, primi innoxii interempti, clamat ad Deum, fontem vitaeque praesidium. Cuiusque quoque hominis sanguis post Abel necati fere vox fit quaedam quae ad Dominum pervenit. Peculiari prorsus modo clamat ad Deum vox *sanguinis Christi*, cuius Abel in innocentia sua figura est prophetica, quemadmodum Epistulae ad Hebraeos auctor commemorat: "Sed accessistis ad Sion montem et civitatem Dei viventis... et Testamenti Novi mediatorem Iesum, et sanguinem aspersionis, melius loquentem quam Abel" (*Hebr.* 12, 22, 24).

Est *sanguis aspersionis*. Huius figura et praenuntium signum fuit sanguis sacrificiorum Veteris Foederis, quibus Deus voluntatem ostendebat vitam suam cum hominibus communicandi, eos purificando et consecrando (Cfr. *Ex.* 24, 8; *Lev.* 17, 11). Haec omnia in Christo nunc consummantur et ad effectum adducuntur: eius est sanguis aspersionis qui redimit, qui purificat, qui salvat; sanguis est Mediatoris Novi Foederis "qui pro multis effunditur in remissionem peccatorum" (*Matth.* 26, 28). Sanguis hic, ex latere scatens Christi in cruce perforato (Cfr. *Jo.* 19, 34), vox "loquentior" est quam sanguis Abel: ille enim significat

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 16.

mercy,<sup>19</sup> it makes intercession for the brethren before the Father (cf. *Heb 7:25*), and it is the source of perfect redemption and the gift of new life.

The blood of Christ, while it reveals the grandeur of the Father's love, *shows how precious man is in God's eyes and how priceless the value of his life*. The Apostle Peter reminds us of this: "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 *Pt 1:18-19*). Precisely by contemplating the precious blood of Christ, the sign of his self-giving love (cf. *Jn 13:1*), the believer learns to recognize and appreciate the almost divine dignity of every human being and can exclaim with ever renewed and grateful wonder: "How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he 'gained so great a Redeemer' (*Exsultet* of the Easter Vigil), and if God 'gave his only Son' in order that man 'should not perish but have eternal life' (cf. *Jn 3:16*)!"<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, Christ's blood reveals to man that his greatness, and therefore his vocation, consists in *the sincere gift of self*. Precisely because it is poured out as the gift of life, the blood of Christ is no longer a sign of death, of definitive separation from the brethren, but the instrument of a communion which is richness of life for all. Whoever in the Sacrament of the Eucharist drinks this blood and abides in Jesus (cf. *Jn 6:56*) is drawn into the dynamism of his love and gift of life, in order to bring to its fullness the original vocation to love which belongs to everyone (cf. *Gen 1:27; 2:18-24*).

It is from the blood of Christ that all draw *the strength to commit themselves to promoting life*. It is precisely this blood that is *the most powerful source of hope, indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God's plan life will be victorious*. "And death shall be no more", exclaims the powerful voice which comes from the throne of God in the Heavenly Jerusalem (*Rev 21:4*). And Saint Paul assures us that the present victory over sin is a sign and anticipation of the definitive victory over death, when there "shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'. 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'" (1 *Cor 15:54-55*).

**26.** In effect, signs which point to this victory are not lacking in our societies and cultures, strongly marked though they are by the "culture of death". It would therefore be to give a one-sided picture, which could lead to sterile discouragement, if the condemnation of the threats to life were not accompanied by the presentation of the *positive signs* at work in humanity's present situation.

Unfortunately it is often hard to see and recognize these positive signs, perhaps also because they do not receive sufficient attention in the communications media. Yet, how many initiatives of help and support for people who are weak and defenceless have sprung up and continue to spring up in the Christian community and in civil society, at the local, national and international level, through the efforts of individuals, groups, movements and organizations of various kinds!

There are still many *married couples* who, with a generous sense of responsibility, are ready to accept children as "the supreme gift of marriage".<sup>21</sup> Nor is there a lack of *families* which, over and above their everyday service to

et altiore "iustitiam" vindicat, at praesertim misericordiam deprecatur (Cfr. S. GREGORII MAGNI *Moralia in Iob*, 13, 23: CCL 143 A, 683), apud Patrem pro fratribus fit intercessor (Cfr. *Hebr. 7, 25*), fons est perfectae redemptionis atque vitae novae donum. Christi sanguis, dum permagnam Patris dilectionem revelat, ostendit simul quemadmodum pretiosus sit ante Dei oculos homo et inaeestimabile sit eius vitae bonum. Id quidem apostolus Petrus commemorat: "Scientes quod non corruptibilibus argento vel auro redempti estis de vana vestra conversatione a patribus tradita, sed pretioso sanguine quasi Agni incontaminati et immaculati Christi" (1 *Petr. 1, 18-19*). Ipsum contemplans pretiosum Christi sanguinem, donationis eius amoris signum (Cfr. *Io. 13, 1*), fidelis dignitatem quasi divinam singulorum hominum agnoscere et aestimare discit atque renovata grataque admiratione affectus clamare potest: "Quantum enim momentum ac pretium habere debet homo in conspectu Creatoris, si «talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem» («Exsultet» vigiliae Paschalis), si Deus dedit Filium suum Unigenitum, ut ille, homo scilicet, non pereat sed habeat vitam aeternam! (Cfr. *Io. 3, 16*)" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptoris Hominis*, 10). Christi sanguis, praeterea, homini ipsi revelat eius granditatem, ideoque eius vocationem, in *sincera sui donatione* collocari. Propterea quod ut vitae donum funditur, Christi sanguis iam non est mortis signum, decretoriae a fratribus seiunctionis, sed communionis instrumentum omnibus divitiis afferentis. Qui in Eucharistiae sacramento sanguinem hunc bibit et in Christo manet (Cfr. *Io. 6, 56*) in ipsius eadem amoris vi vitaeque donatione conglobatur, ut primigeniam amoris vocationem consummet cuique homini propriam (Cfr. *Gen. 1, 27; 2, 18-24*).

Ex eodem Christi sanguine hauriunt omnes homines vim, ut operam navent pro vita. Hic ipse sanguis spei est solidior causa, immo est fundamentum absolutae certitudinis ex Dei consilio vitae victoriam esse futuram. "Et mors ultra non erit", clamat praepotens vox oriens de Dei throno Hierosolymis in caelesti civitate (*Apoc. 21, 4*), Et sanctus Paulus nos certiores facit praesentem ex peccatis victoriam signum praesumptionemque esse perfectae victoriae de morte, cum "Scripturarum adimplebitur verbum: «Absorpta est mors in victoria. Ubi est, mors, victoria tua? Ubi est, mors, stimulus tuus?»" (1 *Cor. 15, 54-5*).

26. Huius victoriae profecto praenuntia signa haud desunt in nostris societatis culturisque, "mortis cultura" sic penitus notatis. Manca datur species, quae spem eripere inaniter potest, si denuntiationem minationum in vitam non comitantur demonstrata quaedam *affirmantia signa*, quae in hodierno hominum statu operantur.

Dolendum est quia haec affirmantia signa laboriose manifestantur et agnoscuntur, fortasse eo etiam quod in communicationis socialis instrumentis haud curiose ostenduntur. At quot incepta orta sunt et usque oriuntur ad debiliores et inermes personas iuvandas et sustinendas in christiana civili communitate, in locali, nationali et internationali ambitu, singulis viris, sodaliciis, motibus et multiplicibus institutionibus operam praebentibus!

Multi sunt adhuc *coniuges* qui liberaliter officioseque filios suscipiunt veluti "praestantissimum matrimonii donum" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50). Nec desunt *familiae*, quae suum praeter cotidianum vitae servitium,

<sup>19</sup> Cf. SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, *Moralia in Iob*, 13, 23: CCL 143A, 683.

<sup>20</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979) 10: AAS 71 (1979), 274.

<sup>21</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

life, are willing to accept abandoned children, boys and girls and teenagers in difficulty, handicapped persons, elderly men and women who have been left alone. Many *centres in support of life*, or similar institutions, are sponsored by individuals and groups which, with admirable dedication and sacrifice, offer moral and material support to mothers who are in difficulty and are tempted to have recourse to abortion. Increasingly, there are appearing in many places *groups of volunteers* prepared to offer hospitality to persons without a family, who find themselves in conditions of particular distress or who need a supportive environment to help them to overcome destructive habits and discover anew the meaning of life.

*Medical science*, thanks to the committed efforts of researchers and practitioners, continues in its efforts to discover ever more effective remedies: treatments which were once inconceivable but which now offer much promise for the future are today being developed for the unborn, the suffering and those in an acute or terminal stage of sickness. Various agencies and organizations are mobilizing their efforts to bring the benefits of the most advanced medicine to countries most afflicted by poverty and endemic diseases. In a similar way national and international associations of physicians are being organized to bring quick relief to peoples affected by natural disasters, epidemics or wars. Even if a just international distribution of medical resources is still far from being a reality, how can we not recognize in the steps taken so far the sign of a growing solidarity among peoples, a praiseworthy human and moral sensitivity and a greater respect for life?

27. In view of laws which permit abortion and in view of efforts, which here and there have been successful, to legalize euthanasia, *movements and initiatives to raise social awareness in defence of life* have sprung up in many parts of the world. When, in accordance with their principles, such movements act resolutely, but without resorting to violence, they promote a wider and more profound consciousness of the value of life, and evoke and bring about a more determined commitment to its defence.

Furthermore, how can we fail to mention *all those daily gestures of openness, sacrifice and unselfish care* which countless people lovingly make in families, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly and other centres or communities which defend life? Allowing herself to be guided by the example of Jesus the “Good Samaritan” (cf. *Lk 10:29-37*) and upheld by his strength, the Church has always been in the front line in providing charitable help: so many of her sons and daughters, especially men and women Religious, in traditional and ever new forms, have consecrated and continue to consecrate their lives to God, freely giving of themselves out of love for their neighbour, especially for the weak and needy.

These deeds strengthen the bases of the “civilization of love and life”, without which the life of individuals and of society itself loses its most genuinely human quality. Even if they go unnoticed and remain hidden to most people, faith assures us that the Father “who sees in secret” (*Mt 6:6*) not only will reward these actions but already here and now makes them produce lasting fruit for the good of all.

Among the signs of hope we should also count the spread, at many levels of public opinion, of *a new sensitivity ever more opposed to war* as an instrument for the resolution of conflicts between peoples, and increasingly oriented to finding effective but “non-violent” means to counter the armed aggressor. In the same perspective there is evidence of a *growing public opposition to the death penalty*, even when such a penalty is seen as a kind of “legitimate defence” on the part of society. Modern society in fact has the means of effectively

derelictos pueros, adolescentes iuvenesque difficultatibus laborantes, impeditas personas, desertos senes suscipiunt. Non paucae *sedes vitae iuvandae* vel similes institutiones a singulis vel a coetibus promoventur, qui admirabili quodam studio sui que impendio re spirituque sustentant nutantes et laborantes matres, quae ad abortum adhibendum pelliciuntur. *Voluntariorum* quoque *sodalicia* oriuntur et diffunduntur, qui operam navant ut hospitio recipiantur familia carentes, peculiaribus in angustiis versantes vel quaerentes aptum educationis locum ubi auxilium ad perniciosos habitus deponendos et vitae sensum recuperandum inveniant.

*Medica ars*, quae magno cum officio ab inquisitoribus et valetudinis opificibus investigatur, usque in suis conatibus progreditur ad magis magisque efficacia remedia invenienda: effectus reportati sunt qui olim ne cogitari quidem potuerunt quique bonam afferunt spem pro nascenti vita, pro personis valetudine laborantibus et gravibus vel extremis morbis insanabiliter correptis. Sodalitates et institutiones multiplices contendunt ut etiam in Nationibus miseris lueque pandema affectis recentioris medicinae beneficia afferantur. Itemque nationales internationalesque medicorum consociationes tempestive ad opem incolis ferendam se comparant, qui naturae calamitatibus, morbis contagiosis bellisve vexantur. In medicinae copiis partiendis etsi multum abest ut certa internationalis iustitia plene efficiatur, quidni non agnoscamus in progressibus ad hoc usque tempus peractis inter populos solidaritatis signa simulque humani moralisque sensus et maioris vitae observantiae? 27. Coram legibus quae abortum siverunt atque coram conatibus ad euthanasiam iure comprobendam hic illic ad effectum adductis, toto in terrarum orbe *motus inceptaque orta sunt quaedam ad socialem sensum pro vita acuendum*. Quando vero sincera cum sua mente plane convenientes firmiter agunt, amota tamen vi, hi motus latiore de bono vitae conscientiam et intellectum fovent ac pariter acrius officium vitam tuendi concitant atque efficiunt.

Nonne commemorandi praeterea *cotidiani gestus acceptionis, sacrificii, gratuitaee curae* quos amanter agunt innumeris homines in familiis, in valetudinariis, orphanotrophiis, domibus senibus destinatis, in sedibus pro vita et in consociationibus? Iesu “boni Samaritani” (Cfr. *Luc. 10, 29-37*) exemplum persequens eiusque robore sustentata, Ecclesia semper primum locum obtinuit in his caritatis finibus: permulti eius filii filiaeque, religiosi religiosaeque potissimum, vetustis atque usque novis formis, vitam Deo consecraverunt et consecrare pergunt, proximo debiliori indigentiorique eam dicantes.

Eiusmodi actiones ipsae illum “amoris vitaeque cultum” funditus aedificant, quo amoto personarum societatis existentia suam claram proprietate humanam significationem amittit. Etiam si a nullo notantur atque a pluribus ignorantur, fides nos certiores reddit Patrem, “qui videt in abscondito” (*Matth. 4, 6*) non modo eos compensaturum, verum iam nunc eos diuturnis fructibus pro omnibus fecundos redditurum.

Inter spei signa variis in publicae opinionis ordinibus *novus augescens sensus magis magisque bello contrarius* annumeratur, qui veluti instrumentum usurpatur ad controversias inter populos solvendas, dum contra efficaciam at “vi carentiam” instrumenta expetuntur et perquiruntur ut armatus hostis contineatur. Eodem in rerum prospectu *latius usque publica diffunditur opinio capitis poenae aversa* etiam veluti “legitimae defensionis” socialis instrumentum, quandoquidem hodierna societas facultates habet



suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform.

Another welcome sign is the growing attention being paid to the *quality of life* and to *ecology*, especially in more developed societies, where people's expectations are no longer concentrated so much on problems of survival as on the search for an overall improvement of living conditions. Especially significant is the reawakening of an ethical reflection on issues affecting life. The emergence and ever more widespread development of *bioethics* is promoting more reflection and dialogue--between believers and non-believers, as well as between followers of different religions--on ethical problems, including fundamental issues pertaining to human life.

**28.** This situation, with its lights and shadows, ought to make us all fully aware that we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the "culture of death" and the "culture of life". We find ourselves not only "faced with" but necessarily "in the midst of" this conflict: we are all involved and we all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of *choosing to be unconditionally pro-life*.

For us too Moses' invitation rings out loud and clear: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil.... I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; *therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live*" (Dt 30:15,19). This invitation is very appropriate for us who are called day by day to the duty of choosing between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death". But the call of Deuteronomy goes even deeper, for it urges us to make a choice which is properly religious and moral. It is a question of giving our own existence a basic orientation and living the law of the Lord faithfully and consistently: "If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by *loving the Lord your God*, by *walking in his ways*, and by *keeping his commandments* and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live ... therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; *for that means life to you and length of days*" (30:16,19-20).

The unconditional choice for life reaches its full religious and moral meaning when it flows from, is formed by and nourished by *faith in Christ*. Nothing helps us so much to face positively the conflict between death and life in which we are engaged as faith in the Son of God who became man and dwelt among men so "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). It is a matter of *faith in the Risen Lord, who has conquered death*; faith in the blood of Christ "that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:24).

With the light and strength of this faith, therefore, in facing the challenges of the present situation, the Church is becoming more aware of the grace and responsibility which come to her from her Lord of proclaiming, celebrating and serving the *Gospel of life*.

## CHAPTER II

*I came that they may have life*

The Christian Message Concerning Life

"The life was made manifest, and we saw it" (1 Jn 1:2): with our gaze fixed on Christ) "the Word of life"

**29.** Faced with the countless grave threats to life present in the modern world, one could feel overwhelmed by sheer powerlessness: good can never be powerful enough to triumph over evil!

At such times the People of God, and this includes every believer, is called to profess with humility and courage its faith in Jesus Christ, "the Word of life" (1

crimina efficaciter coercendi his usa rationibus quae hinc sontem reddant innoxium, hinc viam respiscendi omnino non intercludant.

*Qualitatis quoque vitae et oecologiae studium augescens est dilaudandum, quod praesertim conspicitur in societatibus valde excultis, in quibus hominum exspectationes non tam in rebus vitae necessariis versantur, quam generatim in melioribus vitae condicionibus. Magni est momenti revocata de vita ethica inquisitio: cum enim orta sit et usque adoleverit bioethica, coluntur investigatio ac dialogus – videlicet inter credentes et non credentes, itemque inter diversarum religionum credentes – de ethicis rebus, etiam praecipuis, quae ad hominis vitam spectant.*

28. Hic conspectus luce umbraque pervasus nos omnes concios prorsus reddere debet coram acerrima et gravissima nos sistere dimicatione quae inter bonum et malum, vitam inter ac mortem, "mortis culturam" et "vitae culturam" contenditur. Sistimus non "pro", verum necessario "inter" hanc dimicationem: omnes nempe implicamur et inevitabili officio compellimur, *ut sine condicionibus pro vita eligamus*.

Ad nos quoque illud Moysis clare et vehementer clamat: "Considera quod hodie proposuerim in conspectu tuo vitam et bonum, et e contrario mortem et malum...; proposuerim vobis vitam et mortem, benedictionem et maledictionem. *Elige ergo vitam, ut tu vivas et semen tuum*" (Deut. 30, 15. 19). Quod nobis quoque prorsus convenit, qui cotidie ad discernendum inter "vitae culturam" et "mortis culturam" vocamur. At altius est Deuteronomii monitum, quia ad religiosam moralemque electionem proprie nos concitat. Nam cuiusque vitae cursus funditus est disponendus atque fideliter constanterque Domini lex est tenenda: "Ego praeceptio tibi hodie, *ut diligas Dominum Deum tuum et ambules in viis eius et custodias mandata illius et praecepta et iudicia...* Elige ergo vitam, ut et tu vivas et semen tuum et diligas Dominum Deum tuum atque oboedias voci eius et illi adhaereas, *ipse est enim vita tua et longitudo dierum tuorum*" (Ibid. 30, 16. 19-20).

Sine condicionibus pro vita electio plene religiosam moralemque significationem adipiscitur cum manat, fingitur et alitur *fide in Christo*. Ut inter mortem et vitam, quibus implicamur dimicantes, victores discedamus, nihil magis potest quam fides in Dei Filio qui homo factus est et inter homines venit "ut vitam habeant et abundantius habeant" (Io. 10, 10): *fides est in Christo Resuscitato, qui mortem vicit*; fides est quae Christi sanguinem complectitur, "melius loquentem quam Abel" (Hebr. 12, 24).

Quapropter, fulgore atque vi huius fidei, coram provocationibus hodiernarum rerum condicionum, Ecclesia magis magisque sibi fit conscia gratiae et officii quae a Domino ei tribuuntur ut enuntiet, celebret et inserviat *Evangelio vitae*.

## Caput II

### EGO VENI, UT VITAM HABEANT

#### Christianus nuntius de vita

"Vita apparuit, et vidimus" (1 Io. 1-2): *contuitus in christum, "verbum vitae"*

29. Coram innumeris et gravibus minationibus quae in vitam hominum nostrae aetatis in praesens iaciuntur, quodam insuperabili impotentiae sensu obruimur: bonum nullo tempore malum vincere poterit!

Hoc tempus est quo Dei Populus, atque in eo singuli credentes, vocantur ad propriam fidem in Iesum Christum "Verbum vitae" (Ibid. 1, 1) humiliter ac

*Jn* 1:1). The *Gospel of life* is not simply a reflection, however new and profound, on human life. Nor is it merely a commandment aimed at raising awareness and bringing about significant changes in society. Still less is it an illusory promise of a better future. The *Gospel of life* is something concrete and personal, for it consists in the proclamation of *the very person of Jesus*. Jesus made himself known to the Apostle Thomas, and in him to every person, with the words: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (*Jn* 14:6). This is also how he spoke of himself to Martha, the sister of Lazarus: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (*Jn* 11:25-26). Jesus is the Son who from all eternity receives life from the Father (cf. *Jn* 5:26), and who has come among men to make them sharers in this gift: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (*Jn* 10:10).

Through the words, the actions and the very person of Jesus, man is given the possibility of “knowing” the *complete truth* concerning the value of human life. From this “source” he receives, in particular, the capacity to “accomplish” this truth perfectly (cf. *Jn* 3:21), that is, to accept and fulfil completely the responsibility of loving and serving, of defending and promoting human life. In Christ, the *Gospel of life* is definitively proclaimed and fully given. This is the Gospel which, already present in the Revelation of the Old Testament, and indeed written in the heart of every man and woman, has echoed in every conscience “from the beginning”, from the time of creation itself, in such a way that, despite the negative consequences of sin, *it can also be known in its essential traits by human reason*. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, Christ “perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself; through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious Resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover, he confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed: that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal”.<sup>22</sup>

**30.** Hence, with our attention fixed on the Lord Jesus, we wish to hear from him once again “the words of God” (*Jn* 3:34) and meditate anew on the *Gospel of life*. The deepest and most original meaning of this meditation on what revelation tells us about human life was taken up by the Apostle John in the opening words of his First Letter: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life--the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us--that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us” (1:1-3).

In Jesus, the “Word of life”, God’s eternal life is thus proclaimed and given. Thanks to this proclamation and gift, our physical and spiritual life, also in its earthly phase, acquires its full value and meaning, for God’s eternal life is in fact the end to which our living in this world is directed and called. In this way the *Gospel of life* includes everything that human experience and reason tell us about the value of human life, accepting it, purifying it, exalting it and bringing it to fulfilment.

“*The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation*” (*Ex* 15:2): *life is always a good*

**31.** The fullness of the Gospel message about life was prepared for in the Old Testament. Especially in the events of the Exodus, the centre of the Old

strenue profitendam. *Evangelium Vitae* non est simplex meditatio, quamvis originalis et profunda, de vita humana; nec tantum est mandatum ad movendam conscientiam et ad significantiores suscitandas mutationes in societate; nec agitur de vana melioris futuri temporis promissione. *Evangelium vitae* res est et quidem concreta et personalis, quia continetur in ipsa Iesu persona annuntianda. Apostolo Thomae, atque in eo unicuique homini, Iesus hisce verbis se exhibet: “Ego sum via et veritas et vita” (*Io.* 14, 6). Eadem est proprietas quam Iesus Martham, Lazari sororem, docuit: “Ego sum resurrectio et vita; qui credit in me, etiam si mortuus fuerit, vivet; qui vivit et credit in me, non morietur in aeternum” (*Io.* 11, 25-26). Iesus Filius est qui ab aeterno sumit de Patre vitam (Cfr. *ibid.* 5, 26) et venit ad homines ut eos huius doni participes redderet: “Ego veni ut vitam habeant et abundantius habeant” (*ibid.* 10, 10).

Ideo ex verbo, ex operibus, ex ipsa Iesu persona facultas tribuitur homini ut *omnem veritatem* de humanae vitae bono “cognoscere possit”; et ex illo “fonte” peculiari modo provenit facultas adamussim talem veritatem faciendi (Cfr. *ibid.* 3, 21), id est, suscipiendi necnon funditus exsequendi officium vitam humanam amandi, ei serviendi, eamque tuendi et promovendi. In Christo enim absolute nuntiatur et plene traditur illud *Evangelium vitae* quod iam traditum in revelatione Veteris Testamenti, immo scriptum quodam modo in ipso corde cuiusque hominis et mulieris, in unaquaque conscientia morali resonat “ab initio”, hoc est ab ipsa creatione, ita ut, adversis peccati vinculis non officientibus, *suis in essentialibus rationibus humana quoque mente percipi possit*. Ut scriptum legimus in Concilio Vaticano II, Christus “tota sui ipsius praesentia ac manifestatione, verbis et operibus, signis et miraculis, praesertim autem morte sua et gloriosa ex mortuis resurrectione, misso tandem Spiritu veritatis, revelationem complendo perficit ac testimonio divino confirmat, Deum nempe nobiscum esse ad nos ex peccati mortisque tenebris liberandos et in aeternam vitam resuscitandos” (*Dei Verbum*, 4).

30. Intuentes itaque Dominum Iesum, ab Ipso “Verba Dei” (*Io.* 3, 34) rursus exaudire volumus ac denuo *Evangelium Vitae* meditari. Altior et magis proprius sensus huius meditationis de nuntio revelato circa vitam humanam desumitur ex initio primae Epistolae apostoli Ioannis dicentis:

“Quod fuit ab initio, quod audivimus, quod vidimus oculis nostris, quod perspeximus, et manus nostrae contrectaverunt de verbo vitae – et vita apparuit, et vidimus et testamur et annuntiamus vobis vitam aeternam, quae erat coram Patre et apparuit nobis – quod vidimus et audivimus, annuntiamus et vobis, ut et vos communionem habeatis nobiscum” (1 *Io.* 1, 1-3).

Qua de re, vita divina et aeterna in Iesu, “Verbo vitae” et nuntiatur et traditur. Huius nuntii atque doni virtute, physica et spiritualis hominis vita, sua etiam terrestri aetate, plenitudinem virtutis suae et sensus assequitur: vita enim divina et aeterna terminus est ad quem homo, dum in hoc mundo vivit, impellitur et vocatur. *Evangelium vitae* amplectitur ita ea, quae ipsa experientia et humana ratio asserunt de momento vitae humanae; ea omnia accipit, extollit et ad exitum adducit.

“**Fortitudo mea et robor meum dominus, et factus est mihi in salutem**” (*Ex.* 15, 2): **vita semper bonum est**

31. Re vera, evangelica plenitudo nuntii de vita iam in Vetere Testamento adumbratur. Et praesertim in eventibus Exodi, quae est fulcrum experientiae fidei

<sup>22</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 4.

Testament faith experience, Israel discovered the preciousness of its life in the eyes of God. When it seemed doomed to extermination because of the threat of death hanging over all its newborn males (cf. *Ex* 1:15-22), the Lord revealed himself to Israel as its Saviour, with the power to ensure a future to those without hope. Israel thus comes to know clearly that *its existence* is not at the mercy of a Pharaoh who can exploit it at his despotic whim. On the contrary, Israel's life is *the object of God's gentle and intense love*.

Freedom from slavery meant the gift of an identity, the recognition of an indestructible dignity and *the beginning of a new history*, in which the discovery of God and discovery of self go hand in hand. The Exodus was a foundational experience and a model for the future. Through it, Israel comes to learn that whenever its existence is threatened it need only turn to God with renewed trust in order to find in him effective help: "I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me" (*Is* 44:21).

Thus, in coming to know the value of its own existence as a people, Israel also grows in its *perception of the meaning and value of life itself*. This reflection is developed more specifically in the Wisdom Literature, on the basis of daily experience of the precariousness of life and awareness of the threats which assail it. Faced with the contradictions of life, faith is challenged to respond.

More than anything else, it is the problem of suffering which challenges faith and puts it to the test. How can we fail to appreciate the universal anguish of man when we meditate on the Book of Job? The innocent man overwhelmed by suffering is understandably led to wonder: "Why is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it comes not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures?" (3:20-21). But even when the darkness is deepest, faith points to a trusting and adoring acknowledgment of the "mystery": "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (*Job* 42:2).

Revelation progressively allows the first notion of immortal life planted by the Creator in the human heart to be grasped with ever greater clarity: "He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind" (*Ec* 3:11). This *first notion of totality and fullness* is waiting to be manifested in love and brought to perfection, by God's free gift, through sharing in his eternal life.

*"The name of Jesus... has made this man strong" (Acts 3:16): in the uncertainties of human life, Jesus brings life's meaning to fulfilment*

32. The experience of the people of the Covenant is renewed in the experience of all the "poor" who meet Jesus of Nazareth. Just as God who "loves the living" (cf. *Wis* 11:26) had reassured Israel in the midst of danger, so now the Son of God proclaims to all who feel threatened and hindered that their lives too are a good to which the Father's love gives meaning and value.

"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (*Lk* 7:22). With these words of the Prophet Isaiah (35:5-6, 61:1), Jesus sets forth the meaning of his own mission: all who suffer because their lives are in some way "diminished" thus hear from him the "good news" of God's concern for them, and they know for certain that their lives too are a gift carefully guarded in the hands of the Father (cf. *Mt* 6:25-34).

It is above all the "poor" to whom Jesus speaks in his preaching and actions. The crowds of the sick and the outcasts who follow him and seek him out (cf. *Mt* 4:23-25) find in his words and actions a revelation of the great value of their lives and of how their hope of salvation is well-founded.

Veteris Testamenti, Israel detegit quam pretiosa sit vita sua in conspectu Domini. Cum vero Israel videtur ad interitum iam damnatus, eo quod omnibus recens natis minatio mortis instat (Cfr. *ibid.* 1, 15-22), Dominus ei se exhibet Servatorem, promittens futurum aliquod tempus illis qui omni spe carent. Ita in Israel certa oritur conscientia: eius vita non subicitur potestati pharaonis, qui ea tyrannico arbitrio abuti potest; quin contra, *Deus dulci validoque amore ipsam prosequitur*.

Liberatio a servitute donum est cuiusdam identitatis, comprobatio indelebilis dignitatis atque *novae historiae exordium*, in qua inventio Dei et sui ipsius inventio aequo itinere progrediuntur. Illa Exodi est experientia, fundamentum iaciens et exemplaris. Ex illa Israel discit se, quotiescumque sua existens minis subiciatur, nihil aliud facere debere nisi ad Deum renovata fiducia confugere ut validum auxilium in Eo inveniat: "Formavi te, servus meus es tu, Israel, non decipies me" (*Is.* 44, 21).

Ita, dum pondus comprobatur propriae existens veluti populus, Israel progreditur *percipiendo quoque sensum ac momentum vitae qua talis*. Haec est meditatio quae peculiarem in modum in libris sapientialibus explicatur, iter sumendo a cotidiana experientia *mutabilitatis* vitae atque a conscientia minarum quae illi insidiantur. Coram dissensionibus existens, fides incitatur ad responsum praebendum.

Quaestio praesertim de dolore fidem premit et temptat. Cur non percipitur universalis gemitus hominis cum fit meditatio de libro Iob? Innocens dolore oppressus naturaliter compellitur ad sese interrogandum: "Quare misero data est lux et vita his, qui in amaritudine animae sunt? – Qui expectant mortem, et non venit, et effodiunt quærentes illam magis quam thesauros?" (*Iob.* 3, 20-21). Fides tamen in crassissima quoque caligine impellit ad fidentem et adorantem mysterii agnitionem: "Scio quia omnia potes, et nulla te latet cogitatio" (*Ibid.* 42, 2).

Revelatio paulatim facit ut germen vitae immortalis quod Creator posuit in corde hominis, maiore deprehendatur perspicuitate: "Cuncta fecit bona in tempore suo; et mundum tradidit cordi eorum" (*Qo.* 3, 11). Hoc sane *universitatis et plenitudinis germen* expectat ut in amore manifestetur et impleatur, per gratuitum Dei donum, in communicatione eius vitae aeternae.

**"Hunc, quem videtis et nostis, confirmavit nomen eius" (Act. 3, 16): iesus in existens humanae mutabilitate sensum vitae complet**

32. Experientia populi Foederis renovatur per experientiam omnium "pauperum" qui Iesum Nazarenum inveniunt. Quemadmodum olim Deus "qui amat animas" (Cfr. *Sap.* 11, 26) Israel in periculis versantem confirmavit, ita nunc Dei Filius omnibus, qui minationibus subiciuntur et propria privantur existens, nuntiat eorum quoque vitam bonum esse, cui Patris amor sensum tribuit aestimationemque. "Caeci vident, claudi ambulant, leprosi mundantur et surdi audiunt, mortui resurgunt, pauperes evangelizantur" (*Luc.* 7, 22). Hiscæ verbiſaiaie prophetæ (*Is.* 35, 5-6; 61, 1) Iesus propriae missionis significationem explanavit: ita illi qui patiuntur propter existens quodam modo "deminutam", ab Ipso *bonum nuntium* audiunt, de cura scilicet quam Deus adhibet de illis qui accipiunt confirmationem: propriam etiam vitam donum esse in manibus Patris studiose custoditum (Cfr. *Matth.* 6, 25-34).

Sunt enim "pauperes" qui praecipue Iesu praedicatione et actione adficiuntur. Plurimi ex infirmis et a societate exclusis eum sequuntur et quaerunt (Cfr. *ibid.* 4, 23-25), ex eius verbiſ et actionibus percipiunt quanti eorum vita aestimetur et quomodo eorum salutis

The same thing has taken place in the Church's mission from the beginning. When the Church proclaims Christ as the one who "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (*Acts* 10:38), she is conscious of being the bearer of a message of salvation which resounds in all its newness precisely amid the hardships and poverty of human life. Peter cured the cripple who daily sought alms at the "Beautiful Gate" of the Temple in Jerusalem, saying: "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (*Acts* 3:6). By faith in Jesus, "the Author of life" (*Acts* 3:15), life which lies abandoned and cries out for help regains self-esteem and full dignity.

The words and deeds of Jesus and those of his Church are not meant only for those who are sick or suffering or in some way neglected by society. On a deeper level they affect *the very meaning of every person's life in its moral and spiritual dimensions*. Only those who recognize that their life is marked by the evil of sin can discover in an encounter with Jesus the Saviour the truth and the authenticity of their own existence. Jesus himself says as much: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (*Lk* 5:31-32).

But the person who, like the rich land-owner in the Gospel parable, thinks that he can make his life secure by the possession of material goods alone, is deluding himself. Life is slipping away from him, and very soon he will find himself bereft of it without ever having appreciated its real meaning: "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (*Lk* 12:20).

33. In Jesus' own life, from beginning to end, we find a singular "dialectic" between the experience of the uncertainty of human life and the affirmation of its value. Jesus' life is marked by uncertainty from the very moment of his birth. He is certainly *accepted* by the righteous, who echo Mary's immediate and joyful "yes" (cf. *Lk* 1:38). But there is also, from the start, *rejection* on the part of a world which grows hostile and looks for the child in order "to destroy him" (*Mt* 2:13); a world which remains indifferent and unconcerned about the fulfilment of the mystery of this life entering the world: "there was no place for them in the inn" (*Lk* 2:7). In this contrast between threats and insecurity on the one hand and the power of God's gift on the other, there shines forth all the more dearly the glory which radiates from the house at Nazareth and from the manger at Bethlehem: this life which is born is salvation for all humanity (cf. *Lk* 2:11).

Life's contradictions and risks were fully accepted by Jesus: "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (*2 Cor* 8:9). The poverty of which Paul speaks is not only a stripping of divine privileges, but also a sharing in the lowliest and most vulnerable conditions of human life (cf. *Phil* 2:6-7). Jesus lived this poverty throughout his life, until the culminating moment of the Cross: "he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name" (*Phil* 2:8-9). It is precisely *by his death* that *Jesus reveals all the splendour and value of life*, inasmuch as his self-oblation on the Cross becomes the source of new life for all people (cf. *Jn* 12:32). In his journeying amid contradictions and in the very loss of his life, Jesus is guided by the certainty that his life is in the hands of the Father. Consequently, on the Cross, he can say to him: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!" (*Lk* 23:46), that is, my life. Truly great must be the value of human life if the Son of God has taken it up and made it

expectationes confirmantur.

Non aliter accidit in munere Ecclesiae, inde ab eius exordiis. Haec enim, quae nuntiat illum Iesum qui "pertransiit beneficiendo et sanando omnes oppressos a Diabolo, quoniam Deus erat cum illo" (*Act.* 10, 38), bene novit se ferre salutis nuntium, qui plane novus in condicionibus quoque miseriae et paupertatis vitae hominis resonat. Ita facit Petrus sanando claudum, cotidie iacentem apud portam "Speciosam" templi Hierosolymitani ad eleemosynam quaerendam: "Argentum et aurum non est mihi; quod autem habeo, hoc tibi do: In nomine Iesu Christi Nazareni surge et ambula!" (*Ibid.* 3, 6). Propter fidem in Iesum, "ducem... vitae" (*Ibid.* 3, 15), vita, quae iacet relicta et duplex, conscientiam de se ac plenam dignitatem denuo invenit.

Verba et actiones Iesu eiusque Ecclesiae non respiciunt tantummodo illum qui sive in morbo sive in dolore versatur sive in variis generibus exclusionis a societate. Altius attingunt ipsam vitae cuiusque hominis significationem in ordine sive morali sive spiritali. Ille tantum qui intellegit vitam suam peccati morbo affici, in occurrione cum Iesu Salvatore veritatem invenit et germanam vim propriae existentiae, secundum ipsius verba: "Non necesse habent sani medicum, sed qui male habent; non veni vocare iustos, sed peccatores in paenitentiam" (*Luc.* 5, 31-32).

Qui vero, sicut dives agricola parabolaevangelicae, cogitat propriam vitam in tuto collocare quia bona tantum terrena possidet, reapse fallitur; vita illum effugit, qui sic cito ipsa privabitur, quin veram eiusdem significationem percipere possit: "Stulte! Hac nocte animam tuam repetunt a te; quae autem parasti, cuius erunt?" (*Ibid.* 12, 20).

33. In ipsa Iesu vita, inde ab initio usque ad finem, haec singularis "dissiderendi ratio" reperitur inter experientiam mutabilitatis vitae humanae et testificationem praesentiae eius. Vita enim Iesu inde a natali die mutabilitate signatur. Ipse quidem *hospitio* excipitur a iustis, qui promptae ac gaudiosae affirmationi Mariae coniunguntur (Cfr. *ibid.* 1, 38). Illico tamen etiam *repudiatione* afficitur ab ea hostili gente quae puerum quaerit "ad perdendum eum" (*Matth.* 2, 13), aut aliena remanet nec vertit animum ad perfectionem mysterii huius vitae quae in mundum ingreditur: "quia non erat eis locus in deversorio" (*Luc.* 2, 7). Ex discrepantia inter minas et instabilitatem una ex parte et virtutem doni Dei ex altera, maiore cum splendore refulget gloria quae ex domo Nazarethana et ex praesaepio Bethleemico prorumpit: haec vita quae nascitur salus est totius humani generis (Cfr. *ibid.* 2, 11).

Discrepantiae et vitae pericula a Iesu plene suscipiuntur: "Quoniam propter vos egenus factus est, cum esset dives, ut illius inopia vos divites essetis" (*2 Cor.* 8, 9). Paupertas, de qua loquitur Paulus, non significat tantum aliquem destitutum esse divinis privilegiis, verum etiam communicationem humilium et instabilitatem vitae humanae condicionum (Cfr. *Phil.* 2, 6-7). Iesus totum per vitae suae cursum usque ad novissimam horam in cruce hanc pauperem vitam gerit: "Humiliavit semet ipsum factus oboediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis. Propter quod et Deus illum exaltavit et donavit illi nomen, quod est super omne nomen" (*Phil.* 2, 8-9). *Iesus utique morte sua revelat omnem vitae plenitudinem eiusque pondus*, quatenus eius in cruce deditio fons vitae novae pro omnibus hominibus efficitur (Cfr. *Io.* 12, 32). Dum Iesus inter repugnantiam et sui ipsius vitae iacturam peregrinatur, certa sententia ducitur: vitam suam in manibus esse Patris. Propterea cruci iam affixus Ei clamare potest: "Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum" (*Luc.* 23, 46), id est vitam meam. Vere summi ponderis est vita humana quia Dei Filius in se

the instrument of the salvation of all humanity!

*“Called... to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:28-29): God’s glory shines on the face of man*

**34.** Life is always a good. This is an instinctive perception and a fact of experience, and man is called to grasp the profound reason why this is so.

*Why is life a good?* This question is found everywhere in the Bible, and from the very first pages it receives a powerful and amazing answer. The life which God gives man is quite different from the life of all other living creatures, inasmuch as man, although formed from the dust of the earth (cf. *Gen 2:7, 3:19; Job 34:15; Ps 103:14; 104:29*), is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory (cf. *Gen 1:26-27; Ps 8:6*). This is what Saint Irenaeus of Lyons wanted to emphasize in his celebrated definition: “Man, living man, is the glory of God”.<sup>23</sup> Man has been given a sublime dignity, based on the intimate bond which unites him to his Creator: in man there shines forth a reflection of God himself.

The Book of Genesis affirms this when, in the first account of creation, it places man at the summit of God’s creative activity, as its crown, at the culmination of a process which leads from indistinct chaos to the most perfect of creatures. *Everything in creation is ordered to man and everything is made subject to him: “Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over . . . every living thing” (1:28);* this is God’s command to the man and the woman. A similar message is found also in the other account of creation: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (*Gen 2:15*). We see here a clear affirmation of the primacy of man over things; these are made subject to him and entrusted to his responsible care, whereas for no reason can he be made subject to other men and almost reduced to the level of a thing.

In the biblical narrative, the difference between man and other creatures is shown above all by the fact that only the creation of man is presented as the result of a special decision on the part of God, a deliberation to establish a particular and specific bond with the Creator: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (*Gen 1:26*). *The life which God offers to man is a gift by which God shares something of himself with his creature.*

Israel would ponder at length the meaning of this particular bond between man and God. The Book of Sirach too recognizes that God, in creating human beings, “endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own image” (17:3). The biblical author sees as part of this image not only man’s dominion over the world but also *those spiritual faculties which are distinctively human*, such as reason, discernment between good and evil, and free will: “He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil” (*Sir 17:7*). *The ability to attain truth and freedom are human prerogatives* inasmuch as man is created in the image of his Creator, God who is true and just (cf. *Dt 32:4*). Man alone, among all visible creatures, is “capable of knowing and loving his Creator”.<sup>24</sup> The life which God bestows upon man is much more than mere existence in time. It is a drive towards fullness of life; *it is the seed of an existence which transcends the very limits of time*: “For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity” (*Wis 2:23*).

eam assumpsit eamque locum fecit in quo perficitur totius humani generis salus!

**“Praedestinati “conformes fieri imaginis filii eius” (Rom. 8, 29): gloria dei super hominis vultum resplendet**

34. Vita semper bonum est. Hoc effatum intuitionem continet vel planam experientiae rationem, cuius homo ad intimam vocatur causam percipiendam.

*Cumam vita bonum est?* Interrogatio haec totam Sacram Scripturam permeat et inde a primis paginis efficacem miramque invenit responsonem. Vita, quam Deus homini tradit, prorsus alia est ac cuiuslibet alterius creaturae viventis, quatenus homo, etsi pulveri terrae affinitate coniunctus (Cfr. *Gen. 2, 7; 3, 19; Job. 34, 15; Ps 103 (102), 14; Ps. 104 (103), 29*), coram mundo Dei manifestatio exstat, signum eius praesentiae, vestigium gloriae eius (Cfr. *Gen. 1, 26-27; Ps. 8, 6*). Quae quidem sanctus Irenaeus Lugdunensis in lucem proferre voluit ea permota definitione: “Gloria Dei vivens homo” (S. IRENAEI *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7: *SCh 100/2, 648*). Homo igitur altissima honestatur dignitate, quae radices penitus invenit in vinculo quo suo coniungitur Creatori: in homine repercussio ipsius naturae Dei refulget.

Hoc asserit liber Genesis in prima originum narratione, hominem evehens ad fastigium operae creatricis Dei, velut eiusdem coronationem, dum concluditur processus qui ex confuso chao ad statum creaturae quam maxime perfectae eum extollit. *Universa creatio ad hominem dirigitur et omnia illi subiciuntur*: “Replete terram et subicite eam et dominamini... universis animantibus” (*Gen. 1, 28*), iubet Deus virum et mulierem. Similis nuntius in altera quoque originum narratione invenitur: “Tulit ergo Dominus Deus hominem et posuit eum in paradiso Eden, ut operaretur et custodiret illum” (*Ibid. 2, 15*). Ita confirmatur hominis principatus universorum, quae quidem in eius dicatione sunt posita eiusque concredita responsalitati, dum ipse nullam ob causam paribus suis potest subici, neque ad rerum ordinem redigi.

In biblica narratione differentia hominis a ceteris rebus creatis liquido inde patet quod tantummodo illius creatio praebetur veluti singularis consilii Dei fructus, deliberationis quae in hoc est ut *singulare ac proprium cum Creatore vinculum* constituatur: “Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram” (*Ibid. 1, 26*). Vita quam Deus homini largitur *donum est quo Deus creaturam quodam modo sui ipsius participem reddit*.

Israel diu secum feret quaestionem circa sensum huius singularis ac proprii vinculi hominis cum Deo. Auctor quoque libri Ecclesiastici id agnoscit quod Deus, cum hominem creavit, “secundum se vestivit illum virtute... et secundum imaginem suam fecit illum” (*Sir. 17, 1-2*). Ad hoc sacer auctor revocat non tantum eius dominium in mundum, sed etiam *facultates spirituales magis propriae hominis*, quales sunt: ratio, distinctio boni et mali, libera voluntas: “Disciplina intellectus replevit illos... et mala et bona ostendit illis” (*Ibid. 17, 5-6*). *Facultas veritatem libertatemque attingendi privilegium est hominis* quatenus ad imaginem sui Creatoris, Dei veri et iusti, est creatus (Cfr. *Deut. 32, 4*). Docemur hominem dumtaxat, inter omnes creaturas visibiles, esse “capacem suum Creatorem cognoscendi et amandi” (*Gaudium et Spes, 12*). Vita, quam Deus homini dat, existens est quae ultra tempus progreditur. Cursus est ad vitae plenitudinem; *germen est existens quae ipsos temporis fines transcendit*: “Deus creavit hominem in incorruptibilitate et imaginem similitudinis suae fecit illum” (*Sap. 2, 23*).

<sup>23</sup> “Gloria Dei vivens homo”: *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7: *SCh 100/2, 648-649*.

<sup>24</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 12.

35. The Yahwist account of creation expresses the same conviction. This ancient narrative speaks of a *divine breath* which is *breathed into man* so that he may come to life: “The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (*Gen 2:7*).

The divine origin of this spirit of life explains the perennial dissatisfaction which man feels throughout his days on earth. Because he is made by God and bears within himself an indelible imprint of God, man is naturally drawn to God. When he heeds the deepest yearnings of the heart, every man must make his own the words of truth expressed by Saint Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you”.<sup>25</sup>

How very significant is the dissatisfaction which marks man’s life in Eden as long as his sole point of reference is the world of plants and animals (cf. *Gen 2:20*). Only the appearance of the woman, a being who is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones (cf. *Gen 2:23*), and in whom the spirit of God the Creator is also alive, can satisfy the need for interpersonal dialogue, so vital for human existence. In the other, whether man or woman, there is a reflection of God himself, the definitive goal and fulfilment of every person.

“What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”, the Psalmist wonders (*Ps 8:4*). Compared to the immensity of the universe, man is very small, and yet this very contrast reveals his greatness: “You have made him little less than a god, and crown him with glory and honour” (*Ps 8:5*). *The glory of God shines on the face of man*. In man the Creator finds his rest, as Saint Ambrose comments with a sense of awe: “The sixth day is finished and the creation of the world ends with the formation of that masterpiece which is man, who exercises dominion over all living creatures and is as it were the crown of the universe and the supreme beauty of every created being. Truly we should maintain a reverential silence, since the Lord rested from every work he had undertaken in the world. He rested then in the depths of man, he rested in man’s mind and in his thought; after all, he had created man endowed with reason, capable of imitating him, of emulating his virtue, of hungering for heavenly graces. In these his gifts God reposes, who has said: ‘Upon whom shall I rest, if not upon the one who is humble, contrite in spirit and trembles at my word?’ (*Is 66:1-2*). I thank the Lord our God who has created so wonderful a work in which to take his rest”<sup>26</sup>

36. Unfortunately, God’s marvellous plan was marred by the appearance of sin in history. Through sin, man rebels against his Creator and ends up by *worshipping creatures*: “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (*Rom 1:25*). As a result man not only deforms the image of God in his own person, but is tempted to offences against it in others as well, replacing relationships of communion by attitudes of distrust, indifference, hostility and even murderous hatred. When *God* is not acknowledged as *God*, the profound meaning of man is betrayed and communion between people is compromised.

In the life of man, God’s image shines forth anew and is again revealed in all its fullness at the coming of the Son of God in human flesh. “Christ is the image of the invisible God” (*Col 1:15*), he “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature” (*Heb 1:3*). He is the perfect image of the Father.

The plan of life given to the first Adam finds at last its fulfilment in Christ.

35. Yahvistica pariter originum narratio eandem exprimit opinionem. Vetus igitur relatio de *divino afflatu* loquitur, qui *hominis inhalatur* ut ille vitam ingrediatur: “Tunc formavit Dominus Deus hominem pulverem de humo et inspiravit in nares eius spiraculum vitae, et factus est homo in animam viventem” (*Gen. 2, 7*).

Divina huius spiraculi vitae origo perpetuam explicat displicentiam qua homo suam per vitam afficitur. A Deo factus, indelebile Dei signum ferens, homo suapte natura ad Eum inclinatur. Cum profundam exaudit cordis sui appetitionem, quisque homo facere non potest quin propriam reddat veritatem illam a sancto Augustino enuntiatam: “Fecisti nos ad te; et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te” (*S. AUGUSTINI Confessiones, I, 1: CCL 27, 1*). Quam certe eloquens est displicentia qua hominis vita in paradiso Eden perturbatur quamdiu eius unicum quasi theatrum restat mundus vegetalis et animalis! (Cfr. *Gen. 2, 20*) Solummodo adventus mulieris, creaturae videlicet quae caro est de carne viri et os ex ossibus eius (Cfr. *ibid. 2, 23*) et in qua Dei Creatoris spiritus pariter vivit, explere potest postulatum necessitudinis interpersonalis, quae ad vitam humanam maximi ponderis existimatur. In utroque, tam in viro quam in muliere, Deus Ipse ostenditur, fere portus ultimus et satisfaciens cuiusque personae. “Quid est homo, quod memor es eius, aut filius hominis, quoniam visitas eum?”, Psaltes sese interrogat (*Ps. 8, 5*). In conspectu vastitatis universi homo minimus videtur et haec ipsa differentia efficit ut magnitudo eius extollatur: “Minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis” (forsitan dici etiam potest: “paulo minus a Deo”), “gloria et honore coronasti eum” (*ibid. 6*). *Dei gloria super vultum hominis refulget*. In ipso Creator levamen invenit, uti sanctus Ambrosius stupens ac permotus interpretatur: “Quoniam completus est dies sextus, et mundani operis summa conclusio est; perfecto videlicet homine in quo principatus est animalium universorum, et summa quaedam universitatis, et omnis mundanae gratia creaturae. Certe deferamus silentium; quoniam requievit Deus ab omnibus mundi operibus; requievit autem in recessu hominis, requievit in eius mente atque proposito. Fecerat enim hominem rationis capacem, imitatore sui, virtutum aemulatore, cupidum caelestium gratiarum. In his requiescit Deus qui ait: *Super quem requiescam, nisi supra humilem, et quietum, et tementem verba mea?* (*Esa., LXVI, 1-2*) Gratias ergo Domino Deo nostro qui huiusmodi opus fecit in quo requiesceret” (*S. AMBROSII Hexaëmeron, VI, 75-76: CSEL 32, 260-261*).

36. Mirandum Dei propositum ob peccati incursionem in historiam infeliciter obscuratur. Homo propter peccatum ita Creatori obsistit ut *creaturas adoret* pro Deo: “Coluerunt et servierunt creaturae potius quam Creatori” (*Rom. 1, 25*). Tali quidem modo homo non solum Dei imaginem in se ipso deturpat, sed temptatione compellitur ut eam in ceteris laedat, substituens pro communionis consuetudinibus habitus diffidentiae, levitatis animi, inimicitiae, immo mortiferi odii. Cum enim Deus uti Deus non agnoscitur, tunc intimus hominis sensus proditur et inter homines communio offenditur!

In vita hominis imago Dei denuo relucet et in omnimoda plenitudine ostenditur per Filii Dei adventum in carne humana: “Qui est imago Dei invisibilis” (*Col. 1, 15*), “splendor gloriae et figura substantiae eius” (*Hebr. 1, 3*). Ille perfecta est Patris imago.

Vitae propositum primo Adamo traditum in Christo

<sup>25</sup> *Confessiones, I, 1: CCL 27, 1.*

<sup>26</sup> *Exameron, VI, 75-76: CSEL 32, 260-261.*



Whereas the disobedience of Adam had ruined and marred God's plan for human life and introduced death into the world, the redemptive obedience of Christ is the source of grace poured out upon the human race, opening wide to everyone the gates of the kingdom of life (cf. *Rom 5:12-21*). As the Apostle Paul states: "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 *Cor 15:45*).

All who commit themselves to following Christ are given the fullness of life: the divine image is restored, renewed and brought to perfection in them. God's plan for human beings is this, that they should "be conformed to the image of his Son" (*Rom 8:29*). Only thus, in the splendour of this image, can man be freed from the slavery of idolatry, rebuild lost fellowship and rediscover his true identity.

"Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (*Jn 11:26*): the gift of eternal life

37. The life which the Son of God came to give to human beings cannot be reduced to mere existence in time. The life which was always "in him" and which is the "light of men" (*Jn 1:4*) consists in being begotten of God and sharing in the fullness of his love: "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (*Jn 1:12-13*).

Sometimes Jesus refers to this life which he came to give simply as "life", and he presents being born of God as a necessary condition if man is to attain the end for which God has created him: "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (*Jn 3:3*). To give this life is the real object of Jesus' mission: he is the one who "comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world" (*Jn 6:33*). Thus can he truly say: "He who follows me ... will have the light of life" (*Jn 8:12*).

At other times, Jesus speaks of "eternal life". Here the adjective does more than merely evoke a perspective which is beyond time. The life which Jesus promises and gives is "eternal" because it is a full participation in the life of the "Eternal One". Whoever believes in Jesus and enters into communion with him has eternal life (cf. *Jn 3:15; 6:40*) because he hears from Jesus the only words which reveal and communicate to his existence the fullness of life. These are the "words of eternal life" which Peter acknowledges in his confession of faith: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (*Jn 6:68-69*). Jesus himself, addressing the Father in the great priestly prayer, declares what eternal life consists in: "This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (*Jn 17:3*). To know God and his Son is to accept the mystery of the loving communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit into one's own life, which *even now* is open to eternal life because it *shares in the life of God*.

38. Eternal life is therefore the life of God himself and at the same time the *life of the children of God*. As they ponder this unexpected and inexpressible truth which comes to us from God in Christ, believers cannot fail to be filled with ever new wonder and unbounded gratitude. They can say in the words of the Apostle John: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.... Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 *Jn 3:1-2*).

*Here the Christian truth about life becomes most sublime*. The dignity of this life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact that it comes from God, but

tandem consummatur. Dum Adami intemperantia consilium Dei circa vitam hominis infringit et corrumpit atque mortem immittit in mundum, redemptrix Christi oboedientia fons existit gratiae quae in homines funditur, regni vitae portas omnibus reserans (Cfr. *Rom. 5, 12-21*). Paulus apostolus asserit: "Factus est primus homo Adam in animam viventem; novissimus Adam in Spiritum vivificantem" (1 *Cor. 15, 45*).

Omnibus qui Christi famulatu se committere statuunt, vitae plenitudo conceditur: in iis Dei imago restituitur, renovatur et ad perfectionem ducitur. Hoc est Dei consilium de hominibus, ut conformes fiant "imaginis Filii eius" (*Rom. 8, 29*). Ita dumtaxat, in splendore huius imaginis homo ab idololatriae servitute liberari potest, dispersam fraternitatem restituere, suam recipere identitatem.

"Omnis, qui vivit et credit in me, non morietur in aeternum" (*Io. 11, 26*): donum vitae aeternae

37. Vita, quam Dei Filius venit ut hominibus largiretur, non sola temporis existentia constringitur. Vita, quae ab aeterno "in Ipso" est et quae "lux hominum" (*Ibid. 1, 4*) constituitur, in eo est ut ex Deo nascamur et plenitudinis eius amoris participes simus: "Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri, his, qui credunt in nomine eius, qui non ex sanguinibus neque ex voluntate carnis neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo nati sunt" (*Ibid. 1, 12-13*).

Aliquando Iesus hanc vitam, quam donaturus venit, ita simpliciter vocat: "vitam"; et generationem ex Deo demonstrat tamquam necessariam conditionem in finis ille, ad quem Deus hominem creavit, attingi possit: "Nisi quis natus fuerit desuper, non potest videre regnum Dei" (*Ibid. 3, 3*). Donum huius vitae constituit proprium missionis Iesu propositum: ille "est, qui descendit de caelo et dat vitam mundo" (*Ibid. 6, 33*), ita ut plena veritate asserere valeat: "Qui sequitur me... habebit lucem vitae" (*Ibid. 8, 12*).

Alias Iesus loquitur de "vita aeterna", ubi adiectivum non tantum expectationem quae tempora praetergreditur requirit. "Aeterna" vita est ea quam Iesus promittit et confert, quoniam plenitudo est participationis vitae cuiusdam "Aeterni". Omnis qui credit in Iesum et cum eo communione coniungitur vitam habet aeternam (Cfr. *Io. 3, 15; 6, 40*), quia ab Ipso ea sola verba audit quae revelant atque addunt eius existentiae vitae plenitudinem; sunt quidem "verba vitae aeternae" quae Petrus in professione fidei agnoscit: "Domine, ad quem ibimus? Verba vitae aeternae habes; et nos credidimus et cognovimus quia tu es Sanctus Dei" (*Ibid. 6, 68-69*). In quo autem sit vita aeterna, ipse Iesus explicat cum Patrem magna illa sacerdotali oratione alloquitur: "Haec est autem vita aeterna, ut cognoscant te solum verum Deum et, quem misisti, Iesum Christum" (*Ibid. 17, 3*). Deum cognoscere eiusque Filium idem est ac mysterium communionis amoris Patris, Filii et Spiritus Sancti in propriam vitam suscipere, quae aperitur iam nunc vitae aeternae in *vitae divinae participatione*.

38. Qua de re, vita aeterna est ipsa Dei vita simulque *vita filiorum Dei*. Pius vir admiratione et immensa gratiarum actione non potest non repleti prae hac insperata et ineffabili veritate, quae a Deo ad nos profuit in Christo. Christifidelis igitur apostoli Ioannis verba sibi applicat: "Videte qualem caritatem dedit nobis Pater, ut filii Dei nominemur, et sumus! ... Carissimi, nunc filii Dei sumus, et nondum manifestatum est quid erimus; scimus quoniam, cum ipse apparuerit, similes ei erimus, quoniam videbimus eum sicuti est" (1 *Io. 3, 1-2*).

*Christiana veritas de vita tali ratione suam attingit fastigium*. Huius dignitas non solum eius primordiis, eius a Deo origini coniungitur, verum etiam eius fini,

also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God in knowledge and love of him.

In the light of this truth Saint Irenaeus qualifies and completes his praise of man: “the glory of God” is indeed, “man, living man”, but “the life of man consists in the vision of God”.<sup>27</sup>

Immediate consequences arise from this for human life in its *earthly state*, in which, for that matter, eternal life already springs forth and begins to grow. Although man instinctively loves life because it is a good, this love will find further inspiration and strength, and new breadth and depth, in the divine dimensions of this good. Similarly, the love which every human being has for life cannot be reduced simply to a desire to have sufficient space for self-expression and for entering into relationships with others; rather, it develops in a joyous awareness that life can become the “place” where God manifests himself, where we meet him and enter into communion with him. The life which Jesus gives in no way lessens the value of our existence in time; it takes it and directs it to its final destiny: “I am the resurrection and the life ... whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (*Jn 11:25-26*).

“From man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting” (*Gen 9:5*): *reverence and love for every human life*

**39.** Man’s life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. *God therefore is the sole Lord of this life*: man cannot do with it as he wills. God himself makes this clear to Noah after the Flood: “For your own lifeblood, too, I will demand an accounting ... and from man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting for human life” (*Gen 9:5*). The biblical text is concerned to emphasize how the sacredness of life has its foundation in God and in his creative activity: “For God made man in his own image” (*Gen 9:6*).

Human life and death are thus in the hands of God, in his power: “In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind”, exclaims Job (12:10). “The Lord brings to death and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up” (1 *Sam 2:6*). He alone can say: “It is I who bring both death and life” (*Dt 32:39*).

But God does not exercise this power in an arbitrary and threatening way, but rather as part of his *care and loving concern for his creatures*. If it is true that human life is in the hands of God, it is no less true that these are loving hands, like those of a mother who accepts, nurtures and takes care of her child: “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother’s breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul” (*Ps 131:2*; cf. *Is 49:15*; *66:12-13*; *Hos 11:4*). Thus Israel does not see in the history of peoples and in the destiny of individuals the outcome of mere chance or of blind fate, but rather the results of a loving plan by which God brings together all the possibilities of life and opposes the powers of death arising from sin: “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist” (*Wis 1:13-14*).

**40.** The sacredness of life gives rise to its *inviolability, written from the beginning in man’s heart*, in his conscience. The question: “What have you done?” (*Gen 4:10*), which God addresses to Cain after he has killed his brother Abel, interprets the experience of every person: in the depths of his conscience, man is always reminded of the inviolability of life--his own life and that of others--as something which does not belong to him, because it is the property

eius destinationi communionis cum Deo in eiusdem cognitione et amore.

Sub lumine huius veritatis sanctus Irenaeus distinguit et perficit hominis exaltationem: “gloria Dei” est, certe, “homo vivens”, “vita autem hominis visio Dei” (S. IRENAEI *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7: *SCh 100/2*, 648).

Inde statim consecraria oriuntur pro vita humana in ipsa *terrestri condicione*, in qua ceterum vita aeterna iam est germinata et crescere pergit. Si homo sua sponte diligit vitam quia bonum est, eiusmodi dilectio invenit altiore causam virtutemque, amplitudinem novam et profunditatem in divinis huius boni mensuris. Simili in prospectu dilectio quam unusquisque in vitam habet non perducitur ad simplicem inquisitionem spatii in quo se ipsum enuntiet atque in consuetudinem cum ceteris ingrediatur, sed evolvitur in laeta conscientia se statuere posse propriam existentiam “locum” patefactionis Dei, occurationis et communionis cum Ipso. Vita, quam Iesus nobis largitur, nostrae terrestri existentiae pretium non minuit, sed eam assumit atque ad ipsius novissimam sortem conducit: “Ego sum resurrectio et vita...; omnis, qui vivit et credit in me, non morietur in aeternum” (*Io. 11, 25-26*).

“De manu viri fratris eius requiram animam hominis” (*Gen. 9, 5*): *veneratio et amor erga vitam omnium*

39. Hominis vita a Deo profluit, ipsius est donum, eius imago et vestigium, eius vitalis spiritus participatio. Huius itaque *vitae Deus est unus dominus*: homo de ea pro suo lubitu decernere non potest. Ipse Deus id confirmat iusto Noe post diluvium: “De manu hominis, de manu viri fratris eius requiram animam hominis” (*Ibid.*). Textus enim biblicus in luce profert sacram *vitae indolem* quae Deo eiusque actione creatrice nititur: “Ad imaginem quippe Dei factus est homo” (*Ibid. 9, 6*).

Vita et mors hominis sunt, proinde, in manu Dei, in eius potestate: “In cuius manu anima omnis viventis et spiritus universae carnis hominis”, clamat Iob (*Iob. 12, 10*). “Dominus mortificat et vivificat, deducit ad infernum et reducit” (1 *Sam. 2, 6*). Ille solus asserere potest: “Ego occidam et ego vivere faciam” (*Deut. 32, 39*).

Hanc vero potestatem Deus non uti minax arbitrium exsequitur, sed tamquam *curam et benignam erga creaturas sollicitudinem*. Si verum est vitam hominis in manibus Dei esse, verum est pariter has manus benignas esse, sicut manus matris quae puerum suum excipit, nutrit eiusque curam gerit: “Vere pacatam et quietam feci animam meam; sicut ablactatus in sinu matris suae, sicut ablactatus, ita in me est anima mea” (*Ps. 131 (130), 2*; cf. *Is. 49, 15*; *66, 12-13*; *Os. 11, 4*). Ita in populorum vicissitudinibus necnon in singulorum sorte Israel non conspicit fructum fortuiti casus vel caecae fortunae, sed exitum consilii amoris, quo Deus omnes vitae facultates colligit et cohibet mortis vires, quae ex peccato oriuntur: “Quoniam Deus mortem non fecit nec laetatur in perditione vivorum; creavit enim, ut essent omnia” (*Sap. 1, 13-14*).

40. Ex sacra vitae indole eius inviolabilis scaturit natura, *inscripta inde ab exordiis in corde hominis*, in eius conscientia. Quaestio enim “Quid fecisti?” (*Gen. 4, 10*), qua Deus Cain alloquitur, postquam hic fratrem Abelem necavit, experientiam exhibet cuiusque hominis: in conscientiae latebris ipse semper appellatur ad inviolabilem naturam vitae – sive propriae sive alienae –, uti rem quae ad eum non pertinet, quia proprietas est et donum Dei Creatoris et Patris.

<sup>27</sup> “Vita autem hominis visio Dei”: *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7: *SCh 100/2*, 648- 649.

and gift of God the Creator and Father.

The commandment regarding the inviolability of human life reverberates *at the heart of the “ten words” in the covenant of Sinai* (cf. *Ex* 34:28). In the first place that commandment prohibits murder: “You shall not kill” (*Ex* 20:13); “do not slay the innocent and righteous” (*Ex* 23:7). But, as is brought out in Israel’s later legislation, it also prohibits all personal injury inflicted on another (cf. *Ex* 21:12-27). Of course we must recognize that in the Old Testament this sense of the value of life, though already quite marked, does not yet reach the refinement found in the Sermon on the Mount. This is apparent in some aspects of the current penal legislation, which provided for severe forms of corporal punishment and even the death penalty. But the overall message, which the New Testament will bring to perfection, is a forceful appeal for respect for the inviolability of physical life and the integrity of the person. It culminates in the positive commandment which obliges us to be responsible for our neighbour as for ourselves: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (*Lev* 19:18).

41. The commandment “You shall not kill”, included and more fully expressed in the positive command of love for one’s neighbour, is *reaffirmed in all its force by the Lord Jesus*. To the rich young man who asks him: “Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?”, Jesus replies: “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (*Mt* 19:16,17). And he quotes, as the first of these: “You shall not kill” (*Mt* 19:18). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demands from his disciples a *righteousness which surpasses* that of the Scribes and Pharisees, also with regard to respect for life: “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment’. But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment” (*Mt* 5:21-22).

By his words and actions Jesus further unveils the positive requirements of the commandment regarding the inviolability of life. These requirements were already present in the Old Testament, where legislation dealt with protecting and defending life when it was weak and threatened: in the case of foreigners, widows, orphans, the sick and the poor in general, including children in the womb (cf. *Ex* 21:22; 22:20-26). With Jesus these positive requirements assume new force and urgency, and are revealed in all their breadth and depth: they range from caring for the life of one’s *brother* (whether a blood brother, someone belonging to the same people, or a foreigner living in the land of Israel) to showing concern for the *stranger*, even to the point of loving one’s *enemy*.

A stranger is no longer a stranger for the person who must *become a neighbour* to someone in need, to the point of accepting responsibility for his life, as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows so clearly (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37). Even an enemy ceases to be an enemy for the person who is obliged to love him (cf. *Mt* 5:38-48; *Lk* 6:27-35), to “do good” to him (cf. *Lk* 6:27, 33, 35) and to respond to his immediate needs promptly and with no expectation of repayment (cf. *Lk* 6:34-35). The height of this love is to pray for one’s enemy. By so doing we achieve harmony with the providential love of God: “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (*Mt* 5:44-45; cf. *Lk* 6:28, 35).

Thus the deepest element of God’s commandment to protect human life is the *requirement to show reverence and love* for every person and the life of every person. This is the teaching which the Apostle Paul, echoing the words of Jesus, addresses to the Christians in Rome: “The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet’,

Mandatum, quod inviolabilem humanae vitae naturam respicit, resonat *ipso in animo “decem verborum” Foederis Sinaitici* (Cfr. *Ex* 34, 28). Quod in primis vetat homicidium: “Non occides” (*Ibid.* 20, 13); “Insontem et iustum non occides” (*Ibid.* 23, 7); vetat insuper – ut patet ulterius in corpore toto iuris Israelis – quamlibet laesionem aliis illatam (Cfr. *ibid.* 21, 12-27). Procul dubio, agnoscatur oportet in Vetere Testamento hunc animi sensum quoad aestimationem vitae quamvis ita notatum, nondum suavitatem Sermonis in Monte attingere, uti liquet ex aspectibus quibusdam iuris tum vigentis, cum haud leves poenae corporales atque adeo poena capitis sancirentur. At nuntius universus, quem Novum Testamentum ad consummationem ducere debet, vehemens est appellatio ad venerandam inviolabilem vitae physicae et individuae incolumitatis naturam, qui nuntius ad culmen pervenit ex positivo mandato quod constringit ad curam adhibendam proximi sicut sui ipsius: “Diligens proximum tuum sicut teipsum” (*Lev.* 19, 18).

41. Mandatum “Non occides”, inclusum, amplificatum et prolatum positivo mandato amoris proximi, a Domino Iesu pro omni sua vi confirmatur. Iuveni diviti quaeerenti: “Magister, quid boni faciam, ut habeam vitam aeternam?”, respondet: “Si... vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata” (*Matth.* 19, 16, 17). Et in primis memorat: “Non homicidium facies”. In Montano Sermone Iesus *maiores* a discipulis requirit *iustitiam* quam scribarum et pharisaeorum etiam sub aspectu vitae reverendae: “Audistis quia dictum est antiquis: Non occides; qui autem occiderit, reus erit iudicio: Ego autem dico vobis: Omnis qui irascitur fratri suo reus erit iudicio” (*Ibid.* 5, 21-22).

Tam verbo quam propriis gestis Iesus positivas postea ostendit condiciones huius mandati de inviolabili vitae natura. Hae vim iam suam exerebant tempore Veteris Testamenti, cum corpus iuris promittendas ac tuendas curaret condiciones eorum qui vitam gerebant languentem et minis vexatam, et qui sunt: advena, vidua, orphanus, infirmus, pauper universim, vita ipsa ante nativitatem (Cfr. *Ex* 21, 22; 22, 20-26). Hae condiciones cum Iesu novum assequuntur vigorem et impulsus, et sua plana amplitudine eminent et altitudine; decurrunt enim a cura vitae fratris adhibenda (sive familiaris, sive concivis, sive advenae qui terram Israelis incolit) usque ad extraneum in se excipiendum, quin immo ad inimicum diligendum.

Extrarius talis non erit coram eo qui proximus effici debet cuiuslibet hominis necessitate laborantis, usque ad conspionem vitae eius in se suscipiendam, uti eloquenti vehementique sermone Parabola boni Samaritani nos edocet (Cfr. *Luc.* 10, 25-37). Inimicus quoque talis desinit esse coram eo qui debet illum diligere (Cfr. *Matth.* 5, 38-48; *Luc.* 6, 27-35), eiusque “bono” servire (Cfr. *Luc.* 6, 27, 33, 35), prompto animo et grato sensu (Cfr. *Luc.* 6, 34-35) eius vitae necessitatibus subveniens. Amoris huius culmen oratio est pro inimico, per quam concordia constituitur cum providenti Dei amore: “Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros et orate pro persequentibus vos, ut sitis filii Patris vestri, qui in caelis est, quia solem suum oriri facit super malos et bonos et pluit super iustos et iniustos” (*Matth.* 5, 44-45; cfr. *Luc.* 6, 28, 35). Ita mandatum Dei ad hominis vitam tuendam detegit partem suam altiore penitus insitam in officio singulas personas earumque vitam venerandi et amandi. Haec est doctrina quam apostolus Paulus, verba Iesu quadam resonantia iterans (Cfr. *ibid.* 19, 17-18), christianis urbis Romae tradit: “Nam: Non adulterabis, Non occides, Non furaberis, Non concupisces, et si

and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, ‘*You shall love your neighbour as yourself*. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling; of the law’ (Rom 13:9-10).

“*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it*” (Gen 1:28): *man’s responsibility for life*

42. To defend and promote life, to show reverence and love for it, is a task which God entrusts to every man, calling him as his living image to share in his own lordship over the world: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (Gen 1:28).

The biblical text clearly shows the breadth and depth of the lordship which God bestows on man. It is a matter first of all of *dominion over the earth and over every living creature*, as the Book of Wisdom makes clear: “O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy... by your wisdom you have formed man, to have dominion over the creatures you have made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness” (Wis 9:1,2-3). The Psalmist too extols the dominion given to man as a sign of glory and honour from his Creator: “You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea” (Ps 8:6-8).

As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards *the environment in which he lives*, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the *ecological question*--ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to “human ecology” properly speaking<sup>28</sup>--which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life. In fact, “the dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to ‘use and misuse’, or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to ‘eat of the fruit of the tree’ (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity”.<sup>29</sup>

43. A certain sharing by man in God’s lordship is also evident in the *specific responsibility* which he is given *for human life as such*. It is a responsibility which reaches its highest point in the giving of life *through procreation* by man and woman in marriage. As the Second Vatican Council teaches: “God himself who said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone’ (Gen 2:18) and ‘who made man from the beginning male and female’ (Mt 19:4), wished to share with man a certain special participation in his own creative work. Thus he blessed male and female saying: ‘Increase and multiply’ (Gen 1:28).<sup>30</sup>

By speaking of “a certain special participation” of man and woman in the “creative work” of God, the Council wishes to point out that having a child is an event which is deeply human and full of religious meaning, insofar as it

quod est aliud mandatum, in hoc verbo recapitulatur: *Diliges proximum tuum tamquam teipsum*. Dilectio proximo malum non operatur; plenitudo ergo legis est dilectio” (Rom. 13, 9-10).

“**Crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram et subicite eam**” (Gen. 1, 28): **hominis de vita officia**

42. Vitam tueri et provehere, eandem venerari et amare est officium quoddam singulis hominibus a Deo concreditum, cum Deus vocat eum, vividam veluti sui effigiem, ad mundi dominatum participandum quem ipse occupat: “Benedixitque illis Deus et ait illis: «Crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram et subicite eam et dominamini piscibus maris et volatilibus caeli et universis animantibus, quae moventur super terram»” (Ibid.).

Biblica verba amplitudinem altitudinemque dominatus quem Deus homini tribuit, in lumine locant. Agitur in primis *de orbis terrarum singulorumque viventium dominatu*, quemadmodum Sapientiae liber commemorat: “Deus patrum meorum et Domine misericordiae, ...sapientia tua constituisti hominem, ut dominaretur creaturis, quae a te factae sunt, et diserneret orbem terrarum in sanctitate et iustitia” (Sap. 9, 1, 2-3). Psalmista quoque hominis dominatum tamquam gloriae honorisque signum a Creatore praestitorum extollit: “Constituisti eum super opera manuum tuarum. Omnia subiecisti sub pedibus eius, oves et boves universas, insuper et pecora campi, volucres caeli et pisces maris, quaecumque perambulant semitas maris” (Ps. 8, 7-9).

Ad mundi hortum colendum tutandumque vocatus (Cfr. Gen. 2, 15) homo peculiare quidem officium *de vitae loco* suscipere debet, scilicet de universo mundo quem Deus commodavit ut illius personali dignitati eiusque vitae inserviret, spectatis non modo iis qui nunc sunt, verum et qui postea nascentur. Agitur quippe *de oecologica quaestione* – quae hinc diversarum animalium specierum naturales sedes multiplicesque vitae formas servandas complectitur, illinc ipsam “humanam oecologiam” (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Centesimus Annus*, 38) – et quae in bibliorum sacrorum paginis clara et ethica ratione tantopere significatur, ut vita, quaevis vita, observanter colatur. Reapse “dominium a Creatore homini datum... non est absolutum, nec potest utendi et abutendi arbitrium vocari, vel ex commodo res disponendi. Modus, quem inde a principio ipse Creator homini imposuit quique symbolica ratione exprimitur per interdictionem comedendi de ligno (Cfr. Gen. 2, 16-17), satis clare ostendit in universitate naturae visibilis... nos legibus esse subiectos, non solum biologicis, verum etiam et moralibus, quae impune violari nequeunt” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 34).

43. Homo quodammodo Dei dominatus fit particeps. Hoc quidem *peculiari responsalitate* revelatur, quae ei committitur *quod attinet ad vitam proprie humanam*. Quod officium in vita donanda suum fastigium attingit *per generationem*, quam vir mulierque in matrimonio dant, sicut commemorat Concilium Vaticanum II: “Ipse Deus qui dixit: non est bonum hominem esse solum (Gen. 2, 18) et qui hominem ab initio masculum et feminam fecit (Math. 19, 4), volens ei participationem specialem quandam in sui ipsius opere creativo communicare, viro et mulieri benedixit dicens: *crescite et multiplicamini* (Gen. 1, 28)” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50). De “participatione speciali quadam” viri mulierisque in Dei “opere creativo” loquens, Concilium collustrare vult quemadmodum generatus filius planissime sit humanus religiosusque eventus, quippe qui secum

<sup>28</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 38: AAS 83 (1991), 840-841.

<sup>29</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 34: AAS 80 (1988), 560.

<sup>30</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

involves both the spouses, who form “one flesh” (*Gen 2:24*), and God who makes himself present. As I wrote in my *Letter to Families*: “When a new person is born of the conjugal union of the two, he brings with him into the world a particular image and likeness of God himself: *the genealogy of the person is inscribed in the very biology of generation*. In affirming that the spouses, as parents, cooperate with God the Creator in conceiving and giving birth to a new human being, we are not speaking merely with reference to the laws of biology. Instead, we wish to emphasize that *God himself is present in human fatherhood and motherhood* quite differently than he is present in all other instances of begetting ‘on earth’. Indeed, God alone is the source of that ‘image and likeness’ which is proper to the human being, as it was received at Creation. Begetting is the continuation of Creation”.<sup>31</sup>

This is what the Bible teaches in direct and eloquent language when it reports the joyful cry of the first woman, “the mother of all the living” (*Gen 3:20*). Aware that God has intervened, Eve exclaims: “I have begotten a man with the help of the Lord” (*Gen 4:1*). In procreation therefore, through the communication of life from parents to child, God’s own image and likeness is transmitted, thanks to the creation of the immortal soul.<sup>32</sup> The beginning of the “book of the genealogy of Adam” expresses it in this way: “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and called them man when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth” (*Gen 5:1-3*). It is precisely in their role as co-workers with God *who transmits his image to the new creature* that we see the greatness of couples who are ready “to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Saviour, who through them will enlarge and enrich his own family day by day”.<sup>33</sup>

This is why the Bishop Amphilochius extolled “holy matrimony, chosen and elevated above all other earthly gifts” as “the begetter of humanity, the creator of images of God”.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, a man and woman joined in matrimony become partners in a divine undertaking: through the act of procreation, God’s gift is accepted and a new life opens to the future.

But over and above the specific mission of parents, *the task of accepting and serving life involves everyone; and this task must be fulfilled above all towards life when it is at its weakest*. It is Christ himself who reminds us of this when he asks to be loved and served in his brothers and sisters who are suffering in any way: the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned ... Whatever is done to each of them is done to Christ himself (cf. *Mt 25:31-46*).

“For you formed my inmost being” (*Ps 139:13*): *the dignity of the unborn child*

#### 44. Human life finds itself most vulnerable when it enters the world and

coniuges ferat et complectatur formantes “carnem unam” (*Gen. 2, 24*), et ipsum simul Deum qui praesens fit. Sicut in *Litteris familiis datis* scripsimus, “cum e conubiali duorum coitu novus nascitur homo, secum in mundum peculiarem omnino adfert imaginem similitudinemque cum Deo ipso: *in generationis biologia personae genealogia inscribitur*. Adfirmantes vero coniuges uti parentes cum Deo Conditore operari in concipiendo generandoque novo homine, non unas tantum repetimus biologiae leges; inculcare potius contendimus *in humana paternitate ac maternitate Deum ipsum adesse aliter atque contingat in reliquis cunctis generationibus «in terra»*. Solo enim a Deo illa cooriri potest «imago et similitudo» quae hominis est propria, perinde ac factum est in ipsa creatione. *Generatio enim est creationis propagatio*” (IOANNIS PAULIS PP. II *Gratissimam Sane*, 9; cfr. PII XII *Humani Generis*, die 12 aug. 1950: AAS 42 (1950) 574).

Hoc prompte conspicueque docet sacer textus, gaudenter inducens laetantem clamorem mulieris “matris cunctorum viventium” (*Gen. 3, 20*). Dei operationis sibi conscia, Heva effatur: “Acquisivi virum per Dominum” (*Ibid. 4, 1*). In pariendo igitur, per vitae communicationem ex parentibus in liberos, per immortalis animae creationem (PII XII *Humani Generis*, die 12 aug. 1950: AAS 42 (1950) 575: «Animas enim a Deo immediate creari catholica fides nos retinere iubet») ipsius Dei imago et similitudo transmittitur. Mentem hanc significat “libri generationis Adam” exordium: “In die, qua creavit Deus hominem, ad similitudinem Dei fecit illum. Masculum et feminam creavit eos et benedixit illis; et vocavit nomen eorum Adam in die, quo creari sunt. Vixit autem Adam centum triginta annis et genuit ad similitudinem et imaginem suam vocavitque nomen eius Seth” (*Gen. 5, 1-3*). Hoc ipso in munere cum Deo cooperandi qui suam imaginem novae creaturae transmittit, coniugum splendet excellentia, propensorum “ad cooperandum cum amore Creatoris atque Salvatoris, qui per eos Suam familiam in dies dilatat et ditat” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50; Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 28).

). Hoc sub lumine Amphilochius episcopus extulit “honorabile connubium, quod donum omne terrenum superat”, et existimatur “naturae conditor, pictor divinae imaginis” (AMPHILOCHII EPISCOPI *Orationes*, II, 1: CCSG 3, 39).

Sic vir mulierque matrimonio iugati divinae operae adsociantur: per generationis actum Dei donum accipiunt et nova vita in futurum tempus ingreditur.

At praeter peculiare parentum partes, *omnium est vitam suscipere ac tueri, quod praesertim vitam eam respicere debet quae in debilibus versatur condicionibus*. Ipse Christus hoc nos admonet, postulans ut in fratribus quibuslibet vexatis aerumnis ametur et iuветur: in esurientibus scilicet, sitientibus, hospitibus, nudis, aegrotis, vinculo detentis... Quidquid factum est uni ex his, ipsi Christo factum est (Cfr. *Matth. 25, 31-46*).

“Quia tu formasti renes meos” (*Ps 139 (138), 13*): *parvuli nondum nati dignitas*

44. Magno in discrimine versatur humana vita cum

<sup>31</sup> Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane* (2 February 1994), 9 AAS 86 (1994), 878; cf. PIUS XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 574.

<sup>32</sup> “Animas enim a Deo immediate creari catholica fides nos retinere iubet”: PIUS XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 575.

<sup>33</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50; cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 28: AAS 74 (1982), 114.

<sup>34</sup> *Homilies*, II, 1; CCSG 3, 39.

when it leaves the realm of time to embark upon eternity. The word of God frequently repeats the call to show care and respect, above all where life is undermined by sickness and old age. Although there are no direct and explicit calls to protect human life at its very beginning, specifically life not yet born, and life nearing its end, this can easily be explained by the fact that the mere possibility of harming, attacking, or actually denying life in these circumstances is completely foreign to the religious and cultural way of thinking of the People of God.

In the Old Testament, sterility is dreaded as a curse, while numerous offspring are viewed as a blessing: “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward” (*Ps* 127:3; cf. *Ps* 128:3-4). This belief is also based on Israel’s awareness of being the people of the Covenant, called to increase in accordance with the promise made to Abraham: “Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them ... so shall your descendants be” (*Gen* 15:5). But more than anything else, at work here is the certainty that the life which parents transmit has its origins in God. We see this attested in the many biblical passages which respectfully and lovingly speak of conception, of the forming of life in the mother’s womb, of giving birth and of the intimate connection between the initial moment of life and the action of God the Creator.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (*Jer* 1:5): *the life of every individual, from its very beginning, is part of God’s plan.* Job, from the depth of his pain, stops to contemplate the work of God who miraculously formed his body in his mother’s womb. Here he finds reason for trust, and he expresses his belief that there is a divine plan for his life: “You have fashioned and made me; will you then turn and destroy me? Remember that you have made me of clay; and will you turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love; and your care has preserved my spirit” (*Job* 10:8-12). Expressions of awe and wonder at God’s intervention in the life of a child in its mother’s womb occur again and again in the Psalms.<sup>35</sup>

How can anyone think that even a single moment of this marvellous process of the unfolding of life could be separated from the wise and loving work of the Creator, and left prey to human caprice? Certainly the mother of the seven brothers did not think so; she professes her faith in God, both the source and guarantee of life from its very conception, and the foundation of the hope of new life beyond death: “I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws” (*2 Mac* 7:22-23).

45. The New Testament revelation confirms the *indisputable recognition of the value of life from its very beginning.* The exaltation of fruitfulness and the eager expectation of life resound in the words with which Elizabeth rejoices in her pregnancy: “The Lord has looked on me... to take away my reproach among men” (*Lk* 1:25). And even more so, the value of the person from the moment of conception is celebrated in the meeting between the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, and between the two children whom they are carrying in the womb. It is precisely the children who reveal the advent of the Messianic age: in their

ingreditur in mundum cumque ex hoc saeculo excedit ut in aeternitatis portum transeat. Saepius offendimus in Sacris Litteris – praesertim quod attinet ad existentiam cui morbo vel senectute insidiatur – hortamenta ad curam adhibendam reverentiamque. Ubi non inducuntur hortamenta perspicua ad humanam vitam colendam inde a primo eius ortu, nominatim vitam nondum editam vitamque ad exitum suum propterantem, liquido sane explicatur propterea quod ipsa occasione laedendi, aggrediendi prorsusve negandi vitam his sub condicionibus plane abhorret a religiosa culturalique populi Dei mente. In Vetere Testamento sterilitas velut exitum quoddam reicitur, suboles vero numerosa iudicatur Dei beneficium: “Ecce hereditas Domini filii, merces fructus ventris” (*Ps* 127 (126), 3; cf. *Ps* 128 (127), 3-4). Momentum habet hac in opinione etiam conscientia cuius vi Israel se censet Foederis populum, ad se amplificandum vocatum secundum promissionem Abraham factam: “Suspice caelum et numera stellas, si potes... sic erit semen tuum” (*Gen.* 15, 5). Et tamen stat certa fides vitam a parentibus traditam originem suam invenire in Deo, sicut sane tot biblicorum testantium loci reverentia quadam et pietate loquentes de conceptione, de vita in matris gremio sese informant, de ortu deque stricta necessitudine inter existentiae momentum initiale atque Dei Creatoris actionem.

“Priusquam te formarem in utero, novi te et, antequam exires de vulva, sanctificavi te” (*Ier.* 1, 5): *cuiuslibet hominis existentia, inde a suis primordiis, est in mente Dei.* Iob, ex interiore recessu doloris sui, contuetur Dei operam in mira prorsus corporis sui compositione in gremio matris: illinc fiduciae causam depromit, dum certitudinem exprimit de quodam divino consilio circa vitam suam: “Manus tuae fecerunt me et plasmaverunt me totum in circuitu; et sic repente praecipitas me? Memento, quae, quod sicut lutum feceris me, et in pulverem reduces me. Nonne sicut lac mulsisti me et sicut caseum me coagulasti? Pelle et carnibus vestisti me; ossibus et nervis compegisti me. Vitam et misericordiam tribuisti mihi, et visitatio tua custodivit spiritum meum” (*Iob.* 10, 8-12). Admirationis venerationisque clara verba ob Dei operam in componenda vita in gremio materno resonant etiam in Psalmis (Cfr., ex. gr., *Ps.* 22 (21), 10-11; *Ps.* 71 (70), 6; *Ps.* 139 (138), 13-14). Quomodo cogitare possumus vel unum temporis momentum huius miri processus vitae oborientis subtrahi posse sollerti amantique Creatoris operi atque hominis arbitrio remitti? Hoc profecto cogitatione non percipit septem fratrum mater, quae suam in deum proficitur fidem, principium atque arrabonem vitae inde a sua ipsius conceptione, eodemque tempore fundamentum spei novae vitae ultra mortem: “Nescio qualiter in utero meo apparuisti neque ego spiritum et vitam donavi vobis et singulorum vestrorum compagem non sum ego modulata; sed enim mundi Creator, qui formavit hominis nativitatem quique omnium invenit originem et spiritum et vitam vobis iterum cum misericordia reddet, sicut nunc vosmetipsos despicitis propter leges eius” (*2 Macch.* 7, 22-23).

45. Novi Testamenti revelatio confirmat *non dubitatum agnitionem dignitatis vitae inde ab eius primordiis.* Fecunditatis laus atque vitae studiosa exspectatio resonant sane in verbis quibus Elisabeth laetatur ob suam praegnationem: Dignatus est enim Dominus “auferre opprobrium meum” (*Luc.* 1, 25). At acriore ratione personae dignitas inde a conceptione praedicatur in occurso Virginis Mariae et Elisabethae atque duorum parvulorum ab illis gestatorum in gremio. Iidem sane ipsi pueri patefaciunt messianicae aetatis adventum: in eorum ipso congressu agere incipit redemptrix vis praesentiae Filii Dei inter homines. “Cito

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Psalms 22:10-11; 71:6; 139: 14.

meeting, the redemptive power of the presence of the Son of God among men first becomes operative. As Saint Ambrose writes: “The arrival of Mary and the blessings of the Lord’s presence are also speedily declared... Elizabeth was the first to hear the voice; but John was the first to experience grace. She heard according to the order of nature; he leaped because of the mystery. She recognized the arrival of Mary; he the arrival of the Lord. The woman recognized the woman’s arrival; the child, that of the child. The women speak of grace; the babies make it effective from within to the advantage of their mothers who, by a double miracle, prophesy under the inspiration of their children. The infant leaped, the mother was filled with the Spirit. The mother was not filled before the son, but after the son was filled with the Holy Spirit, he filled his mother too”.<sup>36</sup>

*“I kept my faith even when I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted’” (Ps 116:10): life in old age and at times of suffering*

46. With regard to the last moments of life too, it would be anachronistic to expect biblical revelation to make express reference to present-day issues concerning respect for elderly and sick persons, or to condemn explicitly attempts to hasten their end by force. The cultural and religious context of the Bible is in no way touched by such temptations; indeed, in that context the wisdom and experience of the elderly are recognized as a unique source of enrichment for the family and for society.

*Old age is characterized by dignity and surrounded with reverence* (cf. 2 Mac 6:23). The just man does not seek to be delivered from old age and its burden; on the contrary his prayer is this: “You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth... so even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, till I proclaim your might to all the generations to come” (Ps 71:5,18). The ideal of the Messianic age is presented as a time when “no more shall there be ... an old man who does not fill out his days” (Is 65:20).

In old age, how should one face the inevitable decline of life? *How should one act in the face of death? The believer knows that his life is in the hands of God:* “You, O Lord, hold my lot” (cf. Ps 16:5), and he accepts from God the need to die: “This is the decree from the Lord for all flesh, and how can you reject the good pleasure of the Most High?” (Sir 41:3-4). Man is not the master of life, nor is he the master of death. In life and in death, he has to entrust himself completely to the “good pleasure of the Most High”, to his loving plan.

In moments of *sickness* too, man is called to have the same trust in the Lord and to renew his fundamental faith in the One who “heals all your diseases” (cf. Ps 103:3). When every hope of good health seems to fade before a person’s eyes--so as to make him cry out: “My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass” (Ps 102:11)--even then the believer is sustained by an unshakable faith in God’s life-giving power. Illness does not drive such a person to despair and to seek death, but makes him cry out in hope: “I kept my faith, even when I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted’” (Ps 116:10); “O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the pit” (Ps 30:2-3).

47. The mission of Jesus, with the many healings he performed, shows *God’s great concern even for man’s bodily life*. Jesus, as “the physician of the

– scribit sanctus Ambrosius – adventus Mariae et praesentiae dominicae beneficia declarantur... Vocem prior Elisabeth audivit, sed Ioannes prior gratiam sensit: illa naturae ordine audivit, iste exsultavit ratione mysterii; illa Mariae, iste Domini sensit adventum, femina mulieris, puer pueri; istae gratiam loquuntur, illi intus operantur pietatisque mysterium maternis adoriuntur profectibus duplicique miraculo prophetant matres spiritu parvulorum. Exsultavit infans, repleta mater est (Spiritu Sancto). Non prius mater repleta quam filius, sed cum filius esset repletus Spiritu Sancto, replevit et matrem” (S. AMBROSII *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, II, 22-23: CCL 14, 40-41).

**“Credidi, etiam cum locutus sum: «ego humiliatus sum nimis»” (Ps. 116 (115), 10): vita in senectute et in dolore**

46. Etiam quod attinet ad extrema vitae temporis momenta, praestolari non possumus a biblica revelatione manifestam designationem hodiernae quaestionis circa reverentiam erga aetate provectoros et aegrotos vel apertam condemnationem conatum ad violenter eorum anticipandam finem: in tali nimirum versamur culturali religiosaque condicione quae nihil afficitur eiusmodi sollicitationibus, et quae immo, quod attinet ad maiores natu agnoscit in eorum sapientia atque experientia, amplissimum cuiusque familiae et gentis divitiarum patrimonium, quod substitui non potest.

*Senectus dignitate honestatur atque veneratione insignitur* (Cfr. 2 Macch., 6, 23). Vir iustus non postulat ut sibi senectus eiusque pondus praecidatur; immo vero sic precatur: “Tu es exspectatio mea, Domine; Domine, spes mea a iuventute mea... Et usque in senectam et senium, Deus, ne derelinquas me, donec annuntiem brachium tuum generationi omni, quae ventura est” (Ps. 71 (70), 5, 18). Temporis messianici mira species proponitur sicut illa in qua “non erit ibi amplius... senex, qui non impleat dies suos” (Is. 65, 20).

At in senectute, quomodo suscipienda est inexorabilis vitae declinatio? *Qui habitus coram morte? Novit credens fidelis vitam suam in manibus Dei esse:* Domine, “tu es qui detines sortem meam” (Ps. 16 (15), 5), atque ab Eo etiam moriendi necessitatem accipit: “Hoc iudicium a Domino omni carni, et quid resistis beneplacito Altissimi?” (Sir. 41, 5-6). Sicut vitae ita et mortis non est arbiter homo; in vita sua sicut et in morte sua debet ille semetipsum omnino concredere “arbitrio Altissimi”, ipsius proposito amoris.

Etiam morbo correptus homo invitatur ut eandem colat fidem in Domino suamque renovet praecipuam fiduciam in eo qui “sanat omnes infirmitates” (Cfr. Ps. 103 (102); 3). Ubi quilibet salutis conspectus coram homine obserari videtur – eo usque ut eum impellat ad clamandum: “Dies mei sicut umbra declinaverunt, et ego sicut fenum arui” (Ps 102 (101), 12) –, tunc quoque pius homo inconcussa fide concitatur de vivificanti Dei potentia. Non in desperationem eum impellit morbus neque ad mortem appetendam, sed ad spe repletam precationem: “Credidi, etiam cum locutus sum: «Ego humiliatus sum nimis»” (Ps. 116 (115), 10); “Domine, Deus meus, clamavi ad te et sanasti me. Domine, eduxisti ab inferno animam meam, vivificasti me, ut non descenderem in lacum” (Ps 30 (29), 3-4).

47. Iesu opus multaeque ab Eo patratae sanationes declarant *quantopere Deus consulere velit etiam vitae*

<sup>36</sup> *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, II, 22-23: CCL, 14, 40-41.



body and of the spirit”,<sup>37</sup> was sent by the Father to proclaim the good news to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted (cf. *Lk* 4:18; *Is* 61:1). Later, when he sends his disciples into the world, he gives them a mission, a mission in which healing the sick goes hand in hand with the proclamation of the Gospel: “And preach as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (*Mt* 10:7-8; cf. *Mk* 6:13; 16:18).

Certainly *the life of the body in its earthly state is not an absolute good* for the believer, especially as he may be asked to give up his life for a greater good. As Jesus says: “Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (*Mk* 8:35). The New Testament gives many different examples of this. Jesus does not hesitate to sacrifice himself and he freely makes of his life an offering to the Father (cf. *Jn* 10:17) and to those who belong to him (cf. *Jn* 10:15). The death of John the Baptist, precursor of the Saviour, also testifies that earthly existence is not an absolute good; what is more important is remaining faithful to the word of the Lord even at the risk of one’s life (cf. *Mk* 6:17-29). Stephen, losing his earthly life because of his faithful witness to the Lord’s Resurrection, follows in the Master’s footsteps and meets those who are stoning him with words of forgiveness (cf. *Acts* 7:59-60), thus becoming the first of a countless host of martyrs whom the Church has venerated since the very beginning.

No one, however, can arbitrarily choose whether to live or die; the absolute master of such a decision is the Creator alone, in whom “we live and move and have our being” (*Acts* 17:28).

“All who hold her fast will live” (*Bar* 4:1): *from the law of Sinai to the gift of the Spirit*

**48.** Life is indelibly marked by *a truth of its own*. By accepting God’s gift, man is obliged to *maintain life in this truth* which is essential to it. To detach oneself from this truth is to condemn oneself to meaninglessness and unhappiness, and possibly to become a threat to the existence of others, since the barriers guaranteeing respect for life and the defence of life, in every circumstance, have been broken down.

*The truth of life is revealed by God’s commandment.* The word of the Lord shows concretely the course which life must follow if it is to respect its own truth and to preserve its own dignity. The protection of life is not only ensured by the specific commandment “You shall not kill” (*Ex* 20:13; *Dt* 5:17); *the entire Law of the Lord* serves to protect life, because it reveals that truth in which life finds its full meaning.

It is not surprising, therefore, that God’s Covenant with his people is so closely linked to the perspective of life, also in its bodily dimension. In that Covenant, God’s *commandment* is offered as *the path of life*: “I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of” (*Dt* 30:15-16). What is at stake is not only the land of Canaan and the existence of the people of Israel, but also the world of today and of the future, and the existence of all humanity. In fact, it is altogether impossible for life to remain authentic and complete once it is detached from the good; and the good, in its turn, is

*corporali hominis.* “Medicus carnis atque spiritus” (S. IGNATII ANTIOCHENI *Ad Ephesios*, 7, 2: *Patres apostolici*, ed. F.X. FUNK, II, 82), Iesus missus est a Patre qui nuntiaret laeta mansuetis, et mederetur contritis corde (Cfr. *Luc.* 4, 18; *Is.* 61, 1). Discipulos suos deinde inter homines dimittens, eis munus quoddam commendat, cuius vi aegrotorum sanatio coniungitur cum Evangelii nuntio: “Euntes autem praedicante dicentes: appropinquavit regnum caelorum. Infirmos curate, mortuos suscite, leprosos mundate, daemones eicite” (*Matth.* 10, 7-8; cfr. *Marc.* 6, 13; 16, 18).

Haud dubie, *corporis vita sua in terrestri condicione non est bonum absolutum* credenti homini, cum is rogari possit ut eandem ad superius bonum assequendum deserat; sicut Iesus dicit, “qui voluerit animam suam salvam facere, perdet eam; qui autem perdidit animam suam propter me et evangelium, salvam eam faciet” (*Marc.* 8, 35). *Variae sunt hac in re Novi Testamenti testificationes.* Iesus haud dubitat se ipsum devovere atque ultro animam suam offert Patri (Cfr. *Io.* 10, 17) et amicis suis (Cfr. *ibid.* 10, 15). Etiam mors Ioannis Baptistae, Domini praecursoris, terrestrem existentiam bonum absolutum non esse confirmat: gravior profecto est fidelitas erga Domini verbum etsi affert id vitae discrimen (Cfr. *Marc.* 6, 17-29). Stephanus quidem, dum temporali privatur vita quia resurrectionis Domini fidelis testis, Magistri sequitur vestigia atque remissionis verba pronuntiat coram lapidatoribus suis (Cfr. *Act.* 7, 59-60), iter interminato martyrum agmini aperiens ab Ecclesia inde ab initio excultorum.

Nullus homo tamen suo arbitratu decernere potest utrum vivere malit an mori: huius enim electionis unus absolutus arbiter est Creator, ille scilicet in quo “vivimus et movemur et sumus” (*Act.* 17, 28).

“Omnes, qui tenent eam, ad vitam” (*Bar.* 4, 1): **a sinai lege ad spiritus donum**

48. Secum fert vita in se penitus inscriptam *veritatem quandam suam*. Homini Dei donum accipienti adlaborandum est *ut vitam in hac veritate servet*, utpote quae ad ipsam eius essentiam pertineat. Cum se ipse ab ea separat, semet ipsum multat abiectione infelicitateque; quam ob rem aliorum existentiae fit ipse minatio, cum iam freni sint soluti observantiam vitae tutelamque quacumque sub condicione confirmantes.

*Vitae veritas ex Dei mandato revelatur.* Domini verba definite quidem significant quae ratio vitae sit sequenda ad ipsius observandam veritatem ac protegendam dignitatem. Non peculiare tantum mandatum illud “non occides” (*Ex.* 20, 13; *Deut.* 5, 17) vitae praesidium in tuto collocat: integra Domini Lex famulatur huic tutelae, quia ipsam aperit veritatem in qua vita plenam suam adipiscitur significationem.

Nihil ergo mirum, si Dei Foedus cum populo eius tam solide illicatur vitae aspectui etiam sub corporea ratione. In ipsa veluti *vitae via* monstratur *mandatum*: “Considera quod hodie proposui in conspectu tuo vitam et bonum, et e contrario mortem et malum. Si oboedieris mandatis Domini Dei tui, quae ego praecipio tibi hodie, ut diligas Dominum Deum tuum et ambules in viis eius et custodias mandata illius et praecipia atque iudicia, vives; ac multiplicabit te benedicetque tibi in terra, ad quam ingredieris possidendam” (*Deut.* 30, 15-16). Quaestio pertinet non ad terram Canaan tantum adque populi Israel salutem, sed etiam ad orbem terrarum aetatis nostrae futuri saeculi et ad totius generis humani conservationem. Etenim omnino fieri non potest ut authentica pleneque persistet vita dum ipsa a bono seiungitur; bonum vero, ex parte sua, ex

<sup>37</sup> SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 7, 2: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. Funk, II, 82.

essentially bound to the commandments of the Lord, that is, to the “law of life” (*Sir* 17:11). The good to be done is not added to life as a burden which weighs on it, since the very purpose of life is that good and only by doing it can life be built up.

It is thus *the Law as a whole* which fully protects human life. This explains why it is so hard to remain faithful to the commandment “You shall not kill” when the other “words of life” (cf. *Acts* 7:38) with which this commandment is bound up are not observed. Detached from this wider framework, the commandment is destined to become nothing more than an obligation imposed from without, and very soon we begin to look for its limits and try to find mitigating factors and exceptions. Only when people are open to the fullness of the truth about God, man and history will the words “You shall not kill” shine forth once more as a good for man in himself and in his relations with others. In such a perspective we can grasp the full truth of the passage of the Book of Deuteronomy which Jesus repeats in reply to the first temptation: “Man does not live by bread alone, but... by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (*Dt* 8:3; cf. *Mt* 4:4).

It is by listening to the word of the Lord that we are able to live in dignity and justice. It is by observing the Law of God that we are able to bring forth fruits of life and happiness: “All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die” (*Bar* 4:1).

49. The history of Israel shows how *difficult it is to remain faithful to the Law of life* which God has inscribed in human hearts and which he gave on Sinai to the people of the Covenant. When the people look for ways of living which ignore God’s plan, it is the Prophets in particular who forcefully remind them that the Lord alone is the authentic source of life. Thus Jeremiah writes: “My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (2:13). The Prophets point an accusing finger at those who show contempt for life and violate people’s rights: “They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth” (*Amos* 2:7); “they have filled this place with the blood of innocents” (*Jer* 19:4). Among them, the Prophet Ezekiel frequently condemns the city of Jerusalem, calling it “the bloody city” (22:2; 24:6, 9), the “city that sheds blood in her own midst” (22:3).

But while the Prophets condemn offences against life, they are concerned above all to awaken *hope for a new principle of life*, capable of bringing about a renewed relationship with God and with others, and of opening up new and extraordinary possibilities for understanding and carrying out all the demands inherent in the *Gospel of life*. This will only be possible thanks to the gift of God who purifies and renews: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you” (*Ezek* 36:25-26; cf. *Jer* 31:34). This “new heart” will make it possible to appreciate and achieve the deepest and most authentic meaning of life: namely, that of being *a gift which is fully realized in the giving of self*. This is the splendid message about the value of life which comes to us from the figure of the Servant of the Lord: “When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his life ... he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied” (*Is* 53:10, 11).

It is in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth that the Law is fulfilled and that a new heart is given through his Spirit. Jesus does not deny the Law but brings it to fulfilment (cf. *Mt* 5:17): the Law and the Prophets are summed up in the golden rule of mutual love (cf. *Mt* 7:12). In Jesus the Law becomes once and for all the “gospel”, the good news of God’s lordship over the world, which brings all life

ipsa rei natura postulat Domini mandata, id est “legem vitae” (*Sir* 17, 9). Bonum agendum non superponitur vitae tamquam pondus ei iniunctum, quia ipsa vitae ratio est prorsus bonum, atque vita tantum per bonum impletum aedificatur.

*Legis summa* hominis vitam plane servat. Hoc sane illustrat difficultatem exsequendi mandatum “non occides” quotiescumque cetera “verba viva” (*Act* 7, 38) non implentur, quibus hoc mandatum coniungitur. Extra hunc conspectum mandatum fit simplex officium externum, cuius fines cito explorabuntur, tenuationes vel exceptiones quaerentur. Tantum iis qui sese aperiunt ad veritatis plenitudinem de Deo, de homine deque historia, effatum “non occides” resplendet tamquam bonum pro homine, cunctis eius modis rationibusque prae oculis habitis. Hoc sub prospectu percipere possumus perfectionem veritatis quae continetur in sententia libri Deuteronomii, quae ab Iesu repetitur in responsione sub primae temptationis finem: “Non in solo pane vivat homo, sed in omni verbo, quod egreditur de ore Domini” (*Deut*. 8, 3; cfr. *Matth*. 4, 4).

Domini verbum auscultans secundum dignitatem iustitiamque vivit homo; Dei Legem colens vitae felicitatisque fructus ferre potest: “Omnes, qui tenent eam, ad vitam; qui autem relinquunt eam, moriuntur” (*Bar*. 4, 1).

49. Israelitica historia patefacit quam sit *difficile servare fidelitatem erga legem vitae*, quam in hominum corde Deus inscripsit quamque Foederis populo tradidit in Sina. Ante inquisitionem descriptionum vitae alienarum proposito Dei, Prophetiae nominatim conclamant firmiter Dominum unum esse verumque vitae fontem. Sic scribit Ieremias: “Duo enim mala fecit populus meus: me dereliquerunt fontem aquae vivae, ut foderent sibi cisternas, cisternas dissipatas, quae continere non valent aquas” (*Ier*. 2, 13). Prophetiae de crimine arguunt quotquot vitam contemnunt atque personarum iura frangunt: “Contriverunt super pulverem terrae capita pauperum” (*Am*. 2, 7); “Repleverunt locum istum sanguine innocentium” (*Ier*. 19, 4). Ex iis Ezechiel propheta saepius ignominiae nota designavit urbem Ierusalem eamque appellavit “civitatem sanguinum” (*Ez*. 22, 2; 24, 6, 9), “civitatem effundentem sanguinem in medio sui” (*Ibid*. 22, 3).

Dum vero crimina in vitam delata incusant, Prophetiae suscitare conantur in primis *novi principii expectationem*, quae renovatum instituat cum Deo et fratribus vinculum, ineditas eademque miras reserando facultates ad intellegendas atque exsequendas postulationes quae in Evangelio vitae continentur. Hoc fieri potest tantum per Dei donum, quod purificat et renovat: “Effundam super vos aquam mundam, et mundabimini ab omnibus inquinamentis vestris, et ab universis idolis vestris mundabo vos. Et dabo vobis cor novum et spiritum novum ponam in medio vestri” (*Ex*. 36, 25-26; cfr. *Ier*. 31, 31-34). Huius “cordis novi” virtute intellegere possumus et ad effectum deducere acriorem altioreque vitae significationem: eam scilicet esse *donum quod impletur in donatione*. Est mirus nuntius quem de vitae bono Servi Domini effigies nobis exhibet: “Si posuerit in piaculum animam suam, videbit semen longaevis... Propter laborem animae eius videbit lucem” (*Is*. 53, 10, 11).

Ipsa in Iesu Nazareni actione impletur Lex atque per ipsius Spiritum donatur cor novum. Etenim Iesus non solvit Legem, sed eam implet (Cfr. *Matth*. 5, 17): Lex et Prophetiae constringuntur aureo praeepto reciprocae caritatis (Cfr. *ibid*. 7, 12): in Eo Lex fit omnino “evangelium”, bonus nuntius dominationis Dei in mundum, qui cunctam reducit creaturam ad origines

back to its roots and its original purpose. This is the *New Law*, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (*Rom* 8:2), and its fundamental expression, following the example of the Lord who gave his life for his friends (cf. *Jn* 15:13), is *the gift of self love for one’s brothers and sisters*: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren” (1 *Jn* 3:14). This is the law of freedom, joy and blessedness.

“*They shall look on him whom they have pierced*” (*Jn* 19:37): the *Gospel of life is brought to fulfilment on the tree of the Cross*

**50.** At the end of this chapter, in which we have reflected on the Christian message about life, I would like to pause with each one of you to *contemplate the One who was pierced* and who draws all people to himself (cf. *Jn* 19:37; 12:32). Looking at “the spectacle” of the Cross (cf. *Lk* 23:48) we shall discover in this glorious tree the fulfilment and the complete revelation of the whole *Gospel of life*.

In the early afternoon of Good Friday, “there was darkness over the whole land ... while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two” (*Lk* 23:44, 45). This is the symbol of a great cosmic disturbance and a massive conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil, between life and death. Today we too find ourselves in the midst of a dramatic conflict between the “culture of death” and the “culture of life”. But the glory of the Cross is not overcome by this darkness; rather, it shines forth ever more radiantly and brightly, and is revealed as the centre, meaning and goal of all history and of every human life.

Jesus is nailed to the Cross and is lifted up from the earth. He experiences the moment of his greatest “powerlessness”, and his life seems completely delivered to the derision of his adversaries and into the hands of his executioners: he is mocked, jeered at, insulted (cf. *Mk* 15:24-36). And yet, precisely amid all this, having seen him breathe his last, the Roman centurion exclaims: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (*Mk* 15:39). It is thus, at the moment of his greatest weakness, that the Son of God is revealed for who he is: *on the Cross his glory is made manifest*.

By his death, Jesus sheds light on the meaning of the life and death of every human being. Before he dies, Jesus prays to the Father, asking forgiveness for his persecutors (cf. *Lk* 23:34), and to the criminal who asks him to remember him in his kingdom he replies: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (*Lk* 23:43). After his death “the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised” (*Mt* 27:52). The salvation wrought by Jesus is the bestowal of life and resurrection. Throughout his earthly life, Jesus had indeed bestowed salvation by healing and doing good to all (cf. *Acts* 10:38). But his miracles, healings and even his raising of the dead were signs of another salvation, a salvation which consists in the forgiveness of sins, that is, in setting man free from his greatest sickness and in raising him to the very life of God.

On the Cross, the miracle of the serpent lifted up by Moses in the desert (*Jn* 3:14-15; cf. *Num* 21:8-9) is renewed and brought to full and definitive perfection. Today too, by looking upon the one who was pierced, every person whose life is threatened encounters the sure hope of finding freedom and redemption.

**51.** But there is yet another particular event which moves me deeply when I consider it. “When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, ‘It is finished’; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (*Jn* 19:30). Afterwards, the Roman soldier “pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (*Jn* 19:34).

ipsius adque primas expectationes. Nova est Lex, “lex spiritus vitae in Christo Iesu” (*Rom.* 8, 2), cuius primaria declaratio, ad Domini imitationem qui vitam dat pro amicis suis (Cfr. *Io.* 15, 13), est *donum sui ipsius pro fratribus in caritate*: “Nos scimus quoniam transivimus de morte in vitam, quoniam diligimus fratres” (1 *Io.* 3, 14). Est libertatis lex, laetitiae et beatitudinis.

“**Videbunt in quem transixerunt**” (*Io.* 19, 37): **super crucis arborem evangelium vitae perficitur**

50. Ad finem adducentes caput hoc, in quo Christianum circa vitam nuntium agitavimus, cum unoquoque sane vestrum morari volumus ut *contemplerur Quem transixerunt* quique omnes ad se trahit (Cfr. *ibid.* 19, 37; 12, 32). Crucis “spectaculum” intuentes (Cfr. *Luc.* 23, 48) detegere possumus hac in gloriosa arbore expletionem plenamque totius *Evangelii vitae* revelationem.

Primis feriae sextae in Parasceve horis postmeridianis, “tenebrae factae sunt in universa terra... et obscuratus est sol, et velum templi scissum est medium” (*ibid.* 23, 44, 45). Cuiusdam magnae cosmicae perturbationis est signum, terribilis luctationis inter boni et mali vitae mortisque virtutes. Nos quoque versamur nunc in medio difficili luctamine inter “culturam mortis” ac “vitae culturam”. Eiusmodi caligine tamen Crucis splendor non supprimitur, immo clarius splendidiusque se ostentat veluti totius historiae et cuiusque humanae vitae centrum, sensum, finem.

Iesus cruci affigitur atque a terra exaltatur. Summae “impotentiae” suae tempus agit, et ipsius vita tradita prorsus videtur inimicorum suorum ludificationibus atque in manus interfectorum: ei illuditur, ipse deridetur, laeditur (Cfr. *Marc.* 15, 24-26). Attamen, haec omnia conspicatus “quia sic clamans expirasset”, ait Romanus centurio: “Vere homo hic Filius Dei erat” (*ibid.* 15, 39). Declaratur sic extremae infirmitatis tempore Filii Dei proprietates: *ipsius gloria proditur in Cruce!*

Morte sua Iesus cuiuslibet alterius hominis illuminat vitae mortisque significationem. Antequam moriatur Iesus precatur Patrem, remissionem pro suis persecutoribus invocans (Cfr. *Luc.* 23, 34), atque malefico, qui petit ut memoriam illius agat in regno suo, respondet: “Amen dico tibi: Hodie mecum eris in paradiso” (*ibid.* 23, 43). Post eius mortem “monumenta aperta sunt et multa corpora sanctorum, qui dormierant, surrexerunt” (*Matth.* 27, 52). Salus quam Iesus operatus est vitae et resurrectionis est donatio. In vita sua salutem largitus est Iesus etiam beneficiando et sanando omnes (Cfr. *Act.* 10, 38): miracula vero, sanationes ipsaeque a morte ad vitam revocationes alterius salutis erant signum, quae quidem e peccatorum remissione consistit, videlicet hominis liberatione ab infirmitate maxima, atque in eius promotione ad ipsam Dei vitam. Renovatur in cruce ac plena sua decretoriaque impletur perfectio serpentis portentum a Moysae sublatae in deserto (Cfr. *Io.* 3, 14-15). Hodie etiam, intuens in Eum quem transixerunt, quilibet homo, in cuius existentiam impendent minationes, in spem incidit certam inveniendi liberationem ac redemptionem.

51. Alius tamen quidam emergit definitus eventus, qui obtutum Nostrum captat Nostramque ardentem excitat considerationem. “Cum ergo accepisset acetum, Iesus dixit: Consummatum est! Et inclinato capite tradidit spiritum” (*ibid.* 19, 30). Miles autem Romanus “lancea latus eius aperuit, et continuo exivit sanguis et aqua” (*ibid.* 19, 34).

Everything has now reached its complete fulfilment. The “giving up” of the spirit describes Jesus’ death, a death like that of every other human being, but it also seems to allude to the “gift of the Spirit”, by which Jesus ransoms us from death and opens before us a new life.

It is the very life of God which is now shared with man. It is the life which through the Sacraments of the Church--symbolized by the blood and water flowing from Christ’s side--is continually given to God’s children, making them the people of the New Covenant. *From the Cross, the source of life, the “people of life” is born and increases.*

The contemplation of the Cross thus brings us to the very heart of all that has taken place. Jesus, who upon entering into the world said: “I have come, O God, to do your will” (cf. *Heb* 10:9), made himself obedient to the Father in everything and, “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (*Jn* 13:1), giving himself completely for them.

He who had come “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Mk* 10:45), attains on the Cross the heights of love: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (*Jn* 15:13). And he died for us while we were yet sinners (cf. *Rom* 5:8).

In this way Jesus proclaims that *life finds its centre, its meaning and its fulfilment when it is given up.*

At this point our meditation becomes praise and thanksgiving, and at the same time urges us to imitate Christ and follow in his footsteps (cf. *1 Pt* 2:21).

We too are called to give our lives for our brothers and sisters, and thus to realize in the fullness of truth the meaning and destiny of our existence.

We shall be able to do this because you, O Lord, have given us the example and have bestowed on us the power of your Spirit. We shall be able to do this if every day, with you and like you, we are obedient to the Father and do his will.

Grant, therefore, that we may listen with open and generous hearts to every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. Thus we shall learn not only to obey the commandment not to kill human life, but also to revere life, to love it and to foster it.

### Chapter III

#### *You shall not kill*

#### God’s Holy Law

*“If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17): Gospel and commandment*

52. “And behold, one came up to him, saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?’” (*Mt* 19:6). Jesus replied, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (*Mt* 19:17). The Teacher is speaking about eternal life, that is, a sharing in the life of God himself. This life is attained through the observance of the Lord’s commandments, including the commandment “You shall not kill”. This is the first precept from the Decalogue which Jesus quotes to the young man who asks him what commandments he should observe: ‘Jesus said, ‘You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal...’” (*Mt* 19:18).

*God’s commandment is never detached from his love: it is always a gift meant for man’s growth and joy. As such, it represents an essential and indispensable aspect of the Gospel, actually becoming “gospel” itself: joyful good news. The Gospel of life is both a great gift of God and an exacting task for humanity. It gives rise to amazement and gratitude in the person graced with freedom, and it*

*lam omnia ad perfectam pervenerant impletionem. “Tradere spiritum” designat Iesu mortem similem cuiuslibet alterius hominis, simulque indicare videtur etiam “Spiritus donum”, quo is nos a morte redimit nosque ad novam aperit vitam.*

*Ipsius Dei vitae particeps fit homo. Agitur de vita quae, per Ecclesiae sacramenta – quorum imagines sunt sanguis et aqua a Christi latere scaturientes – continenter Dei filiis tribuitur, qui hoc modo Novi Foederis populus constituuntur. “Populus vitae” oritur atque effunditur a Cruce, quae est vitae fons.*

*Crucis contemplatio ad primas sic nos adducit origines eorum quae e venerunt. Ingrediens in mundum dixit Iesus: “Ecce venio, ut faciam voluntatem tuam” (Cfr. *Hebr.* 10, 9), Patri in omnibus factus est oboediens, atque “cum dilexisset suos qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos” (*Io.* 13, 1), pro illis totum se ipsum tradens.*

*Qui “non venit, ut ministraretur ei, sed ut ministraret et daret animam suam redemptionem pro multis” (*Marc.* 10, 45), amoris fastigium in Cruce adsequitur. “Maiorem hac dilectionem nemo habet, ut animam suam quis ponat pro amicis suis” (*Io.* 15, 133). Mortuus est pro nobis, cum adhuc peccatores essemus (Cfr. *Rom.* 15, 8).*

*Hac ratione renuntiat ille vitam suam consequi centrum, suam significationem suamque plenitudinem in sui ipsius donatione.*

*Iam vero meditatio fit laus et gratiarum actio, et eodem tempore nos concitat ut Iesum imitemur eiusque sequamur vestigia (Cfr. *1 Petr.* 2, 21).*

*Etiam nos invitamur ad vitam pro fratribus tradendam, complentes hoc modo in veritatis plenitudine nostrae existentiae sensum atque sortem.*

*Hoc facere possumus quia Tu, Domine, exemplum dedisti nobis pariterque nobis largitus es Spiritus tui robur. Hoc facere poterimus si cotidie, Tecum et sicut Tu, oboediamus Patri eiusque implebimus voluntatem.*

*Nobis ideo concede ut corde docili et magno animo audiamus omne verbum quod ex ore Dei procedit: hoc modo didicerimus non solum “non occidere” vitam hominis, sed eam insuper colere, amare, provehere.*

### Caput III

#### NON HOMICIDIUM FACIES

#### Dei lex sacra

**“Si autem vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata” (*Matth.* 19, 17): evangelium et mandatum**

52. “Et ecce unus accedens ait illi: «Magister, quid boni faciam, ut habeam vitam aeternam?»” (*Ibid.* 19, 16). Cui respondit Iesus: “Si vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata” (*Ibid.* 19, 17). De vita loquitur Magister aeterna, sive de ipsius vitae Dei communicatione. Quam quidem ad vitam acceditur Domini custodiendis praeceptis, inter quae et illud est: “Non homicidium facies”. Hoc primum Decalogi praeceptum adolescenti illi commemoravit Iesus, percontanti scilicet quae sibi necesse esset implere mandata: “Iesus autem dixit: «Non homicidium facies; non adulterabis, non facies furtum...»” (*Ibid.* 19, 18).

*Numquam ab eius amore seiungitur mandatum Dei: ad hominis incrementum gaudiumque semper est donum. Efficit tale munus partem pernecessariam ac rationem indissolubilem Evangelii, immo vero sese id exhibet veluti “eu-angelion” seu bonam laetamque nuntiationem. Magnum pariter Dei est donum *Evangelium vitae* simulque obligans hominem officium.*

asks to be welcomed, preserved and esteemed, with a deep sense of responsibility. In giving life to man, God *demand*s that he love, respect and promote life. *The gift thus becomes a commandment, and the commandment is itself a gift.*

Man, as the living image of God, is willed by his Creator to be ruler and lord. Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes that “God made man capable of carrying out his role as king of the earth ... Man was created in the image of the One who governs the universe. Everything demonstrates that from the beginning man’s nature was marked by royalty... Man is a king. Created to exercise dominion over the world, he was given a likeness to the king of the universe; he is the living image who participates by his dignity in the perfection of the divine archetype”.<sup>38</sup> Called to be fruitful and multiply, to subdue the earth and to exercise dominion over other lesser creatures (cf. *Gen* 1:28), man is ruler and lord not only over things but especially over himself,<sup>39</sup> and in a certain sense, over the life which he has received and which he is able to transmit through procreation, carried out with love and respect for God’s plan. Man’s *lordship* however is not absolute, but *ministerial*: it is a real reflection of the unique and infinite lordship of God. Hence man must exercise it with *wisdom and love*, sharing in the boundless wisdom and love of God. And this comes about through obedience to God’s holy Law: a free and joyful obedience (cf. *Ps* 119), born of and fostered by an awareness that the precepts of the Lord are a gift of grace entrusted to man always and solely for his good, for the preservation of his personal dignity and the pursuit of his happiness.

With regard to things, but even more with regard to life, man is not the absolute master and final judge, but rather--and this is where his incomparable greatness lies--he is the “minister of God’s plan”.<sup>40</sup>

Life is entrusted to man as a treasure which must not be squandered, as a talent which must be used well. Man must render an account of it to his Master (cf. *Mt* 25:14-30; *Lk* 19:12-27).

“From man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting for human life” (*Gen* 9:5): *human life is sacred and inviolable*

53. “Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves ‘the creative action of God’, and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being”.<sup>41</sup> With these words the Instruction *Donum Vitae* sets forth the central content of God’s revelation on the sacredness and inviolability of human life.

Admirationem in persona libera gignit et poscit ut auscultetur, adservetur atque acri officiorum cuiusque conscientia aestimetur: vitam ipsi tribuens, *postulat* Deus ab homine ut illum diligat vereatur provehat. Hac *via transit donum in mandatum mandatumque ipsum est donum.*

Viventis Dei imago destinatur homo a suo Conditore velut rex et dominus. Scribit sanctus Gregorius Nyssenus: “Praestantissimus ille rerum artifex naturam nostram condidit velut instrumentum quoddam regno administrando idoneum... Praeterea hominem naturae divinae, cuius omnia parent imperio, imaginem esse, nihil esse putandum est aliud, quam regium ei decus in ipsa creatione tributum esse... Rex appellatur; ita et hominis natura sic condita ut reliquorum creatorum domina esset propter eam, qua regem universitatis huius refert, similitudinem, imago quasi viva erecta est, cum qua et dignitas et nomen archetypi communicaretur” (S. GREGORII NYSSENI *De hominis opificio*, 4: PG 44, 136). Vocatus olim ut ferax esset ac multiplicaretur, ut terram subiceret rebusque infra hominem dominaretur (Cfr. *Gen.* 1, 28), homo rex quidem exstat et non tantum orbis dominus, verum in primisque sui ipsius (Cfr. S. IOANNIS DAMASCENI *De fide orthodoxa*, 2, 12: PG 94, 920; locus laudatur in S. THOMAE *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae. Prol.), ac quodam modo vitae illius quae ei est donata quamque traducere potest genitali actu ex amore divinique consilii observatione impleto. Eius tamen haud est *dominatio* absoluta sed *ministerialis*, utpote quae unicum vere referat et infinitum Dei dominatum. Quocirca exsequatur eam oportet homo *sapienter et amanter*, dum sapientiam communicat amoremque Dei immensum. Id quod denique fit secundum oboedientiam sacrae ipsius Legi: quae libera quidem oboedientia est ac laeta (Cfr. *Ps.* 119 (118)), nata et nutrita ex conscientia qua intellegitur Domini mandata donum esse gratiae homini semper et in eius dumtaxat commoditatem concredata, in dignitatis cuiusque tutelam necnon felicitatis prosecutionem. Quem ad modum ceteris coram rebus, multo etiam magis homo coram vita ipsa non interminatus est dominus nec arbiter indisputabilis; at praebet sese “ministrum consilii a Creatore initi” (PAULI VI *Humanae Vitae*, 13), unde incomparabilis eius existit praestantia.

Perinde ac thesaurus homini commendatur vita non amittendus, velut talentum argenti fructuose collocandum. De ea namque Domino ratio est homini reddenda (Cfr. *Matth.* 25, 14-30; *Luc.* 19, 12-27).

“De manu viri fratris eius requiram animam hominis” (*Gen.* 9, 5): *sacra est hominis vita atque inviolabilis*

53. “Humana vita pro re sacra habenda est quippe quae inde a suo exordio Creatoris Dei actionem postulet ac semper peculiari necessitudine cum Creatore, unico fine suo, perstet conexa. Solus Deus vitae Dominus est ab exordio usque ad exitum: nemo, in nullis rerum adiunctis, sibi vindicare potest ius mortem humanae creaturae innocenti directe afferendi” (CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Donum Vitae*, Introd., 5; cfr. *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, n. 2258). Praecipuam iis vocibus doctrinam revelationis divinae proponit Instructio “Donum Vitae” de sacra vitae humanae inviolabilitate indole.

<sup>38</sup> *De Hominis Opificio*, 4: PG 44, 136.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. SAINT JOHN DAMASCENE, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 2, 12: PG 94, 920.922, quoted in SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Prologue.

<sup>40</sup> PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (25 July 1968), 13: AAS 60 (1968), 489.

<sup>41</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), Introduction, No. 5: AAS 80 (1988), 76-77; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2258.

*Sacred Scripture* in fact presents the precept “You shall not kill” as a divine commandment (*Ex* 20:13; *Dt* 5:17). As I have already emphasized, this commandment is found in the Decalogue, at the heart of the Covenant which the Lord makes with his chosen people; but it was already contained in the original covenant between God and humanity after the purifying punishment of the Flood, caused by the spread of sin and violence (cf. *Gen* 9:5-6).

God proclaims that he is absolute Lord of the life of man, who is formed in his image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26-28). Human life is thus given a sacred and inviolable character, which reflects the inviolability of the Creator himself. Precisely for this reason God will severely judge every violation of the commandment “You shall not kill”, the commandment which is at the basis of all life together in society. He is the “*goel*”, the defender of the innocent (cf. *Gen* 4:9-15; *Is* 41:14; *Jer* 50:34; *Ps* 19:14). God thus shows that he does not delight in the death of the living (cf. *Wis* 1:13). Only Satan can delight therein: for through his envy death entered the world (cf. *Wis* 2:24). He who is “a murderer from the beginning”, is also “a liar and the father of lies” (*Jn* 8:44). By deceiving man he leads him to projects of sin and death, making them appear as goals and fruits of life.

54. As explicitly formulated, the precept “You shall not kill” is strongly negative: it indicates the extreme limit which can never be exceeded. Implicitly, however, it encourages a positive attitude of absolute respect for life; it leads to the promotion of life and to progress along the way of a love which gives, receives and serves. The people of the Covenant, although slowly and with some contradictions, progressively matured in this way of thinking, and thus prepared for the great proclamation of Jesus that the commandment to love one’s neighbour is like the commandment to love God; “on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets” (cf. *Mt* 22:36-40). Saint Paul emphasizes that “the commandment... you shall not kill ... and any other commandment, are summed up in this phrase: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” (*Rom* 13:9; cf. *Gal* 5:14). Taken up and brought to fulfilment in the New Law, the commandment “You shall not kill” stands as an indispensable condition for being able “to enter life” (cf. *Mt* 19:16-19). In this same perspective, the words of the Apostle John have a categorical ring: “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (*1 Jn* 3:15).

From the beginning, the *living Tradition of the Church*--as shown by the *Didache*, the most ancient non-biblical Christian writing--categorically repeated the commandment “You shall not kill”: “There are two ways, a way of life and a way of death; there is a great difference between them... In accordance with the precept of the teaching: you shall not kill... you shall not put a child to death by abortion nor kill it once it is born ... The way of death is this: ... they show no compassion for the poor, they do not suffer with the suffering, they do not acknowledge their Creator, they kill their children and by abortion cause God’s creatures to perish; they drive away the needy, oppress the suffering, they are advocates of the rich and unjust judges of the poor; they are filled with every sin. May you be able to stay ever apart, O children, from all these sins!”<sup>42</sup>

As time passed, the Church’s Tradition has always consistently taught the absolute and unchanging value of the commandment “You shall not kill”. It is a

Praeceptum enim homini “non occides” tradunt *Litterae Sacrae* veluti mandatum divinum (*Ex* 20, 13; *Deut* 5, 17). Illud profecto – haud secus ac superius iam inculcavimus – inest in Decalogo ipso, in intima nempe Foederis parte quod cum electo suo populo pepigit Dominus; verum iam ante in pristino reperiebatur Dei Foedere cum hominibus inito post purificatoriam diluvii castigationem, quam latius diffusa scelera ac violentiae evocaverant (Cfr. *Gen* 9, 5-6).

Vitae hominis Dominus sese principem esse Deus adseverat, quem suam ad imaginem similitudinemque finxit (Cfr. *ibid.* 1, 26-28). Sacram ideo atque inviolabilem indolem prae se vita fert humana, in qua tamquam vocis imago repetitur ipsa Conditoris inviolabilitas. Hanc ipsam ob causam severum se Deus iudicem praestabit omnis violationis mandati: “non occides”, quod in tota subest sociali hominum consortione. Is namque “goel” existit, id est innocenti defensor (Cfr. *ibid.* 4, 9.15; *Is* 41, 14; *Ier* 50, 34; *Ps* 19 (18), 15). Hoc igitur etiam modo non gaudere se testatur Deus de perditione vivorum (Cfr. *Sap.* 1, 13). Solus inde laetari potest Satanas: ipsius namque ex invidia orbem est mors ingressa (Cfr. *ibid.* 2, 24); qui “homicida fuit ab initio”, aequabiliter “mendax est et pater eius” (*Io* 8, 44): deceptum semel hominem ad peccatum deinceps perducit mortemque, quae ei quaedam metae ostendantur vitaeque fructus.

54. Prae se fert explicitè vim valde negantem mandatum “non homicidium facies”; litem enim indicat extremum quem nefas transgredi est. Implicitè tamen ad mentem omnino affirmantem perducit, quod spectat ad plenam vitae observationem, dum suadet ut eam quis promoveat et in via procedat amoris qui se donat, qui alios accipit iisque servit. Populus quoque Foederis, quamvis tarditate quadam et inconstantia, progredientem maturitatem expertus est hanc ad sententiam, cum ad magnam sese compararet lesu Christi nuntiationem: proximi scilicet amorem mandatum simile esse amoris Dei: “In his duobus mandatis universa Lex pendet et Prophetarum” (Cfr. *Matth.* 22, 36-40). “Non occides... et si quod est aliud mandatum – ait sanctus Paulus – in hoc verbo recapitulatur: «Diliges proximum tuum tamquam teipsum»” (*Rom.* 19, 3; cfr. *Gal.* 5, 14). Suscepta autem plenumque ad effectum deducta in Foedere Novo norma: “non occides” uti pernecessaria condicio remanet ut quis “ad vitam ingrediatur” (Cfr. *Matth.* 19, 16-19). Secundum eandem hanc mentem, imperiosius quiddam sonat apostoli Ioannis vox: “Omnis, qui odit fratrem suum, homicida est, et scitis quoniam omnis homicida non habet vitam aeternam in semetipso manentem” (*1 Io.* 3, 15).

Suis primis ab exordiis *viva Ecclesiae Traditio* – perinde ac *Didachè*, vetustissimum christianum extra Biblia scriptum, testificatur – iterat graviter mandatum “non occides”: “Duae viae sunt, altera vitae et altera mortis, sed multum interest inter duas vias... Secundum autem mandatum doctrinae: Non occides... non interficies fetum in abortione neque interimes infantem natum... Mortis vero via haec est: non miserentur inopis, non laborant de afflicto, non cognoscentes Creatorem suum, liberorum interemptores, in abortione corrumpentes creaturam Dei, aversantes egenum, opprimentes afflictum, divitum advocati, pauperum iniqui iudices, omnibus peccatis inquinati: liberemini, filii, ab his omnibus” (*Didachè*, I, 1: II, 1-2; V, 1-3: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. FUNK, I, 2-3. 6-9. 14-17; cfr. PSEUDO-BARNABAE *Epistula*, XIX, 5, *loc. cit.*, 90-93).

*Ecclesiae Traditio* dein progrediens per aetates unanimi consensu absolutam vim perpetuamque docuit illius praecepti: “Non homicidium facies”. Constat porro

<sup>42</sup> *Didache*, I, 1; II, 1-2; V, 1 and 3: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. Funk, I, 2-3, 6-9, 14-17; cf. *Letter of Pseudo-Barnabas*, XIX, 5: *loc. cit.*, 90-93.

known fact that in the first centuries, murder was put among the three most serious sins--along with apostasy and adultery--and required a particularly heavy and lengthy public penance before the repentant murderer could be granted forgiveness and readmission to the ecclesial community.

**55.** This should not cause surprise: to kill a human being, in whom the image of God is present, is a particularly serious sin. *Only God is the master of life!* Yet from the beginning, faced with the many and often tragic cases which occur in the life of individuals and society, Christian reflection has sought a fuller and deeper understanding of what God's commandment prohibits and prescribes.<sup>43</sup> There are in fact situations in which values proposed by God's Law seem to involve a genuine paradox. This happens for example in the case of *legitimate defence*, in which the right to protect one's own life and the duty not to harm someone else's life are difficult to reconcile in practice. Certainly, the intrinsic value of life and the duty to love oneself no less than others are the basis of a *true right to self-defence*. The demanding commandment of love of neighbour, set forth in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus, itself presupposes love of oneself as the basis of comparison: "You shall love your neighbour *as yourself*" (*Mk 12:31*). Consequently, no one can renounce the right to self-defence out of lack of love for life or for self. This can only be done in virtue of a heroic love which deepens and transfigures the love of self into a radical self-offering, according to the spirit of the Gospel Beatitudes (cf. *Mt 5:38-40*). The sublime example of this self-offering is the Lord Jesus himself.

Moreover, "legitimate defence can be not only a right but a grave duty for someone responsible for another's life, the common good of the family or of the State".<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately it happens that the need to render the aggressor incapable of causing harm sometimes involves taking his life. In this case, the fatal outcome is attributable to the aggressor whose action brought it about, even though he may not be morally responsible because of a lack of the use of reason.<sup>45</sup>

**56.** This is the context in which to place the problem of the *death penalty*. On this matter there is a growing tendency, both in the Church and in civil society, to demand that it be applied in a very limited way or even that it be abolished completely. The problem must be viewed in the context of a system of penal justice ever more in line with human dignity and thus, in the end, with God's plan for man and society. The primary purpose of the punishment which society inflicts is "to redress the disorder caused by the offence".<sup>46</sup> Public authority must redress the violation of personal and social rights by imposing on the offender an adequate punishment for the crime, as a condition for the offender to regain the exercise of his or her freedom. In this way authority also fulfils the purpose of defending public order and ensuring people's safety, while at the same time offering the offender an incentive and help to change his or her behaviour and be rehabilitated.<sup>47</sup>

It is clear that, for these purposes to be achieved, *the nature and extent of the*

primis saeculis gravissima inter flagitia esse recensitum homicidium una cum apostasia et adulterio, publicamque paenitentiam postulatam esse valde onerosam ac longam prius quam paenitenti homicidae venia concederetur et accessio denuo in ecclesiam communionem.

55. Gignere stuporem non debet haec res: occidere enim hominem, in quo nempe Dei adsit imago, insignis gravitatis est facinus. *Vitae solus Deus est dominus!* Semper nihilo minus, datis multiplicibus crebroque acerbis casibus quos singulorum hominum ipsiusque societatis vita adfert, christifideles rem ponderantes adsequi studuerunt pleniorum et altiorum intellectum eorum quae Dei mandatum prohibet praescribitque (Cfr. *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, nn. 2263-2269; cfr. etiam *Catechismus Concilii Tridentini*, III, 327-332). Adiuncta enim sunt, in quibus bona per Dei Legem exposita inter se contendere videantur, vel etiam palam pugnare. Exsistit, verbi causa, *defensio legitima*, ubi propriae vitae tutandae ius officiumque non laedendae alterius difficulter revera simul componi posse videntur. Certissime intrinsecum vitae bonum atque officium erga se sicut et in alios gerendi amoris, verum ius sui ipsius defendendi constituunt. Idem dein imperiosum amoris mandatum erga alios, in Vetere Testamento pronuntiatum et a lesu Christo corroboratum, pro concessio sumit quando adversus se ipsum caritatem veluti comparationis terminum: "Diliges proximum tuum *tamquam teipsum*" (*Marc. 12, 31*). Ius ideo sui tutandi repudiare nemo potest ex exiguo vitae suive ipsius amore, verum ob heroicum dumtaxat amorem, qui eundem sui amorem ampliat ac transformat secundum evangelicarum beatitudinum adfectionem (Cfr. *Matth. 5, 38-48*) in extremo sese offerendi proposito cuius summum est ipse Dominus Iesus exemplar.

Aliunde vero "legitima defensio potest esse non solum ius, sed grave officium ei, qui vitam aliorum, familiae et communitatis civilis bonum commune praestare debet" (*Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, n.2265). Infeliciter autem evenit ut cum prohiberi necesse est adgredientem ne noceat nonnumquam sit ei inferenda mors. Eo in casu mortis exitus adsignandus est eidem ipsi reo, qui sua vi se obiecerit morti, etiamsi non sit moraliter culpabilis ob impeditum rationis usum (S. THOMAE *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 64, a. 7; S. ALPHONSI MARIAE DE LIGUORI *Theologia Moralitatis*, I, III, tr. 4, c. 1, dub. 3).

56. Hoc in rerum prospectu de *poena capitali* oritur quaestio, super qua simul in Ecclesia simul in civili societate invalescit eorum opinatio qui circumscribi valde eius usum velint quin etiam funditus tolli. Ponderanda quaestio est ad talis iustitiae poenalis regulam, quae dignitati hominis magis usque respondeat ideoque, tandem, Dei consilio de homine ac societate. Re quidem vera, quam societas infligit "poena eo imprimis spectat, ut inordinato culpa illato occurratur" (*Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, n. 2266). Ultricem publica auctoritas se gerere debet violatorum tum in singulis tum in societate iurium per iniunctam reo congruam culpae expiationem, ut repetere ei liceat suae libertatis usum. Id ita consequitur quoque auctoritas ut publicus ordo singulorumque muniatur tutela, dum incitamentum reis subditur adiumentumque ut corrigant sese ac redimant (*Ibid.*).

Patet tamen omnia ut haec impetrentur proposita,

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2263-2269; cf. also *Catechism of the Council of Trent III, ## 327-332*.

<sup>44</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2265.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 64, a. 7; SAINT ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI, *Theologia Moralitatis*, I, III, tr. 4, c. 1, dub. 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2266.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibid.*



*punishment* must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent.

In any event, the principle set forth in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* remains valid: “If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority must limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person”.<sup>48</sup>

57. If such great care must be taken to respect every life, even that of criminals and unjust aggressors, the commandment “You shall not kill” has absolute value when it refers to the *innocent person*. And all the more so in the case of weak and defenceless human beings, who find their ultimate defence against the arrogance and caprice of others only in the absolute binding force of God’s commandment.

In effect, the absolute inviolability of innocent human life is a moral truth clearly taught by Sacred Scripture, constantly upheld in the Church’s Tradition and consistently proposed by her Magisterium. This consistent teaching is the evident result of that “supernatural sense of the faith” which, inspired and sustained by the Holy Spirit, safeguards the People of God from error when “it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals”.<sup>49</sup>

Faced with the progressive weakening in individual consciences and in society of the sense of the absolute and grave moral illicitness of the direct taking of all innocent human life, especially at its beginning and at its end, *the Church’s Magisterium* has spoken out with increasing frequency in defence of the sacredness and inviolability of human life. The Papal Magisterium, particularly insistent in this regard, has always been seconded by that of the Bishops, with numerous and comprehensive doctrinal and pastoral documents issued either by Episcopal Conferences or by individual Bishops. The Second Vatican Council also addressed the matter forcefully, in a brief but incisive passage.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, 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*. This doctrine, based upon that unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. *Rom* 2:14-15), is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.<sup>51</sup>

The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end. It is in fact a grave act of disobedience to the moral law, and indeed to God himself, the author and guarantor of that law; it contradicts the fundamental virtues of justice and charity. “Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an

*modum et genus poenae* diligenter omnino aestimanda esse decernendaque neque ad extinguendum extremo consilio reum descendere licere nisi absoluta instante necessitate, cum videlicet aliter prorsus non potest defendi societas. Atqui hodie, propter convenientiorem institutionis poenalis temperationem, admodum raro huius modi intercidunt casus, si qui omnino iam reapse accidunt.

Quidquid id est, valet etiamnum in novo *Catholicae Ecclesiae Catechismo* significatum principium, ex quo: “Si instrumenta incruenta sufficiunt ad vitas humanas defendendas ab aggressore et ad ordinem publicum tuendum simulque personarum securitatem, auctoritas his utatur instrumentis, utpote quae melius respondeant concretis boni communis condicionibus et sint dignitati personae humanae magis consentanea” (*Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, 2267).

57. Si vero tanta danda est opera vitae omni reverendae, etiam cuiusque sontis et iniuste adgredientis, virtutem prae se fert absolutam mandatum: “non occides”, quotiens ad *innocentem hominem* refertur. Quod magis etiam valet, si de imbecillo et indefenso homine est sermo, cui postrema reponitur defensio contra alienum arbitratum ac dominatum in sola vi infinita praecepti Dei.

Etenim humanae innocentis vitae plena inviolabilitas moralem continet veritatem luculenter in sacris Litteris traditam, repetitam constanter in Ecclesiae Traditione atque eius Magisterio unanimiter propositam. Quae nempe consensio manifestus est fructus illius “supernaturalis sensus fidei” qui, a Spiritu Sancto excitatus ac sustentatus, Dei Populum ab errore arceat, cum “universalem suum consensum de rebus fidei et morum exhibet” (*Lumen Gentium*, 12).

Coram igitur conspectu progredientis imminutionis intra conscientias hominum et societatem sensuum absolutae et gravis inhonestatis moralis, quam secum directa omnis innocentis humanae vitae extinctio importat, praesertim sub eiusdem principium ac finem, *Ecclesiae Magisterium* suas geminavit pro sacra inviolabilitate humanae vitae natura tuenda intercessionem. Cui pontificum Romanorum Magisterio, valde quidem instanti, semper adiunctum est etiam episcoporum magisterium per complura et copiosa documenta doctrinalia ac pastoralia quae tum Episcopales Conferentiae ediderunt tum singuli Episcopi. Neque vehemens defuit suaque brevitate efficax Concilii Vaticani II edictum (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 27).

Quapropter Nos auctoritate usi Petro eiusque Successoribus a Christo collata, coniuncti cum Ecclesiae catholicae Episcopis, *confirmamus directam voluntariamque hominis innocentis interfecionem graviter inhonestam esse semper*. Doctrina haec, cuius innituntur radices illa in non scripta lege quam, praeunte rationis lumine, quivis homo suo reperit in animo (Cfr. *Rom*. 2, 14-15), inculcatur denuo Sacris in Litteris, Ecclesiae Traditione commendatur atque ordinario et universali Magisterio explanatur (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 25).

Deliberatum consilium spoliandi innocuum hominem sua vita semper morali iudicio malum est, nec potest licitum haberi umquam nec uti finis neque ut via ad bonum propositum. Gravis namque inobedientia est morali legi, immo ipsi Deo eius auctori ac vindici; primariae praeterea virtuti iustitiae contradicit et caritatis. “Declarandum est neminem nihilque ullo modo sincere posse ut vivens humanum innocens

<sup>48</sup> No. 2267.

<sup>49</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying. Furthermore, no one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care, nor can he or she consent to it, either explicitly or implicitly. Nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such an action”.<sup>52</sup>

As far as the right to life is concerned, every innocent human being is absolutely equal to all others. This equality is the basis of all authentic social relationships which, to be truly such, can only be founded on truth and justice, recognizing and protecting every man and woman as a person and not as an object to be used. Before the moral norm which prohibits the direct taking of the life of an innocent human being “there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the ‘poorest of the poor’ on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal”.<sup>53</sup>

“Your eyes beheld my unformed substance” (Ps 139:16): the unspeakable crime of abortion

**58.** Among all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable. The Second Vatican Council defines abortion, together with infanticide, as an “unspeakable crime”.<sup>54</sup>

But today, in many people’s consciences, the perception of its gravity has become progressively obscured. The acceptance of abortion in the popular mind, in behaviour and even in law itself, is a telling sign of an extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense, which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, even when the fundamental right to life is at stake. Given such a grave situation, we need now more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to *call things by their proper name*, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception. In this regard the reproach of the Prophet is extremely straightforward: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Is 5:20). Especially in the case of abortion there is a widespread use of ambiguous terminology, such as “interruption of pregnancy”, which tends to hide abortion’s true nature and to attenuate its seriousness in public opinion. Perhaps this linguistic phenomenon is itself a symptom of an uneasiness of conscience. But no word has the power to change the reality of things: procured abortion is *the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth*.

The moral gravity of procured abortion is apparent in all its truth if we recognize that we are dealing with murder and, in particular, when we consider the specific elements involved. The one eliminated is a human being at the very beginning of life. No one more absolutely *innocent* could be imagined. In no way could this human being ever be considered an aggressor, much less an unjust aggressor! He or she is *weak*, defenceless, even to the point of lacking that minimal form of defence consisting in the poignant power of a newborn baby’s cries and tears. The unborn child is *totally entrusted* to the protection and

occidatur, sive sit fetus vel embryo, sive infans vel adultus, sive senex, sive morbo insanabili affectus, sive in mortis agone constitutus. Praeterea nemini licet mortiferam hanc actionem petere sibi aut alii, qui sit ipsius responsalitati commissus, immo in eadem ne consentire quidem potest explicite vel implicite. Nec auctoritas ulla potest eam legitime iniungere vel permittere” (CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Iura et Bona*).

Hoc in vitae iure omnis innocens homo ceteris cunctis est omnino par. Illa aequalitas fundamentum est cuiuslibet verae necessitudinis socialis, quae, ut talis reapse sit, haud potest quin veritati ipsi innitatur aequitativae, dum agnoscit unumquemque virum et feminam unamquamque tamquam personam non ut rem de qua quilibet decerni liceat. Moralem sic ante regulam quae directam vetat hominis innocentis occisionem, “non dantur privilegia neque exceptiones: mundi esse dominum vel miserimum omnium in terra nihil refert: prae moralibus postulatis omnes sumus omnino aequales” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Veritatis Splendor*, 96).

“Imperfectum adhuc me viderunt oculi tui” (Ps. 139 (138), 16): abominandum flagitium abortus

58. Omnia inter ea scelera quae patrare homo contra vitam potest, notas quasdam prae se fert procuratus abortus quibus improbus insignite ac detestabilis evadit. Illum describit Concilium Vaticanum II, perinde atque infanticidium, “crimen nefandum” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51: «Abortus necnon infanticidium nefanda sunt crimina»).

Hodie tamen multorum hominum in conscientia ipsa eius gravitatis perceptio paulatim est obiecta. Quod in animis, in moribus, in legibus ipsis accipitur abortus, luculentum est documentum periculosissimi cuiusdam discriminis moralium sensuum, unde difficilius usque fit inter bonum discernere ac malum, etiam cum fundamentale agitur ad vitam ius. Hoc dato adeo gravi rerum statu, opus est nunc magis quam alias unquam animosa voluntate spectandi ipsam veritatem atque *res proprio nomine vocitandi*, ut compromissis alicuius commoditatis non cedatur neque invitamento ad sese decipiendum. De eadem re imperiosum etiamnum resonat Prophetae probrum: “Vae, qui dicunt malum bonum et bonum malum, ponentes tenebras in lucem et lucem in tenebras” (Is. 5, 20). Omnino in abortu ambiguae voces late iam disseminatim percipiuntur, sicut est illa “graviditatis interruptae”, cuius abscondere est veram illius naturam atque apud vulgus imminuere pondus. Hic fortasse linguae usus idem simul signum est conscientiarum perturbatarum. Attamen rerum veritatem nullum evertere valet vocabulum: abortus procuratus *quacumque peragitur via, deliberata est ac directa hominis occisio primordiali eius vitae tempore quod inter conceptionem decurrit et parturitionem*.

Procurati ideo abortus gravitas moralis tunc quidem omni sua elucet in veritate, cum intellegitur hic agi de homicidio ac nominatim cum propria perspicuntur adiuncta quibus illud circumdatur. Destrui enim homo vitam modo ingrediens, quo videlicet haud potest quidquam prorsus concipi magis *innocens*: numquam iudicari potest adgressor tantoque minus adgressor iniustus! *Imbecillis* est atque inermis, adeo quidem ut minima etiam illa privetur sese defendendi ratione, quam habet implorans gemitus ac fletus nati modo infantis. *Committitur usque quaque tutelae curaque*

<sup>52</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration on Euthanasia *Iura et Bona* (5 May 1980), II: AAS 72 (1980), 546.

<sup>53</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 96: AAS 85 (1993), 1209.

<sup>54</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 51: “Abortus necnon infanticidium nefanda sunt crimina”.

care of the woman carrying him or her in the womb. And yet sometimes it is precisely the mother herself who makes the decision and asks for the child to be eliminated, and who then goes about having it done.

It is true that the decision to have an abortion is often tragic and painful for the mother, insofar as the decision to rid herself of the fruit of conception is not made for purely selfish reasons or out of convenience, but out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family. Sometimes it is feared that the child to be born would live in such conditions that it would be better if the birth did not take place. Nevertheless, these reasons and others like them, however serious and tragic, *can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being*.

**59.** As well as the mother, there are often other people too who decide upon the death of the child in the womb. In the first place, the father of the child may be to blame, not only when he directly pressures the woman to have an abortion, but also when he indirectly encourages such a decision on her part by leaving her alone to face the problems of pregnancy:<sup>55</sup> in this way the family is thus mortally wounded and profaned in its nature as a community of love and in its vocation to be the “sanctuary of life”. Nor can one overlook the pressures which sometimes come from the wider family circle and from friends. Sometimes the woman is subjected to such strong pressure that she feels psychologically forced to have an abortion: certainly in this case moral responsibility lies particularly with those who have directly or indirectly obliged her to have an abortion. Doctors and nurses are also responsible, when they place at the service of death skills which were acquired for promoting life.

But responsibility likewise falls on the legislators who have promoted and approved abortion laws, and, to the extent that they have a say in the matter, on the administrators of the health-care centres where abortions are performed. A general and no less serious responsibility lies with those who have encouraged the spread of an attitude of sexual permissiveness and a lack of esteem for motherhood, and with those who should have ensured—but did not—effective family and social policies in support of families, especially larger families and those with particular financial and educational needs. Finally, one cannot overlook the network of complicity which reaches out to include international institutions, foundations and associations which systematically campaign for the legalization and spread of abortion in the world. In this sense abortion goes beyond the responsibility of individuals and beyond the harm done to them, and takes on a distinctly social dimension. It is a most serious *wound* inflicted on society and its culture by the very people who ought to be society’s promoters and defenders. As I wrote in my *Letter to Families*, “we are facing an immense threat to life: not only to the life of individuals but also to that of civilization itself”.<sup>56</sup> We are facing what can be called a “*structure of sin*” which opposes human life not yet born.

**60.** Some people try to justify abortion by claiming that the result of conception, at least up to a certain number of days, cannot yet be considered a personal human life. But in fact, “from the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it

ipsius a qua in utero gestatur. At interdum nihilominus ea ipsa, mater nempe, statuit et petit eius extinctionem, immo exsequitur eam quoque.

Constat nonnumquam consilium agendi abortus adferre matri ipsi dolorem acerrimum animique tumultum, quandoquidem voluntas abigendi conceptionis fructum non ex causis oritur solum egoismi cuiusdam aut commodi, sed inde potius quod alia magni momenti bona servare cupit, qualia sunt ipsa eius valetudo vel digna vitae condicio reliquis familiae sodalibus. Metuuntur subinde in nascituro aliquae adfectiones vitae, quae idcirco suadeant praestare eum omnino non nasci. Verumtamen non possunt hae similesque rationes, quantumvis ponderosae sint et acerbae, voluntariam hominis insontis necationem *umquam purgare*.

59. Praeter matrem alii item crebrius de morte infantis nondum enati decernunt. Culpari in primis potest pater infantis, non tum solum cum ad abortum aperte mulierem compellit, verum cum oblique etiam tali favet eius consilio, deserendo illam ante graviditatis difficultates (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 14): sic mortali vulnere percutitur familia suaque in natura uti communitatis ex amore violatur atque sua in vocatione ut “vitae sacrarium” sit. Nec impulsiones eas taceri decet quae ampliore e familiari cognatione importentur necnon ab amicis. Subicitur haud raro femina adeo vehementibus sollicitationibus ut animo sese cogi iam sentiat ad abortum accipiendum: talibus quidem in casibus nihil dubitatur quin illos praesertim premat morale officium a quibus recta obliquave via in abortum est propulsa. Responsales etiam medici ipsi esse possunt atque valetudinis curatores, cum in mortis ministerium suam peritiam destinant idcirco comparatam ut vitam provehat.

Officio quodam similiter legum latores implicantur a quibus rogatae lataeque sunt leges pro abortu, tum, quatenus res ab iis pendet, administratores institutionum sanitatis adhibitarum ad exsequendos abortus. Non minor universim obligatio simul eos tangit qui adiuvant ut mentis habitus pro licentia sexuali ac maternitatis contemptus dispergantur, atque simul qui praestare debuerunt – et id facere omiserunt – rationes validas familiares socialesque ad familias sustentandas, potissimum frequentiores aut peculiaribus adfictas nummorum educationisque difficultatibus. Neque conivendum est illa in conspirationis iunctura eo usque pertingente ut instituta complectatur internationalia et opera fundata et sodalicia, quae certa via et ratione nituntur ut per orbem abortus sanciantur ac differatur. Hoc porro pacto excedit fines officii hominum singulorum abortus et detrimenta singulis illata, induitque sibi speciem insigniter socialem: gravissimum enim *vulnus* est societati ipsi inflictum eiusque humano cultui ab iis nempe qui illius esse potius debent aedificatores ac protectores. Perinde ac scripsimus in *Litteris familiis datis*, “occurrimus hic ingenti minationi adversus vitam: non a singulis modo hominibus verum universa a civitate” (IOANNIS PAULUS PP. II *Gratissimam Sane*, 21). Obsatur ante oculos nempe quam definire licet “*peccati structuram*” contra nondum enatam hominis vitam.

60. Abortum tamen sunt qui defendant fructum adfirmantes conceptionis, saltem ad certum usque quendam dierum numerum, nondum iudicari posse personalem vitam humanam. At revera “simul atque ovum fecundatum est, iam inchoata est vita, quae neque patris neque matris est, verum novi viventis humani, qui propter se ipsum crescit. Is numquam

<sup>55</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 14: AAS 80 (1988), 1686.

<sup>56</sup> NO 21: AAS 86 (1994), 920

were not human already. This has always been clear, and... modern genetic science offers clear confirmation. It has demonstrated that from the first instant there is established the programme of what this living being will be: a person, this individual person with his characteristic aspects already well determined. Right from fertilization the adventure of a human life begins, and each of its capacities requires time--a rather lengthy time--to find its place and to be in a position to act".<sup>57</sup> Even if the presence of a spiritual soul cannot be ascertained by empirical data, the results themselves of scientific research on the human embryo provide "a valuable indication for discerning by the use of reason a personal presence at the moment of the first appearance of a human life: how could a human individual not be a human person?".<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, what is at stake is so important that, from the standpoint of moral obligation, the mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolutely clear prohibition of any intervention aimed at killing a human embryo. Precisely for this reason, over and above all scientific debates and those philosophical affirmations to which the Magisterium has not expressly committed itself, the Church has always taught and continues to teach that the result of human procreation, from the first moment of its existence, must be guaranteed that unconditional respect which is morally due to the human being in his or her totality and unity as body and spirit: "*The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception*; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life".<sup>59</sup>

**61.** The texts of *Sacred Scripture* never address the question of deliberate abortion and so do not directly and specifically condemn it. But they show such great respect for the human being in the mother's womb that they require as a logical consequence that God's commandment "You shall not kill" be extended to the unborn child as well.

Human life is sacred and inviolable at every moment of existence, including the initial phase which precedes birth. All human beings, from their mothers' womb, belong to God who searches them and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny shapeless embryos and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow whose days are numbered and whose vocation is even now written in the "book of life" (cf. *Ps* 139: 1, 13-16). There too, when they are still in their mothers' womb--as many passages of the Bible bear witness<sup>60</sup>--they are the personal objects of God's loving and fatherly providence.

humanus fiet, nisi iam tunc talis fuit. Scientia genetica recentioris temporis praeclare confirmat has res, quae manifesto semper patuerunt... Ipsa videlicet demonstravit iam a primo momento adesse fixam structuram seu programma geneticum huius viventis: hominem nempe, et quidem hunc hominem individuum, omnibus suis motis propriis praefinitisque iam ornatum. Ab ipsa fecundatione iniiit mirificus cursus cuiusdam vitae humanae, cuius singulae potentes facultates tempus poscunt, ut recte ordinentur atque ad agendum praeparentur" (CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Declaratio de abortu procurato*, 12-13). Quamquam spiritalis anima praesens comprobari nullius potest experimenti indicio, eadem tamen scientiarum consecraria de humano embryone "pretiosa suppeditant elementa, ex quibus rationis ope dignosci potest personam iam adesse praesentem inde ab hac prima vitae humanae significatione: cur igitur vivens creatura humana non esset etiam persona humana?" (EIUSDEM *Donum Vitae*, I, 1). Tantum est praeterea rei momentum ut, habita officiorum moralium ratione, sola probabilitas ipsa de praesentia alicuius personae prohibeat planissime quoslibet actus ad germen humanum extinguendum intentos. Quam omnino ob rem, ultra doctorum disceptationes ipsasque philosophorum adfirmationes quarum numquam explicate se particeps praebuit Magisterium, docuit semper Ecclesia etiamque nunc docet fructui humanae generationis, iam inde a primo illius existentiae momento, omnem sine ulla conditione reverentiam esse tribuendam quae moraliter enti humano debeatur tota in eius summa unitateque corporali ac spiritali: "*Creatura humana ut persona observanda atque tractanda est inde ab eius conceptione*, ac propterea inde ab illo temporis momento ipsius agnoscenda sunt iura personae, quorum primum recensetur ius inviolabile ad vitam, quo unaquaeque creatura humana innocens gaudet" (CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Donum Vitae*, I, 1). 61. *Litterarum Sacrarum* loci, ubi de voluntario abortu numquam est sermo et propterea directis propriisque vocabulis abortus haud reicitur, talem tamen tantamque hominis ipsius exprimentum materno in sinu venerationem, ut tamquam necessariam conclusionem postulent ut erga illum etiam prorogetur Dei mandatum: "Non homicidium facies".

Quovis enim suae existentiae tempore sacra est hominis vita atque inviolabilis, iis quoque in primordiis quae ortum ipsius antecedunt. Pertinet iam matris e visceribus homo ad Deum, qui introspicit eum et cognoscit, qui illum conformat suisque plasmat manibus, qui intuetur eum dum exile adhuc germen et informe est, quique in ipso posteri temporis adultum dispicit, cuius numerati iam sunt dies et cuius est iam studium inscriptum in "libro vitae" (Cf. *Ps*. 138 (139), 1. 13-16). Ibidem quoque, cum materno versatur in gremio, est homo obiectum maxime quidem personale amantissimae ac paternae Dei providentiae, haud secus ac complures Bibliorum testificantur loci (Sic Ieremias propheta: «Et factum est verbum Domini ad

<sup>57</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (18 November 1974), NOS. 12-13: AAS 66 (1974), 738.

<sup>58</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation* *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), I, No. 1: AAS 80 (1988), 78-79.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit., 79.

<sup>60</sup> Hence the Prophet Jeremiah: "The word of the Lord came to me saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations'" (1:4-5). The Psalmist, for his part, addresses the Lord in these words: "Upon you I have leaned from my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb" (*Ps* 71:6; cf. *Is* 46:3; *Job* 10:8-12; *Ps* 22:10-11). So too the Evangelist Luke in the magnificent episode of the meeting of the two mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, and their two sons, John the Baptist and Jesus, still hidden in their mothers' wombs (cf. 1:39-45) emphasizes how even before their birth the two little ones are able to communicate: the child recognizes the coming of the Child and leaps for joy.

*Christian Tradition*--as the *Declaration* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith points out so well<sup>61</sup>--is clear and unanimous, from the beginning up to our own day, in describing abortion as a particularly grave moral disorder. From its first contacts with the Greco-Roman world, where abortion and infanticide were widely practised, the first Christian community, by its teaching and practice, radically opposed the customs rampant in that society, as is clearly shown by the *Didache* mentioned earlier.<sup>62</sup> Among the Greek ecclesiastical writers, Athenagoras records that Christians consider as murderesses women who have recourse to abortifacient medicines, because children, even if they are still in their mother's womb, "are already under the protection of Divine Providence".<sup>63</sup> Among the Latin authors, Tertullian affirms: "It is anticipated murder to prevent someone from being born; it makes little difference whether one kills a soul already born or puts it to death at birth. He who will one day be a man is a man already".<sup>64</sup>

Throughout Christianity's two thousand year history, this same doctrine has been constantly taught by the Fathers of the Church and by her Pastors and Doctors. Even scientific and philosophical discussions about the precise moment of the infusion of the spiritual soul have never given rise to any hesitation about the moral condemnation of abortion.

62. The more recent *Papal Magisterium* has vigorously reaffirmed this common doctrine. Pius XI in particular, in his Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, rejected the specious justifications of abortion.<sup>65</sup> Pius XII excluded all direct abortion, i.e., every act tending directly to destroy human life in the womb "whether such destruction is intended as an end or only as a means to an end".<sup>66</sup> John XXIII reaffirmed that human life is sacred because "from its very beginning it directly involves God's creative activity".<sup>67</sup> The Second Vatican Council, as mentioned earlier, sternly condemned abortion: "From the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes".<sup>68</sup>

me dicens: "Priusquam te formarem in utero, novi te et, antequam exires de vulva, sanctificavi te et prophetam gentibus dedi te"» (1, 4-5). Psalmista, ex parte sua sic ad Dominum se vertit: «Super te innixus sum ex utero, de ventre matris meae tu es susceptor meus» (*Ps 71 [70]*, 6; cfr. *Is.* 46, 3; *Iob.* 10, 8-12; *Ps.* 22 [21], 10-11). Etiam evangelista Lucas - in mira illa narratione occurrunt duarum matrum, Elizabeth et Mariae, duorumque filiorum, Ioannis Baptistae atque Iesu, adhuc in materno gremio abditorum (cfr. 1, 39-45) - in luce ponit Pueri adventum animadvertere puerum atque laetari).

Prout effert probe *Declaratio* de hoc argumento a Congregatione pro Doctrina Fidei edita (Cfr. CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Declaratio de abortu procurato*), consona est atque illustris a principio ad nostros usque dies *christiana Traditio*, quae tenet ipsum abortum veluti morale quiddam unice inordinatum. Ex quo enim intra Graecum Romanumque orbem coeperat christiana communitas versari, ubi abortus infanticidique iam late invaluerat consuetudo, radicatus tum suis doctrinis tum moribus adversabatur istius societatis institutis, uti superius iam eluxit in commemorata *Doctrina Duodecim Apostolorum* («Non interficies foetum in abortione neque interimes infantem natum»: V, 2, *Patres apostolici*, ed. F.X. FUNK, I, 17). Graecos autem inter ecclesiasticos scriptores Athenagoras admonet christianos aestimare homicidas feminas quae medicamentis ad abortum utantur, quoniam "foetum etiam in utero animal esse ac ideo Deo curae esse" (*Libellus pro christianis*, 35: PG 6, 969). Apud Latinos affirmat Tertullianus: "Homicidii festinatio est prohibere nasci, nec refert, natam quis eripiat animam an nascentem disturbet. Homo est et qui est futurus" (TERTULLIANI *Apologeticum*, IX, 8: CSEL 69, 24).

Per suum duorum annorum milium spatium eadem haec inculcata est doctrina assidue ab Ecclesiae Patribus eiusque Pastoribus et Doctoribus. Neque philosophorum doctorumque hominum disputationes de ipso animae spiritalis infusae momento vel minimam attulerunt umquam dubitationem de morali abortus repudiatione.

62. Per magna vi recentius *Pontificum Magisterium* communem hanc iteravit doctrinam. Litteris nominatim in encyclicis, quibus titulus "Casti Connubii", reiecit Pius XI speciosas abortus defensiones (Cfr. PII XI *Casti Connubii*, II); exclusit dein Pius XII omnem abortum directum, actum videlicet quemlibet recta tendentem ad nondum editam humanam vitam delendam, "sive accipitur ea destructio tamquam finis sive modo instrumentum ad finem" (PII XII *Allocutio ad Coetum medico-biologicum «S. Lucas»*, die 12 nov. 1944: *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, VI (1944-1945) 191; cfr. EIUSDEM *Allocutio ad Coetum Catholicum Italicum Obstetricum*, 2, die 29 oct. 1951: AAS 43 (1951) 838); Ioannes XXIII denuo adseverat esse humanam vitam sacram "quippe quae inde a suo exordio, Creatoris actionem Dei postulet" (IOANNIS XXIII *Mater et Magistra*, 3, die 15 maii 1961: AAS 53 (1961) 447). Vehementissime, sicut iam est dictum, damnavit Concilium Vaticanum II abortum: "Vita igitur inde a conceptione maxima cura tuenda est; abortus necnon

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (18 November 1974), No. 7: AAS 66 (1974), 740-747.

<sup>62</sup> "You shall not kill a child by abortion nor shall you kill it once it is born": V, 2: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. Funk, I, 17.

<sup>63</sup> *Apologia on behalf of the Christians*, 35: PG 6, 969.

<sup>64</sup> *Apologeticum*, IX, 8: CSEL 69, 24.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Casti Connubii* (31 December 1930), 1: AAS 22 (1930), 562-592.

<sup>66</sup> Address to the Biomedical Association "San Luca" (12 November 1944): *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, VI (1944-1945), 191; cf. Address to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives (29 October 1951), No. 2: AAS 43 (1951), 838.

<sup>67</sup> Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961), 3: AAS 53 (1961), 447.

<sup>68</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 51.

The *Church's canonical discipline*, from the earliest centuries, has inflicted penal sanctions on those guilty of abortion. This practice, with more or less severe penalties, has been confirmed in various periods of history. The 1917 *Code of Canon Law* punished abortion with excommunication.<sup>69</sup> The revised canonical legislation continues this tradition when it decrees that “a person who actually procures an abortion incurs automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication”.<sup>70</sup> The excommunication affects all those who commit this crime with knowledge of the penalty attached, and thus includes those accomplices without whose help the crime would not have been committed.<sup>71</sup> By this reiterated sanction, the Church makes clear that abortion is a most serious and dangerous crime, thereby encouraging those who commit it to seek without delay the path of conversion. In the Church the purpose of the penalty of excommunication is to make an individual fully aware of the gravity of a certain sin and then to foster genuine conversion and repentance.

Given such unanimity in the doctrinal and disciplinary tradition of the Church, Paul VI was able to declare that this tradition is unchanged and unchangeable.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, 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 in the aforementioned consultation, 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. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.<sup>73</sup>

No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church.

63. This evaluation of the morality of abortion is to be applied also to the recent forms of *intervention on human embryos* which, although carried out for purposes legitimate in themselves, inevitably involve the killing of those embryos. This is the case with *experimentation on embryos*, which is becoming increasingly widespread in the field of biomedical research and is legally permitted in some countries. Although “one must uphold as licit procedures carried out on the human embryo which respect the life and integrity of the embryo and do not involve disproportionate risks for it, but rather are directed to its healing, the improvement of its condition of health, or its individual

infanticidium nefanda sunt crimina” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51).

Inde a primis iam saeculis canonica Ecclesiae disciplina plectit poenis illos qui sese abortus culpa polluerunt eaque ratio agendi plus minus gravibus poenis per historiae aetates est confirmata. *Codex Iuris Canonici* anno MCMXVII promulgatus excommunicationis poenam in abortum sanciebat (Cfr. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, MCMXVII, can. 2350, 1). Similiter normam persequitur eandem renovatus *Iuris Canonici Codex* cum statuit: “Qui abortum procurat, effectu secuto, in excommunicationem *latae sententiae* incurrit” (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 1398; cfr. etiam *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, can. 1450, 2), ultro videlicet continuoque. Ferit excommunicatio eos omnes qui cognita poena scelus hoc admittunt, illos simul inclusos participes sine quorum opera patrari non potuit crimen (Cfr. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 1329; cfr. etiam *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, can. 1417); tali iterata poena notat Ecclesia ut gravissimum et periculosissimum crimen hoc, itaque eius auctorem impellit ut conversionis iter cito reperiat. Etenim illuc in Ecclesia excommunicationis spectat poena, ut gravitatis quorundam peccatorum conscii maxime reddantur homines ideoque congrua adiuvetur paenitentia et conversio.

Coram simili consensione in tralatitia doctrina disciplinae Ecclesiae, valuit pontifex Paulus VI adseverare idem magisterium nec esse mutatum nec posse mutari (Cfr. PAULI VI *Allocutio ad Italicos Iuris peritos Catholicos*, die 9 dec. 1972: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, X (1972) 1260 ss.; EIUSDEM *Humanae Vitae*, 14). Auctoritate proinde utentes Nos a Christo Beato Petro eiusque Successoribus collata, consentientes cum Episcopis qui abortum crebrius respuerunt quique in superius memorata interrogatione licet per orbem disseminati una mente tamen de hac ipsa concinuerunt doctrina – *declaramus abortum recta via procuratum, sive uti finem intentum seu ut instrumentum, semper gravem prae se ferre ordinis moralis turbationem*, quippe qui deliberata existat innocens hominis occisio. Haec doctrina naturali innititur lege Deique scripto Verbo, transmittitur Ecclesiae Traditione atque ab ordinario et universali Magisterio exponitur (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 25). Nequit exinde ulla condicio, ulla finis, ulla lex in terris umquam licitum reddere actum suapte natura illicitum, cum Dei Legi adversetur in cuiusque hominis insculptae animo, ab Ecclesia praedicatae, quae potest etiam ratione agnoscere.

63. Adhibeatur oportet moralis haec abortus aestimatio aequabiliter ad recentes formas *incursum in embryones humanos* quae, quantumvis proposita in se honesta persequantur, necessario tamen eorum secum important necem. De *experimentis* agit *super embryones* peractis, quae latius usque in biomedicae inquisitionis provincia percrebrescent et quae aliquibus in Civitatibus lege permittuntur. Si vero “*interventus in humano embryone liciti habendi sunt hac condicione, ut embryones vitam integritatemque observent, ne secumferant pericula haud proportionata sed spectent ad morbi curationem, ad salutis statum in melius*

<sup>69</sup> Canon 2350, # 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1398; cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, canon 1450, # 2.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, canon 1329; also *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, canon 1417.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Address to the National Congress of Italian Jurists (9 December 1972): AAS 64 (1972), 777; Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (25 July 1968), 14: AAS 60 (1968), 490.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

survival”,<sup>74</sup> it must nonetheless be stated that the use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born, just as to every person.<sup>75</sup>

This moral condemnation also regards procedures that exploit living human embryos and fetuses--sometimes specifically “produced” for this purpose by *in vitro* fertilization--either to be used as “biological material” or as *providers of organs or tissue for transplants* in the treatment of certain diseases. The killing of innocent human creatures, even if carried out to help others, constitutes an absolutely unacceptable act.

Special attention must be given to evaluating the morality of *prenatal diagnostic techniques* which enable the early detection of possible anomalies in the unborn child. In view of the complexity of these techniques, an accurate and systematic moral judgment is necessary. When they do not involve disproportionate risks for the child and the mother, and are meant to make possible early therapy or even to favour a serene and informed acceptance of the child not yet born, these techniques are morally licit. But since the possibilities of prenatal therapy are today still limited, it not infrequently happens that these techniques are used with a eugenic intention which accepts selective abortion in order to prevent the birth of children affected by various types of anomalies. Such an attitude is shameful and utterly reprehensible, since it presumes to measure the value of a human life only within the parameters of “normality” and physical well-being, thus opening the way to legitimizing infanticide and euthanasia as well.

And yet the courage and the serenity with which so many of our brothers and sisters suffering from serious disabilities lead their lives when they are shown acceptance and love bears eloquent witness to what gives authentic value to life, and makes it, even in difficult conditions, something precious for them and for others. The Church is close to those married couples who, with great anguish and suffering, willingly accept gravely handicapped children. She is also grateful to all those families which, through adoption, welcome children abandoned by their parents because of disabilities or illnesses.

“*It is I who bring both death and life*” (Dt 32:39): *the tragedy of euthanasia*

**64.** At the other end of life’s spectrum, men and women find themselves facing the mystery of death. Today, as a result of advances in medicine and in a cultural context frequently closed to the transcendent, the experience of dying is marked by new features. When the prevailing tendency is to value life only to the extent that it brings pleasure and well-being, suffering seems like an unbearable setback, something from which one must be freed at all costs. Death is considered “senseless” if it suddenly interrupts a life still open to a future of new and interesting experiences. But it becomes a “rightful liberation” once life is held to be no longer meaningful because it is filled with pain and inexorably doomed to even greater suffering.

Furthermore, when he denies or neglects his fundamental relationship to God,

mutandum et ad ipsius singularis fetus superstitem vitam in tuto ponendam” (CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Donum Vitae*, I, 3), contra est item adserendum embryonum fetuumve humanorum usurpationem tamquam obiectorum totidem periclitationis constituturæ sceleratam violationem eorum dignitatem ut hominum, quibus videlicet ius sit ad eandem reverentiam quae omni debeatur infanti iam nato omnique personae (*Charta Iurium Familiae*, die 22 oct. 1983, art. 4b, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1983).

Respicit eadem moralis condemnatio etiam processum illum qui embryonibus et humanis fetibus – interdum consulto hunc ad finem per fecundationem in vitro “effectis” – abutitur veluti “biologica materia”, quae praesto sit, vel ut *praebitoribus organorum aut textilium transportandorum* in quorundam morborum curationem. Re quidem vera innocentes necare creaturas humanas, etiamsi aliarum in commodum, quiddam est funditus intolerandum.

Peculiarem porro considerationem addici oportet morali aestimationi *rationum atque investigationum* praenatalium quae nempe iam ante tempus sinunt ut forte quae ipsius nascituri sint vitia deprehendantur. Etenim ob ipsam complicatam harum inquisitionum naturam, subtilior illa aestimatio minutioque est reddenda. Quotiescumque infanti ipsi ac matri absunt nimirum magna pericula ac diriguntur eo investigationes ut praevia curatio parari vel ut nasciturus etiam tranquillo conscioque animo suscipi possit, tractationes illae morali ratione sunt honestae. Quandoquidem vero rariores hodie sanationes ante ortum effici valent, crebro quidem accidit ut medicae hae actiones alicui sententiae seu menti eugeneticae subiciantur, quae abortum selectionis accipit ne fetus enascantur variis deformitatum generibus adfecti. Turpis autem est talis mens maximeque improbanda, quoniam vitae cuiusdam utilitatem metri dumtaxat ex “normalitatis” regulis audet atque corporis valetudine, dum viam simul in lege reserat ad infanticidii et euthanasiae approbationem.

Fortitudo ex contrario illa ac serenitas, quibus fratres tot nostri sororesque, gravibus laborantes impeditioibus, a nobis scilicet recepti ac dilecti, suam producent vitam, testimonium revera singulariter reddunt efficac verorum bonorum quibus vita cuiusque definitur atque etiam difficilioribus in adiunctis cara sibi et aliis efficitur. Iis adstat Ecclesia coniugibus qui magno cum angore doloreque recipere suos consentiunt liberos impedimentis valde adflictos; aequabiliter gratissima ipsa est erga eas domos quae, per adoptionem, desertos propriis a parentibus ob impeditioes aegrotationesve accipiunt.

“*Ego occidam et ego vivere faciam*” (Deut. 32, 39): *euthanasiae tragoedia*

64. Altero in vitae extremo ante hominis oculos mortis observatur arcanum. Propter magnos in re medicina factos progressus atque intra culturalia rerum adiuncta, unde transcendentia excluditur, novis quibusdam nunc notis distinguitur ipse moriendi actus. Etenim, quamdiu aestimare homines fere eatenus malunt vitam quatenus voluptatem ea gignit prosperitatemque, exstat dolor veluti haud toleranda clades, ex qua omnibus modis quis est liberandus. Mors vero, quae “absurda” iudicatur si inopinato interrumpit vitam adhuc patentem ad futura tempora experientis pulchris repleta, “vindicata liberatio” contra evadit, cum omni significatione carere iam existimatur vita doloribus obruta ac necessario quodam fato ad maiorem etiam venturum cruciatum destinata.

Principalem porro suam cum Deo necessitudinem repudiando aut oblivione obliterans, homo semet

<sup>74</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987) I, 3: AAS 80 (1988), 80.

<sup>75</sup> *Charter of the Rights of the Family* (22 October 1983), article 4b: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1983.



man thinks he is his own rule and measure, with the right to demand that society should guarantee him the ways and means of deciding what to do with his life in full and complete autonomy. It is especially people in the developed countries who act in this way: they feel encouraged to do so also by the constant progress of medicine and its ever more advanced techniques. By using highly sophisticated systems and equipment, science and medical practice today are able not only to attend to cases formerly considered untreatable and to reduce or eliminate pain, but also to sustain and prolong life even in situations of extreme frailty, to resuscitate artificially patients whose basic biological functions have undergone sudden collapse, and to use special procedures to make organs available for transplanting.

In this context the temptation grows to have recourse to *euthanasia*, that is, *to take control of death and bring it about before its time*, “gently” ending one’s own life or the life of others. In reality, what might seem logical and humane, when looked at more closely is seen to be *senseless and inhumane*. Here we are faced with one of the more alarming symptoms of the “culture of death”, which is advancing above all in prosperous societies, marked by an attitude of excessive preoccupation with efficiency and which sees the growing number of elderly and disabled people as intolerable and too burdensome. These people are very often isolated by their families and by society, which are organized almost exclusively on the basis of criteria of productive efficiency, according to which a hopelessly impaired life no longer has any value.

**65.** For a correct moral judgment on euthanasia, in the first place a clear definition is required. *Euthanasia in the strict sense* is understood to be an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering. “Euthanasia’s terms of reference, therefore, are to be found in the intention of the will and in the methods used”.<sup>76</sup>

Euthanasia must be distinguished from the decision to forego so-called “aggressive medical treatment”, in other words, medical procedures which no longer correspond to the real situation of the patient, either because they are by now disproportionate to any expected results or because they impose an excessive burden on the patient and his family. In such situations, when death is clearly imminent and inevitable, one can in conscience “refuse forms of treatment that would only secure a precarious and burdensome prolongation of life, so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted”.<sup>77</sup> Certainly there is a moral obligation to care for oneself and to allow oneself to be cared for, but this duty must take account of concrete circumstances. It needs to be determined whether the means of treatment available are objectively proportionate to the prospects for improvement. To forego extraordinary or disproportionate means is not the equivalent of suicide or euthanasia; it rather expresses acceptance of the human condition in the face of death.<sup>78</sup>

In modern medicine, increased attention is being given to what are called “methods of palliative care”, which seek to make suffering more bearable in the final stages of illness and to ensure that the patient is supported and

regulam esse censet normamque sibi, dum ius simul sibi esse arbitrat ut a societate postulet certam confirmatamque facultatem ac rationem de propria vita decernendi secundum plenam ac planam sui iuris condicionem. Ita nominatim se gerit homo qui Civitates magis progressas incolit: impulsus illuc praeterea sibi videtur continuatis medicinae artis augmentis et rationibus ipsis usque perfectionibus. Per technicos modos apparatusque summe consummatos iam tales hodie se praebent scientia et medicina, ut non tantum insolubiles antehac dissolvere possint difficultates doloremque ipsum aut mitigare aut funditus exterminare, verum vitam etiam sustinere vel in debilitate extrema pertrahere, homines ipsos artificio quodam resuscitare quorum biologici processus primarii improvisos pertulerunt lapsus, intercedere ut transplantanda aliquando praesto sint organa.

Hisce in rerum adiunctis magis ac magis alliciuntur homines ad *euthanasiam*, ut *morte* videlicet *dominentur in antecessum inducenda morte* sicque suae vel alienae vitae “dulciter” imponendo finem. Re autem vera, quod rationi consentaneum atque humanum videri potest, si altius introspicitur *absurdum* deprehenditur et *inhumanum*. Aliquo consistimus coram signo maxime quidem conturbante illius “culturae mortis”, quae in locis prosperitatis potissimum percrescit et quam mens quaedam designat ad rerum efficientiam propensa, ubi nimium onerosus et vix tolerabilis habetur numerus crescens hominum seniorum et infirmorum. ersaepe quidem a suis segregantur familiis et societate ipsa: quae nempe instituta administrantur fere unice ad leges efficientis rerum effectiois, secundum quas vita sine remedio inhabilis iam nihil prae se fert boni.

65. Clare ideo in primis ut rectum de euthanasia feratur morale iudicium, est definienda illa. *Sub nomine euthanasiae vero proprioque sensu* accipitur actio vel omissio quae suapte natura et consilio mentis mortem affert ut hoc modo omnis dolor removeatur.

“Euthanasia igitur in voluntatis proposito et procedendi rationibus, quae adhibentur, continetur” (CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI Declaratio de euthanasia *lura et Bona*, II).

Ab ea separatur oportet consilium illud, quo quis tractationem reiciat sic dictam “*vehementiam therapeuticam*”, aliquos nempe medicos interventus non amplius aegrotantis statui congruentes, quia impares iam sunt iis effectibus quos sperari liceret vel etiam quia nimis omnino ipsi aegroto eiusque familiae molesti. His enim in casibus, cum nuntiata iam instat mors nec vitari potest, licet ex conscientia “consilium inire curationibus renuntiandi, quae nonnisi precariam et doloris plenam vitae dilationem afferre valent, haud intermissis tamen ordinariis curis, quae in similibus casibus aegroto debentur” (*Ibid.* IV). Officium certissime adest morale ut quis se curet curetque se curandum; quod tamen officium metiendum est secundum concreta rerum adiuncta: in re namque nata necesse est diiudicare convenienter therapeutica instrumenta ad manus aliquando melioris conditionis ipsis expectationibus. Haud vero tantum valet consiliorum extraordinariorum vel nimiorum reiectio quam voluntaria mors vel euthanasia; consensum potius illa declarat cum humano statu ante mortem (*Cfr. ibid.*).

Recentissima in medicina arte magis magisque emergunt sic dictae “*curae palliatives*”, eo scilicet pertinentes ut extremo morbi tempore tolerabilior fiat dolor utque patienti ipsi consentaneus simul praestetur comitatus humanus. Hic inter alias quaestiones illud

<sup>76</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration on Euthanasia *lura et Bona* (5 May 1980), II: AAS 72 (1980) 546.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, IV: *loc cit.*, 551.

<sup>78</sup> *Cf. ibid.*

accompanied in his or her ordeal. Among the questions which arise in this context is that of the licitness of using various types of painkillers and sedatives for relieving the patient's pain when this involves the risk of shortening life. While praise may be due to the person who voluntarily accepts suffering by forgoing treatment with pain-killers in order to remain fully lucid and, if a believer, to share consciously in the Lord's Passion, such "heroic" behaviour cannot be considered the duty of everyone. Pius XII affirmed that it is licit to relieve pain by narcotics, even when the result is decreased consciousness and a shortening of life, "if no other means exist, and if, in the given circumstances, this does not prevent the carrying out of other religious and moral duties".<sup>79</sup> In such a case, death is not willed or sought, even though for reasonable motives one runs the risk of it: there is simply a desire to ease pain effectively by using the analgesics which medicine provides. All the same, "it is not right to deprive the dying person of consciousness without a serious reason":<sup>80</sup> as they approach death people ought to be able to satisfy their moral and family duties, and above all they ought to be able to prepare in a fully conscious way for their definitive meeting with God.

Taking into account these distinctions, in harmony with the Magisterium of my Predecessors<sup>81</sup> 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. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.<sup>82</sup>

Depending on the circumstances, this practice involves the malice proper to suicide or murder.

**66.** Suicide is always as morally objectionable as murder. The Church's tradition has always rejected it as a gravely evil choice.<sup>83</sup> Even though a certain psychological, cultural and social conditioning may induce a person to carry out an action which so radically contradicts the innate inclination to life, thus lessening or removing subjective responsibility, *suicide*, when viewed objectively, is a gravely immoral act. In fact, it involves the rejection of love of self and the renunciation of the obligation of justice and charity towards one's

existit etiam utrum honestus sit ipse usus generum diversorum medicaminis analgesici et sedativi, quo aegrotans doloribus subtrahatur, quotiens nempe periculum eodem tempore imminet ne vita ei abscondatur. Laudandus enim si ille potest videri qui ultro suaque sponte pati consentit, repudiatis id est rationibus antidolorificis, ut lucidam sibi plene servet mentem communicetque, si quidem christifidelis est, conscio modo Domini passionem, tamen iste sese gerendi "heroicus" modus omnibus imperatus minime existimari debet. Sua iam aetate confirmaverat Pius XII dolorem opprimi medicamentis licere, etiamsi conscius exinde impediretur animus vitae brevior ipsa evaderet, "si" – ut ait – "alia non in procinctu sunt instrumenta atque certis in adiunctis istud non prohibet quin religiosa alia compleantur et moralia officia" (Pii XII *Allocutio ad medicorum coetum omnibus e gentibus*, III, die 24 febr. 1957: AAS 49 (1957) 147; cfr. CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI Declaratio de euthanasia *lura et Bona*). Etenim tunc neque cupitur mors nec quaeritur, quamquam iustus de causis eius subest periculum: voluntas ea dumtaxat est ut efficaciter deleniatur dolor, adhibitis analgesicis viis quae auxilio datae sunt medicae arti. Verumtamen "sui conscientia non destitui moribundus absque gravi causa debet" (Pii XII *Allocutio ad medicorum coetum omnibus e gentibus*: AAS 49 (1957) 145); appropinquantes iam morti posse adhuc homines oportet suis moralibus satisfacere familiaribusque obligationibus atque potissimum plena cum conscientia ad decretoriam sese comparare cum Deo congressionem.

His rite interpositis distinctionibus, Magisterium Nos Decessorum Nostrorum (*Ibid.*: l.c., pp. 129-147; CONGR. S. OFFICII *Decretum de directa insontium occisione*, 2 dec. 1940: AAS 32 (1940) 553 s.; PAULI VI *Nuntius ad Francogallicam televisionem*: «*Quaelibet vita est sacra*», die 27 ian. 1971: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, IX (1971) 57 s.; EIUSDEM *Allocutio ad coetum «International College of Surgeons»*, die 1 iun. 1972: l.c., X (1972) 583 ss.; *Gaudium et Spes*, 27) iterantes atque in communione cum catholicae Ecclesiae Episcopis confirmamus euthanasiam gravem divinae Legis esse violationem, quatenus est conscia necatio personae humanae, quae moraliter probari non potest. Haec doctrina lege naturali atque Verbo Dei scripto adhuc, Ecclesiae Traditione traducitur atque Magisterio ordinario et universali explicatur (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 25).

Talis actus, secundum rerum adiuncta, propriam voluntariae mortis ac homicidii inhonestatem secum adfert.

66. Suicidium numquam moraliter est admittendum aequae ac homicidium. Ecclesia id graviter malum cum habeat usque respicit (Cfr. S. AUGUSTINI *De Civitate Dei*, I, 20: CCL 47, 22; S. THOMAE *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 6, a. 5). Tametsi certae animi, cultus et societatis condiciones efficere possunt ut eiusmodi facinus patretur quod radicatus absonum sit a nativa cuiusque in vitam inclinatione, minuendo vel etiam tollendo subiectivam responsalitem, suicidium obiective consideratum graviter immoraliter est actus,

<sup>79</sup> PIUS XII, Address to an International Group of Physicians (24 February 1957), III: AAS 49 (1957), 147; cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration on Euthanasia *lura et Bona*, III: AAS 72 (1980), 547-548.

<sup>80</sup> Pius XII, Address to an International Group of Physicians (24 February 1957), III: AAS 49 (1957), 145.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Address to an International Group of Physicians, (24 February 1957): *loc. cit.*, 129-147; CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY OFFICE, *Decretum de directa insontium occisione* (2 December 1940): AAS 32 (1940), 553-554; PAUL VI, Message to French Television: "Every life is sacred" (27 January 1971): *Insegnamenti IX* (1971) 57-58; Address to the International College of Surgeons (1 June 1972) AAS 64 (1972), 432-436; SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *De Civitate Dei* I, 20: CCL 47, 22; SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 6, a. 5.

neighbour, towards the communities to which one belongs, and towards society as a whole.<sup>84</sup> In its deepest reality, suicide represents a rejection of God's absolute sovereignty over life and death, as proclaimed in the prayer of the ancient sage of Israel: "You have power over life and death; you lead men down to the gates of Hades and back again" (*Wis* 16:13; cf. *Tob* 13:2).

To concur with the intention of another person to commit suicide and to help in carrying it out through so-called "assisted suicide" means to cooperate in, and at times to be the actual perpetrator of, an injustice which can never be excused, even if it is requested. In a remarkably relevant passage Saint Augustine writes that "it is never licit to kill another: even if he should wish it, indeed if he request it because, hanging between life and death, he begs for help in freeing the soul struggling against the bonds of the body and longing to be released; nor is it licit even when a sick person is no longer able to live".<sup>85</sup>

Even when not motivated by a selfish refusal to be burdened with the life of someone who is suffering, euthanasia must be called a *false mercy*, and indeed a disturbing "perversion" of mercy. True "compassion" leads to sharing another's pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear. Moreover, the act of euthanasia appears all the more perverse if it is carried out by those, like relatives, who are supposed to treat a family member with patience and love, or by those, such as doctors, who by virtue of their specific profession are supposed to care for the sick person even in the most painful terminal stages.

The choice of euthanasia becomes more serious when it takes the form of a *murder* committed by others on a person who has in no way requested it and who has never consented to it. The height of arbitrariness and injustice is reached when certain people, such as physicians or legislators, arrogate to themselves the power to decide who ought to live and who ought to die. Once again we find ourselves before the temptation of Eden: to become like God who "knows good and evil" (cf. *Gen* 3:5). God alone has the power over life and death: "It is I who bring both death and life" (*Dt* 32:39; cf. *2 Kg* 5:7; *1 Sam* 2:6). But he only exercises this power in accordance with a plan of wisdom and love. When man usurps this power, being enslaved by a foolish and selfish way of thinking, he inevitably uses it for injustice and death. Thus the life of the person who is weak is put into the hands of the one who is strong; in society the sense of justice is lost, and mutual trust, the basis of every authentic interpersonal relationship, is undermined at its root.

67. Quite different from this is the *way of love and true mercy*, which our common humanity calls for, and upon which faith in Christ the Redeemer, who died and rose again, sheds ever new light. The request which arises from the human heart in the supreme confrontation with suffering and death, especially when faced with the temptation to give up in utter desperation, is above all a request for companionship, sympathy and support in the time of trial. It is a plea for help to keep on hoping when all human hopes fail. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us: "It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence becomes most acute" and yet "man rightly follows the intuition of his heart when he abhors and repudiates the absolute ruin and total disappearance of his own person. Man rebels against death because he bears in himself an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to mere matter".<sup>86</sup>

quandoquidem requirit ut amor sui denegetur et caritatis officia reiciantur proximum respicientia, propriam communitatem et universam societatem (Cfr. CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Iura et Bona*, I; *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, nn. 2281-2283). Intimo eius sensu spectato, illud Dei dominatum in vitam et mortem abnuat, qui in precibus sapientis veteris Israelis proclamatur: "Tu enim vitae et mortis habes potestatem, et deducis ad portas mortis et reducis" (*Sap.* 16, 13; cfr. *Tob.* 13, 2).

Cum quis eodem animo est quo sui interemptor atque in complendo proposito ei adest per "suicidium adiutum", quod dicitur, fit huius rei socius et nonnumquam actor ipse cuiusdam iniuriae, quae numquam comprobari potest, ne postulata quidem forte. S. Augustinus nostrae fere aetatis prope singularem exprimit mentem: "Non licere alterum occidere, etiam volentem et petentem, et vivere iam non valentem...., et animam corporis nexibus oblutantem solvique cupientem" (S. AUGUSTINI *Epistula* 204, 5: CSEL 57, 320).

Quamvis non causetur euthanasia ex eo quod, sui commodi causa, quis curare recusat patientem, eadem *falsa pietas est habenda*, immo eius gravis "deformitas": nam vera "miseratio" efficit ut cum alterius dolore homo societur, non autem eum perimit cuius aegritudo tolerari non potest. Atque multo flagitiosius videtur euthanasiae facinus, si ab iis patratum, qui – ut familiares – consanguineum leniter amanterque iuvare debent vel – ut medici – suam ipsorum propter artem, aegrotum curare debent, etiamsi in condicionibus ille insanabilibus versatur.

Euthanasiae electio gravior fit cum in *homicidium* vertitur, quod alii in quadam persona patrant quae nullo prorsus modo eam quaesivit eamque comprobavit. Summum deinceps arbitrium attingitur et iniuria, cum quidam medici vel legum latores de vita morteque decernendi sibi vindicant potestatem. Sollicitatio illa sic, quae fuit in Eden, renascitur: "Eritis sicut Deus scientes bonum et malum" (Cfr. *Gen.* 3, 5). Sed penes Deum tantum est potestas vitam et mortem constituendi: "Ego occidam et ego vivere faciam" (*Deut.* 32, 39; cfr. *2 Reg.* 5, 7; *1 Sam.* 2, 6). Ipse dumtaxat secundum sapientiae dilectionisque consilium suam potestatem usque gerit. Cum homo, stulta quadam obsessus mente sui que commodi studiosus, hanc potestatem perperam occupat, eandem necessario ad iniuriam et mortem agendas usurpat. Vita sic debilioris in ditione est praepotentis; in hominum societate iustitiae sensus amittitur, atque mutua fiducia radicatus in discrimen adducitur, quae est fundamentum in quo inter personas sincera nititur necessitudo.

67. Omnino autem alia est *amoris sinceraeque pietatis via*, quam nostra humanitas communis infert quamque in Christo Redemptore fides, qui mortuus est et resurrexit, novis rationibus collustrat. Postulatio, quae ex hominis corde manat instantibus novissime dolore et morte, praesertim cum temptatur ut se ipse ad desperationem inclinet atque quasi in ea absumatur, requirit potissimum consuetudinem, solidaritatem, atque praesidium difficultatibus obvientibus. Auxilium postulatur ad insuper sperandum, cum omnes humanae spes praeciduntur. Sicut Concilium Vaticanum II commemoravit, "coram morte aenigma condicionis humanae maximum evadit" ipsi homini; atque is "recte instinctu cordis sui iudicat, cum totalem ruinam et definitivum exitum suae personae abhorret et respuit. Semen aeternitatis quod in se gerit, ad solam materiam cum irreductibile sit, contra mortem insurgit"

<sup>84</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration On Euthanasia *Iura et Bona* (5 May 1980), I: AAS 72 (1980), 545; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2281-2283.

<sup>85</sup> *Ep.* 204, 5: CSEL 57, 320.

<sup>86</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 18.

This natural aversion to death and this incipient hope of immortality are illumined and brought to fulfilment by Christian faith, which both promises and offers a share in the victory of the Risen Christ: it is the victory of the One who, by his redemptive death, has set man free from death, “the wages of sin” (*Rom* 6:23), and has given him the Spirit, the pledge of resurrection and of life (cf. *Rom* 8:11). The certainty of future immortality and *hope in the promised resurrection* cast new light on the mystery of suffering and death, and fill the believer with an extraordinary capacity to trust fully in the plan of God.

The Apostle Paul expressed this newness in terms of belonging completely to the Lord who embraces every human condition: “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (*Rom* 14:7-8). *Dying to the Lord* means experiencing one’s death as the supreme act of obedience to the Father (cf. *Phil* 2:8), being ready to meet death at the “hour” willed and chosen by him (cf. *Jn* 13:1), which can only mean when one’s earthly pilgrimage is completed. *Living to the Lord* also means recognizing that suffering, while still an evil and a trial in itself, can always become a source of good. It becomes such if it is experienced for love and with love through sharing, by God’s gracious gift and one’s own personal and free choice, in the suffering of Christ Crucified. In this way, the person who lives his suffering in the Lord grows more fully conformed to him (cf. *Phil* 3:10; *1 Pet* 2:21) and more closely associated with his redemptive work on behalf of the Church and humanity.<sup>87</sup> This was the experience of Saint Paul, which every person who suffers is called to relive: “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church” (*Col* 1:24).

“We must obey God rather than men” (*Acts* 5:29): *civil law and the moral law*

**68.** One of the specific characteristics of present-day attacks on human life--as has already been said several times--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. Consequently, there is a tendency to claim that it should be possible to exercise these rights with the safe and free assistance of doctors and medical personnel.

It is often claimed that the life of an unborn child or a seriously disabled person is only a relative good: according to a proportionalist approach, or one of sheer calculation, this good should be compared with and balanced against other goods. It is even maintained that only someone present and personally involved in a concrete situation can correctly judge the goods at stake: consequently, only that person would be able to decide on the morality of his choice. The State therefore, in the interest of civil coexistence and social harmony, should respect this choice, even to the point of permitting abortion and euthanasia.

At other times, it is claimed that civil law cannot demand that all citizens should live according to moral standards higher than what all citizens themselves acknowledge and share. Hence the law should always express the opinion and will of the majority of citizens and recognize that they have, at least in certain extreme cases, the right even to abortion and euthanasia. Moreover the prohibition and the punishment of abortion and euthanasia in these cases would inevitably lead--so it is said--to an increase of illegal practices: and these would not be subject to necessary control by society and would be carried out in a medically unsafe way. The question is also raised whether supporting a law

(*Gaudium et Spes*, 18).

Naturalis haec facultas morti obsistendi atque haec nascens immortalitatis spes collustrantur et complentur christiana fide, quae Christi Resuscitati victoriam participandam pollicetur ac porrigit: victoria est profecto Illius qui per mortem suam redemptricem hominem a morte vindicavit, “peccati stipendio” (*Rom*. 6, 23), atque Spiritum ministravit, resurrectionis vitaeque pignus (Cfr. *Rom*. 8, 11). Futurae immortalitatis certitudo atque *resurrectionis promissae spes* patiendi moriendique mysterio novam lucem afferunt itemque fidelibus ingens praebent robur ad Dei mysterium tenendum.

Paulus apostolus hanc novam rem verbis patefacit significantibus totam Deo dedicationem quamlibet humanam conditionem complectentem. “Nemo enim nostrum sibi vivit et nemo sibi moritur; sive enim vivimus, Domino vivimus, sive morimur, Domino morimur. Sive ergo vivimus, sive morimur, Domini sumus” (*Ibid.* 14, 7-8). *Domino mori* propriam mortem vivere significat veluti summam Patri oboeditionem (Cfr. *Phil*. 2, 8), dum videlicet ea suscipitur in ipsa “hora”, quam is vult et eligit (Cfr. *Io*. 13, 1), quandoquidem unus ille scit statuitque tempus definitum ex hoc mundo discedendi. *Domino vivere* agnoscere etiam significat dolorem, ut idem per se malum sit et periclitatio, semper boni fontem evadere posse. Istud fit cum suscipitur amandi gratia et amando, dum scilicet Christi passio cruci affixi participatur, Deo id donante et homine libere recipiente. Hoc modo qui in Domino passionem suam experitur, plenius ei accommodatur (Cfr. *Phil*. 3, 10; *1 Petr*. 2, 21) eiusque redemptrici operae pro Ecclesia et humanitate artius sociatur (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Salvifici Doloris*, 14-24). Hoc Apostolus experitur, quod etiam quivis patiens sumendum vocatur: “Nunc gaudeo in passionibus pro vobis et adimpleo ea, quae desunt passionum Christi, in carne mea pro corpore eius, quod est Ecclesia” (*Col*. 1, 24).

“Oboedire oportet deo magis quam hominibus” (*Act*. 5, 29): *civilis lex lexque moralis*

**68.** Una ex minationibus, quae hodie vitae humanae insidiantur, quemadmodum alias dictum est, eo tendit, ut *iure illae iustificentur*, quasi iura essent, quae, certis saltem exstantibus conditionibus, Natio civibus praestare debet ideoque eadem tenenda, medicis et valetudinibus operariis gratuito et sicure id concedentibus.

Haud semel existimatur nondum natorum vitam aequae ac graviter imbecillorum imperfectum dumtaxat esse bonum: pro portione vel ad meram rationem cum aliis rebus comparanda est et perpendenda. Iudicatur quoque eum solum, qui re implicatur et involvitur, convenienter haec bona ponderare posse: ideo is unus de moralitate rei eligendae decernere potest. Quocirca Civitas, ut civilis convictus socialisque concordia recte serventur, hanc electionem tueri debet, atque etiam abortum et euthanasiam permittere.

Alias dicitur lex civilis iubere non posse omnes cives vivere ad altiorum moralitatis ordinem quam ipsi noverunt et admittunt. Hac de causa mentem voluntatemque maioris civium partis semper lex patefacere debet atque iisdem, saltem quibusdam in gravissimis casibus, etiam ius abortus et euthanasiae concedere. Ceterum abortus atque euthanasiae interdictio et coercitio his in casibus necessario – aiunt – ad actionum lege veterum amplificationem adducunt: quae quidem – pergunt illi – societatis respectonem vitant atque abest opportuna medicorum cura. Aliquis praeterea quaerat, lege lata quae servari re non possit, utrum significet cunctarum legum

<sup>87</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (11 February 1984), 14-24: AAS 76 (1984), 214-234.

which in practice cannot be enforced would not ultimately undermine the authority of all laws.

Finally, the more radical views go so far as to maintain that in a modern and pluralistic society people should be allowed complete freedom to dispose of their own lives as well as of the lives of the unborn: it is asserted that it is not the task of the law to choose between different moral opinions, and still less can the law claim to impose one particular opinion to the detriment of others.

69. In any case, in the democratic culture of our time it is commonly held that the legal system of any society should limit itself to taking account of and accepting the convictions of the majority. It should therefore be based solely upon what the majority itself considers moral and actually practises. Furthermore, if it is believed that an objective truth shared by all is *de facto* unattainable, then respect for the freedom of the citizens--who in a democratic system are considered the true rulers--would require that on the legislative level the autonomy of individual consciences be acknowledged. Consequently, when establishing those norms which are absolutely necessary for social coexistence, the only determining factor should be the will of the majority, whatever this may be. Hence every politician, in his or her activity, should clearly separate the realm of private conscience from that of public conduct.

As a result we have what appear to be two diametrically opposed tendencies. On the one hand, individuals claim for themselves in the moral sphere the most complete freedom of choice and demand that the State should not adopt or impose any ethical position but limit itself to guaranteeing maximum space for the freedom of each individual, with the sole limitation of not infringing on the freedom and rights of any other citizen. On the other hand, it is held that, in the exercise of public and professional duties, respect for other people's freedom of choice requires that each one should set aside his or her own convictions in order to satisfy every demand of the citizens which is recognized and guaranteed by law; in carrying out one's duties the only moral criterion should be what is laid down by the law itself. Individual responsibility is thus turned over to the civil law, with a renouncing of personal conscience, at least in the public sphere.

70. At the basis of all these tendencies lies the *ethical relativism* which characterizes much of present-day culture. There are those who consider such relativism an essential condition of democracy, inasmuch as it alone is held to guarantee tolerance, mutual respect between people and acceptance of the decisions of the majority, whereas moral norms considered to be objective and binding are held to lead to authoritarianism and intolerance.

But it is precisely the issue of respect for life which shows what misunderstandings and contradictions, accompanied by terrible practical consequences, are concealed in this position.

It is true that history has known cases where crimes have been committed in the name of "truth". But equally grave crimes and radical denials of freedom have also been committed and are still being committed in the name of "ethical relativism". When a parliamentary or social majority decrees that it is legal, at least under certain conditions, to kill unborn human life, is it not really making a "tyrannical" decision with regard to the weakest and most defenceless of human beings? Everyone's conscience rightly rejects those crimes against humanity of which our century has had such sad experience. But would these crimes cease to be crimes if, instead of being committed by unscrupulous tyrants, they were legitimated by popular consensus?

Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality

auctoritatem demum labefactari necne.

Acerrimae tandem opinioniones asseverant in recentiore multiplice societate plene suam cuique esse agnoscendam potestatem propriae vitae disponendae aequae ac nondum natorum: non est enim legis munus ex diversis moralibus sententiae electionem ducere, eoque minus quandam iniungere opinionem prae aliis.

69. Quidquid est, in democratico cultu hodie vigente late vagatur mens, secundum quam iudiciales societatis institutiones recipere debent et persequi solummodo maioris partis opinioniones, ideoque in illis eadem fundamentum invenire quas maior pars moralem normam agnoscit et sequitur. Si autem obiectiva communisque veritas attingi re non posse existimatur, verenda civium libertas – qui in populari regimine vera potestate pollent – ex lege postulat ut singularum conscientiarum agnoscat autonomia ideoque in normis constituendis quas utique civilis convictus necessario inducit quaevis voluntas maioris partis prorsus servetur. Hoc modo quisque publicus vir, qui in media re politica versatur, in agendo a privata conscientia negotia publica seiungere debet.

Quapropter duae dantur proclivitates, quae inter se omnino discrepare videntur. Hinc singuli sibi maximum vindicant ius moraliter eligendi atque requirunt ut Civitas nullam in se recipiat neve imponat ethicam doctrinam, sed quam amplissimam cuique praestet libertatis provinciam, exterioribus unis positus finibus non laedendi spatium quod ad ius ceterorum civium pertinet. Illinc censent, in publicis negotiis artibusque sustinendis, observantiam erga libertatem eligendi alteri servatam singulos compellere ut se sevocent a suis rationibus atque sese disponant ad inserviendum omnibus civium postulatis, quae leges agnoscunt et tuentur, uno suscepto morali iudicio ad munia explenda quod eadem leges statuunt et decernunt. Hoc modo personae officium in civili lege reponitur, dempta conscientia morali, saltem in publicarum rerum regione.

70. Omnibus his opinionibus usque subest *relativismus ethicus*, quo hodiernus cultus magna ex parte imbutur. Nec deest qui censeat talem relativismum popularis regiminis esse condicionem, quippe qui solus praestet tolerantiam, mutuum inter personas observantiam, maiori parti decementi assensionem, dum morales normae, cum sint obiectivae et constringentes, ad praepotentiam et intolerantiam ducunt.

Verum de vita tuenda quaestio ipsa demonstrat quae ambiguitates et sententiae inter se pugnantibus opinionibus his occultentur, gravissimis comitantibus rerum eventibus.

Verum est quosdam recensere historiam eventus in quibus facinora "veritatis" titulo sunt patrata. At crimina non minus gravia atque praecipuae veritatis negationes sunt admissa et admittuntur vel nomine "relativismi ethici". Cum autem legatorum vel societatis maior pars de legitime vita nondum nata interimenda decernit, quamvis quaedam insint condiciones, nonne de debili homine et inermi "tyrannicum" capit consilium? Universalis conscientia merito nostrum aevum humanitatem obniitit, quae nostrum aevum lamentabiliter est expertum. Numne haec desinunt esse crimina, si loco immodicorum tyrannorum populari voluntate patrantur?

Populare profecto regimen re eo efferri non potest ut

or a panacea for immorality. Fundamentally, democracy is a “system” and as such is a means and not an end. Its “moral” value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behaviour, must be subject: in other words, its morality depends on the morality of the ends which it pursues and of the means which it employs. If today we see an almost universal consensus with regard to the value of democracy, this is to be considered a positive “sign of the times”, as the Church’s Magisterium has frequently noted.<sup>88</sup> But the value of democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes. Of course, values such as the dignity of every human person, respect for inviolable and inalienable human rights, and the adoption of the “common good” as the end and criterion regulating political life are certainly fundamental and not to be ignored.

The basis of these values cannot be provisional and changeable “majority” opinions, but only the acknowledgment of an objective moral law which, as the “natural law” written in the human heart, is the obligatory point of reference for civil law itself. If, as a result of a tragic obscuring of the collective conscience, an attitude of scepticism were to succeed in bringing into question even the fundamental principles of the moral law, the democratic system itself would be shaken in its foundations, and would be reduced to a mere mechanism for regulating different and opposing interests on a purely empirical basis.<sup>89</sup>

Some might think that even this function, in the absence of anything better, should be valued for the sake of peace in society. While one acknowledges some element of truth in this point of view, it is easy to see that without an objective moral grounding not even democracy is capable of ensuring a stable peace, especially since peace which is not built upon the values of the dignity of every individual and of solidarity between all people frequently proves to be illusory. Even in participatory systems of government, the regulation of interests often occurs to the advantage of the most powerful, since they are the ones most capable of manoeuvring not only the levers of power but also of shaping the formation of consensus. In such a situation, democracy easily becomes an empty word.

**71.** It is therefore urgently necessary, for the future of society and the development of a sound democracy, to rediscover those essential and innate human and moral values which flow from the very truth of the human being and express and safeguard the dignity of the person: values which no individual, no majority and no State can ever create, modify or destroy, but must only acknowledge, respect and promote.

Consequently there is a need to recover the *basic elements of a vision of the relationship between civil law and moral law*, which are put forward by the Church, but which are also part of the patrimony of the great juridical traditions of humanity.

Certainly *the purpose of civil law* is different and more limited in scope than that of the moral law. But “in no sphere of life can the civil law take the place of conscience or dictate norms concerning things which are outside its competence”,<sup>90</sup> which is that of ensuring the common good of people through the recognition and defence of their fundamental rights, and the promotion of

vicem gerat moralitatis vel remedium fiat immoralitatis. Radicitus illud “ordinatio” quaedam est, ideoque suapte natura instrumentum non finis est existimandum. Eiusdem “moralis” indoles non est insita, sed e congruentia cum lege morali pendet cui, sicut ceteri hominum mores, subesse debet: a finium scilicet honestate pendet, qui spectantur, et subsidiorum quae adhibentur. Si quidem hodie publice extollitur bonum popularis regiminis, id “temporum signum” opportunum est existimandum, quem ad modum Ecclesiae Magisterium saepenumero confirmavit (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Centesimus Annus*, 46; PII XII *Radiophonicus nuntius natalicius*, die 24 dec. 1944: AAS 37 (1945) 10 ss.). At popularis regiminis praestantia stat decidit una simul cum bonis quae ipsum exprimit et promovet: procul dubio praecipuae necessariaeque res cuiusque humanae personae sunt dignitas, reverentia erga eius iura sancta et non alienabilia, necnon “bonum commune” suscipiendum tamquam finis et iudicium de vita politica agenda. His principiis subesse non possunt “maiores partes” opinionum temporariae et mobiles, sed tantum obiectiva moralis lex agnita ad quam, ut ad moralem legem in hominis corde insculptam, ipsa civilis lex referri debet. Si autem, ob omnium conscientiae miseriam obtenebrationem, sceptica ratio in dubium prima principia quoque moralis legis devocat, ipsa democratica institutio funditus evertitur atque ad meracam machinationem redigitur, quae re diversa dissonaque commoda moderatur (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Veritatis Splendor*, 97 et 99).

Aliquis cogitaverit hanc etiam rationem, meliore deficiente re, propter socialem pacem esse existimandam. Quamvis veritatis quaedam ratio sit hac in aestimatione agnoscenda, difficile non est conspiciere sine morali aequo praesidio ne populare quidem regimen solidam pacem praestare posse, eo magis quod pax, quae non cuiusque hominis excellentia et dignitate mensuratur neque mutuo inter homines adiumento, haud raro fallax evadit. Nam ipsi in regiminibus ubi quisque suam gerit partem, beneficia et commoda saepe pro fortioribus ordinantur, cum sint ipsi habiliores non modo ad potestatis mechanemata agenda, verum ad consensum fingendum. Hac in rerum condicione, populare regimen facile fit inane verbum.

71. Instat itaque, pro adveniente societate proque popularis regiminis salubri incremento, ut rursus detegantur humana moralisque bona capitalia et nativa, quae ab ipsa hominum veritate manent, quaeque personae dignitatem expriment et tueantur: bona idcirco, quae nulla persona, nulla maior pars, nulla Civitas constituere, umquam immutare vel delere potest, sed ab iis debent dumtaxat agnoscere, servari et provehi. Repetenda sunt igitur hac sub ratione *primaria capita quae necessitudinem inter legem civilem et moralem legem complectuntur*, quae nempe Ecclesia exhibet, quaeque ad praeclarum translaticiumque iuris patrimonium hominum pertinent.

Certe *legis civilis officium* aliud est et angustius ac moralis legis. Verum “in nullo vitae spatio lex civilis se substituere potest in locum conscientiae, nec normas edere, quae ipsius competentiam excedant” (CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Donum Vitae*, II), quae quidem in eo sita est ut rationem habeat boni

<sup>88</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 46: AAS 83 (1991), 850; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message (24 December 1944): AAS 37 (1945) 10-20.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 97 and 99: AAS 85 (1993), 1209-1211.

<sup>90</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Instruction on Respect for Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), III: AAS 80 (1988), 98.

peace and of public morality.<sup>91</sup> The real purpose of civil law is to guarantee an ordered social coexistence in true justice, so that all may “lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way” (1 *Tim* 2:2). Precisely for this reason, civil law must ensure that all members of society enjoy respect for certain fundamental rights which innately belong to the person, rights which every positive law must recognize and guarantee. First and fundamental among these is the inviolable right to life of every innocent human being. While public authority can sometimes choose not to put a stop to something which--were it prohibited--would cause more serious harm,<sup>92</sup> it can never presume to legitimize as a right of individuals--even if they are the majority of the members of society--an offence against other persons caused by the disregard of so fundamental a right as the right to life. The legal toleration of abortion or of euthanasia can in no way claim to be based on respect for the conscience of others, precisely because society has the right and the duty to protect itself against the abuses which can occur in the name of conscience and under the pretext of freedom.<sup>93</sup>

In the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII pointed out that “it is generally accepted today that the common good is best safeguarded when personal rights and duties are guaranteed. The chief concern of civil authorities must therefore be to ensure that these rights are recognized, respected, co-ordinated, defended and promoted, and that each individual is enabled to perform his duties more easily. For ‘to safeguard the inviolable rights of the human person, and to facilitate the performance of his duties, is the principal duty of every public authority’. Thus any government which refused to recognize human rights or acted in violation of them, would not only fail in its duty; its decrees would be wholly lacking in binding force”.<sup>94</sup>

72. The doctrine on the necessary *conformity of civil law with the moral law* is in continuity with the whole tradition of the Church. This is clear once more from John XXIII’s Encyclical:

“Authority is a postulate of the moral order and derives from God. Consequently, laws and decrees enacted in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience...; indeed, the passing of such laws undermines the very nature of authority and results in shameful abuse”.<sup>95</sup> This is the clear teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who writes that “human law is law inasmuch as it is in conformity with right reason and thus derives from the eternal law. But when a law is contrary to reason, it is called an unjust law; but in this case it ceases to be a law and becomes instead an act of violence”.<sup>96</sup> And again: “Every law made by man can be called a law

communis personarum per primaria iura agnita et servata, pace retenta et publica moralitate (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 7). Legis namque civilis munus in sociali convictu ex ordine praestando consistit in vera iustitia, ut universi “quietam et tranquillam vitam agamus in omni pietate et castitate” (1 *Tim*, 2, 2). Hanc ipsam propter causam omnibus societatis participibus lex civilis de nonnullis praecipuis iuribus tutandis conquire debet, quae naturaliter ad personam pertinent quaeque agnoscere servareque debet quaevis condita lex. Primum capitaleque ex omnibus ius est inviolabile vitae quo omnes homines fruuntur innoxii. Si quidem publica auctoritas nonnumquam illud abdicare potest quod prohibuit gravius infert detrimentum (S. THOMAE *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 96, a. 2), numquam tamen comprobare potest, veluti singulorum ius – etiamsi hi maiorem obtinerent societatis partem – aliis personis illatam plagam per eorum neglectum tam principale ius quod ad ius vitae pertinet. Quod autem ex lege abortum et euthanasiam tolerat, hoc nullo pacto cum conscientia aliorum observanda et colenda necti potest, propterea quod societas ius habet officiumque se tuendi adversus abusus qui conscientiae nomine ac sub libertatis obtentu occurrere possunt (Cfr. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7).

In Litteris encyclicis “*Pacem in Terris*” Ioannes XXIII opportunè docuit: “Verum cum nostra aetate commune bonum maxime in humanae personae servatis iuribus et officiis consistere putetur, tum praecipue in eo sint oportet curatorum rei publicae partes ut hinc iura agnoscantur, colantur, inter se componantur, defendantur, provehantur, illinc suis quisque officiis fungi possit. Etenim «inviolabilia iura tueri, hominum propria, atque curare, ut facilius quisque suis muneribus defungatur, hoc cuiusvis publicae potestatis officium est praecipuum». Quam ob causam, si qui magistratus iura hominis vel non agnoscant vel violent, non tantum ab officio ipsi suo discedant, sed etiam quae ab ipsis sint imperata, omni obligandi vi careant” (IOANNIS XXIII *Pacem in Terris*, II; interior locus est PII XII ex *Nuntio Radiophonico* dato in Sollemnitate Pentecostes, die 1 iun. 1941: AAS 33 (1941) 200. Eodem de argumento repetuntur in adnotatione PII XI *Mit Brennender Sorge*, die 14 mar. 1937: AAS 29 (1937) 79; PII XII *Nuntius radiophonicus natalicius*, die 24 dec. 1942: AAS 35 (1943) 9 ss.).

72. Constantem persequitur Ecclesiae traditionem disciplina illa quae docet necessario debere *civilem legem convenire cum lege morali*, sicut ex Ioannis XXIII Litteris encyclicis modo memoratis rursus liquet:

“Quandoquidem imperii facultas ex ordine rerum incorporalium exigitur atque a Deo manat, si forte rei publicae moderatores contra eundem ordinem atque adeo contra Dei voluntatem vel leges ferunt, vel aliquid praecipiant, tunc neque latae leges, neque datae facultates civium animos obstringere possunt...; immo vero tunc auctoritas ipsa plane corrumpitur, et foeda sequitur iniuria” (IOANNIS XXIII *Pacem in Terris*, II). Haec est sancti Thomae conspicua doctrina, qui inter alia scribit: “Lex humana intantum habet rationem, inquantum est secundum rationem rectam; et secundum hoc manifestum est quod a lege aeterna derivatur. Inquantum a ratione recedit, sic dicitur lex

<sup>91</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 96, a. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), II; AAS 55 (1963), 273-274. The internal quote is from Pius XII, Radio Message of Pentecost 1941 (1 June 1941): AAS 33 (1941), 200. On this topic, the Encyclical cites: Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Mit brennender Sorge* (14 March 1937): AAS 29 (1937), 159; Encyclical Letter *Divini Redemptoris* (19 March 1937), III: AAS 29 (1937), 79; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message (24 December 1942): AAS 35 (1943), 9-24.

<sup>95</sup> Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), II: *loc cit.*, 271.

<sup>96</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 93, a. 3, ad 2um.



insofar as it derives from the natural law. But if it is somehow opposed to the natural law, then it is not really a law but rather a corruption of the law”.<sup>97</sup>

Now the first and most immediate application of this teaching concerns a human law which disregards the fundamental right and source of all other rights which is the right to life, a right belonging to every individual. Consequently, laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law. It might be objected that such is not the case in euthanasia, when it is requested with full awareness by the person involved. But any State which made such a request legitimate and authorized it to be carried out would be legalizing a case of suicide-murder, contrary to the fundamental principles of absolute respect for life and of the protection of every innocent life.

In this way the State contributes to lessening respect for life and opens the door to ways of acting which are destructive of trust in relations between people. Laws which authorize and promote abortion and euthanasia are therefore radically opposed not only to the good of the individual but also to the common good; as such they are completely lacking in authentic juridical validity. Disregard for the right to life, precisely because it leads to the killing of the person whom society exists to serve, is what most directly conflicts with the possibility of achieving the common good. Consequently, a civil law authorizing abortion or euthanasia ceases by that very fact to be a true, morally binding civil law.

73. Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a *grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection*. From the very beginnings of the Church, the apostolic preaching reminded Christians of their duty to obey legitimately constituted public authorities (cf. *Rom 13:1-7*; *1 Pet 2:13-14*), but at the same time it firmly warned that “we must obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29*). In the Old Testament, precisely in regard to threats against life, we find a significant example of resistance to the unjust command of those in authority. After Pharaoh ordered the killing of all newborn males, the Hebrew midwives refused. “They did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live” (*Ex 1:17*). But the ultimate reason for their action should be noted: “*the midwives feared God*” (*ibid.*). It is precisely from obedience to God--to whom alone is due that fear which is acknowledgment of his absolute sovereignty--that the strength and the courage to resist unjust human laws are born. It is the strength and the courage of those prepared even to be imprisoned or put to the sword, in the certainty that this is what makes for “the endurance and faith of the saints” (*Rev 13:10*).

iniqua; et sic non habet rationem legis, sed magis violentiae cuiusdam” (S. THOMAE *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIæ, q. 93, a. 3, ad 2um). Tum etiam: “Unde omnis lex humanitus posita intantum habet de ratione legis, in quantum a lege naturae derivatur. Si vero in aliquo a lege naturali discordet, iam non erit lex, sed legis corruptio” (*Ibid.*, Ia-IIæ, q. 95, a. 2. S. Thomas memorat S. Augustinum: «Non videtur esse lex, quae iusta non fuerit», *De Libero Arbitrio*, I, 5, 11: PL 2, 1227). Ante omnia profecto artiusque talis doctrina ad legem humanam refertur, quae primum primordialeque vitae ius non agnoscit, ius dicimus quod est cuiusque hominis proprium. Sic leges, quae abortu et euthanasia homines innoxios directo interimendos comprobant, prorsus et insanabiliter discrepant inviolabili cum vitae iure, quod ad omnes homines pertinet, ideoque negant prae lege omnes homines esse aequales. Aliquis autem contra dicat minime istud referri ad euthanasiam, cum ipsa a conscio omnino subiecto postulatur. At si Natio quaedam legitime huiusmodi postulatum admittat idemque perfici sinat, lege suidicium-homicidium comprobet, adversus capitalia principia quae vitam ab omni re expeditam contingunt et omnis vitae innoxiae tutelam.

Quae res efficit ut vitae observantia hebetetur et iter ad periculosos fiducia habitus in socialibus necessitudinibus pateat. Leges igitur quae permittunt euthanasiam abortumque iisque favent, radicitus sunt absonae non modo a singulorum bono, verum et bono communi, atque idcirco iudiciali carent vera vi. Etenim iuris vitae negatio, propterea quod prae se gerit personae interitum, cui inserviendi causa existit societas, altius quidem et sine spe bono communi perficiendo opponitur. Ex quo consequitur legem civilem iam desinere veram esse legem civilem quae moraliter obstringat, cum abortum euthanasiamve comprobat.

73. Abortus ergo et euthanasia crimina sunt quae nulla humana lex potest rata facere. Huiusmodi leges non modo conscientiam non devinciunt, verum *graviter nominatimque compellunt ut iisdem per conscientiae repugnantiam officiantur*. Ipsa ex Ecclesiae origine, apostolica praedicatio praecepit ut publicis magistratibus legitime constitutis parerent christiani (Cf. *Rom. 13, 1-7*; *1 Petr. 2, 13-14*), eodem tamen tempore hoc firmiter monuit: “Oboedire oportet Deo magis quam hominibus” (*Act. 5, 29*). In Vetere iam Foedere, quoad minas adversus vitam, insigne invenitur exemplum quo auctoritati officitur iniuriose imperanti. Pharaoni, qui cunctos modo natos necari iusserat, Hebraeorum obstetrices sunt refragatae. Eae “non fecerunt iuxta praeceptum regis Aegypti, sed conservabant mares” (*Ex. 1, 17*). At sapiens huius mentis ratio est respicienda: “*Timuerunt autem obstetrices Deum*” (*Ibid.*). Ex ipsa Deo obtemperazione – cui tribuendus est uni ille timor qui secum fert eiusdem absoluti dominatus agnitionem – vis animusque oriuntur iniquis hominum legibus reluctandi. Vis quidem et animus sunt illius qui promptus est in vincula conici vel gladio necari, pro certo illud habens: “Hic est patientia et fides sanctorum” (*Apoc. 13, 10*).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-11, q. 95, a. 2. Aquinas quotes SAINT AUGUSTINE: “Non videtur esse lex, quae iusta non fuerit”, *De Libero Arbitrio*, I, 5, 11: PL 32. 1227.

In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore never licit to obey it, or to “take part in a propaganda campaign in favour of such a law, or vote for it”.<sup>98</sup>

A particular problem of conscience can arise in cases where a legislative vote would be decisive for the passage of a more restrictive law, aimed at limiting the number of authorized abortions, in place of a more permissive law already passed or ready to be voted on. Such cases are not infrequent. It is a fact that while in some parts of the world there continue to be campaigns to introduce laws favouring abortion, often supported by powerful international organizations, in other nations--particularly those which have already experienced the bitter fruits of such permissive legislation--there are growing signs of a rethinking in this matter. In a case like the one just mentioned, when it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at *limiting the harm* done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality. This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects.

74. The passing of unjust laws often raises difficult problems of conscience for morally upright people with regard to the issue of cooperation, since they have a right to demand not to be forced to take part in morally evil actions. Sometimes the choices which have to be made are difficult; they may require the sacrifice of prestigious professional positions or the relinquishing of reasonable hopes of career advancement. In other cases, it can happen that carrying out certain actions, which are provided for by legislation that overall is unjust, but which in themselves are indifferent, or even positive, can serve to protect human lives under threat. There may be reason to fear, however, that willingness to carry out such actions will not only cause scandal and weaken the necessary opposition to attacks on life, but will gradually lead to further capitulation to a mentality of permissiveness.

In order to shed light on this difficult question, it is necessary to recall the general principles concerning *cooperation in evil actions*. Christians, like all people of good will, are called upon under grave obligation of conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God’s law. Indeed, from the moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil. Such cooperation occurs when an action, either by its very nature or by the form it takes in a concrete situation, can be defined as a direct participation in an act against innocent human life or a sharing in the immoral intention of the person committing it. This cooperation can never be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it. Each individual in fact has moral responsibility for the acts which he personally performs; no one can be exempted from this responsibility, and on the basis of it everyone will be judged by God himself (cf. *Rom 2:6; 14:12*).

To refuse to take part in committing an injustice is not only a moral duty; it is also a basic human right. Were this not so, the human person would be forced to perform an action intrinsically incompatible with human dignity, and in this

Si ergo de lege agitur suapte natura iniqua, ut est quae abortum permittit et euthanasiam, numquam licet eidem se accommodare, nec quisquam “potest esse particeps alicuius motus publicae opinionis qui eiusmodi legi faveat, neque potest latis suffragiis sustinere” (CONGR. PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI *Declaratio de abortu procurato*, 22, die 18 nov. 1974: AAS 66 (1974) 744).

De conscientia nominatim agitari potest quibusdam forte evenientibus casibus, cum legatorum suffragia necessaria sunt ut strictiori legi faveatur, quae scilicet circumscribat abortuum lege admissorum numerum pro laxiore lege quae iam viget vel suffragiis probanda. Huiusmodi eventus non sunt rari. Illud enim contingit, dum orbis terrarum quibusdam in partibus leges subinde pro abortu inducuntur, suadentibus haud raro valentibus internationalibus institutis, aliis tamen in Nationibus – in illis potissimum quae iam infelicitur id genus leges sunt expertae – signa quaedam existunt mutatarum sententiarum. Superiore in casu, quoties vitari antiquarive non potest abortus lex, liquet legatum, qui palam alioquin vulgoque abortui adversetur, suffragari licite posse illis consiliis quae eiusmodi legis damna minuire velint et periculosum effectum extenuare qui sive culturam sive moralitatem publicam respicit. Hac enim agendi ratione officium suum non praestat illicitae vel iniustae legi; potius vero aequus opportunusque inducitur conatus ut eius iniquae cohibeantur species.

74. Iniquae legum lationes prae hominibus probis saepe conscientiae quaestiones difficiles explicatu ponunt quae sociatam operam respiciunt, sui ipsius iure officiose confirmato, ne quis compellatur ad aliquod faciendum quod moraliter est malum. Nonnumquam id quod eligitur est acerbum, et postulare potest ut patienter alicuius ordinis artes deserantur vel ampliores praetermittantur forte eventuri gradus quorundam honorum, qui legitime affectantur. Aliis in casibus usu venire potest ut quaedam peracta per se aequi ponderis vel etiam iusta, quae in contextum quandam inseruntur legum plerarumque iniquarum, humanas servant vitas minis affectas. At contra congruus timor occurrere potest ne proclivitas ad haec agenda non modo secum scandalum ferat ac necessariam simul oppositionem extenuet vertendam in conamina contra vitam, verum pedetemptim etiam ad concedendum impellat permittentibus rationibus.

Ad hanc moralem quaestionem difficilem collustrandam principia universalis *de participatione cum malis actibus* sunt repetenda. Christiani, aequae ac omnes bonae voluntatis homines, gravi conscientiae officio concitantur ne suam operam expresse dent ad ea patranda, quae, tametsi civilibus praescriptis conceduntur, Dei Legi officiunt. Etenim, morali spectata re, non licet expresse cum malo operam sociare. Adesse consociatam operam constat cum perfectum opus, vel suapte natura vel ob speciem quam in certo quodam contextu ipsum praebet, se patefacit directo veluti actum contra vitam hominis innocentis patratum aut veluti immorale propositum cum agenti principe communicantem. Sociata haec opera numquam comprobari potest, neque sub alterius libertatis servandae obtentu, neque ratione habitae legis civilis id permittentis et postulantis: actu enim quos quisque per se agit est moralis responsalitas, de qua nemo declinare potest et de qua quisque ab ipso Deo iudicabitur (Cfr. *Rom. 2, 6; 14, 12*).

Non modo moralis officii est proprium, verum capitalis iuris humani, participationem detectare ad iniuriam faciendam. Nisi ita esset, persona humana actum patrare cogere suapte natura contrarium suae

<sup>98</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (18 November 1974), No. 22: AAS 66 (1974), 744.

way human freedom itself, the authentic meaning and purpose of which are found in its orientation to the true and the good, would be radically compromised. What is at stake therefore is an essential right which, precisely as such, should be acknowledged and protected by civil law. In this sense, the opportunity to refuse to take part in the phases of consultation, preparation and execution of these acts against life should be guaranteed to physicians, health-care personnel, and directors of hospitals, clinics and convalescent facilities. Those who have recourse to conscientious objection must be protected not only from legal penalties but also from any negative effects on the legal, disciplinary, financial and professional plane.

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lk 10:27): “promote” life

**75.** God’s commandments teach us the way of life. *The negative moral precepts*, which declare that the choice of certain actions is morally unacceptable, have an absolute value for human freedom: they are valid always and everywhere, without exception. They make it clear that the choice of certain ways of acting is radically incompatible with the love of God and with the dignity of the person created in his image. Such choices cannot be redeemed by the goodness of any intention or of any consequence; they are irrevocably opposed to the bond between persons; they contradict the fundamental decision to direct one’s life to God.<sup>99</sup>

In this sense, the negative moral precepts have an extremely important positive function. The “no” which they unconditionally require makes clear the absolute limit beneath which free individuals cannot lower themselves. At the same time they indicate the minimum which they must respect and from which they must start out in order to say “yes” over and over again, a “yes” which will gradually embrace the *entire horizon of the good* (cf. Mt 5:48). The commandments, in particular the negative moral precepts, are the beginning and the first necessary stage of the journey towards freedom. As Saint Augustine writes, “the beginning of freedom is to be free from crimes... like murder, adultery, fornication, theft, fraud, sacrilege and so forth. Only when one stops committing these crimes (and no Christian should commit them), one begins to lift up one’s head towards freedom. But this is only the beginning of freedom, not perfect freedom”.<sup>100</sup>

**76.** The commandment “You shall not kill” thus establishes the point of departure for the start of true freedom. It leads us to promote life actively, and to develop particular ways of thinking and acting which serve life. In this way we exercise our responsibility towards the persons entrusted to us and we show, in deeds and in truth, our gratitude to God for the great gift of life (cf. Ps 139:13-14).

The Creator has entrusted man’s life to his responsible concern, not to make arbitrary use of it, but to preserve it with wisdom and to care for it with loving fidelity. The God of the Covenant has entrusted the life of every individual to his or her fellow human beings, brothers and sisters, according to the law of reciprocity in giving and receiving, of self-giving and of the acceptance of others. In the fullness of time, by taking flesh and giving his life for us, the Son of God showed what heights and depths this law of reciprocity can reach. With the gift of his Spirit, Christ gives new content and meaning to the law of

eiusdem dignitati, atque hoc modo illius ipsa libertas, cuius sensus finesque germani sunt ad verum et bonum commune versi, in discrimen penitus incideret. Itaque de principali iure agitur quod, quia tale est, lex civilis sancire debet et tueri. Has propter rationes medicis, sanitatis opificibus, valetudinariorum et nosocomiorum praesidibus, facultas danda est recusandi participationem in deliberatione, praeparatione atque executione huiusmodi adversus vitam facinororum. Qui conscientiae repugnantiae nomine ita se gerit tuendus est non modo ut ei caveatur in poenis dandis, verum etiam a quovis detrimento respiciente legem, animadversiones, rem familiarem artemque.

“Diligens... proximum tuum sicut teipsum” (Luc. 10, 27): vitam “promove”

75. Dei mandata vitae viam nos docent. *Praecepta moralia negantia*, quae scilicet nonnullos actus moraliter esse respuendos significant, pro humana libertate absoluta gaudent vi: semper et ubique vigent, sine exceptione. Ostendunt enim electionem quarundam agendi rationum omnino amori in Deum repugnare et personae humanae dignitati, quae ad eius imaginem est creata: talis igitur electio nullo bono proposito iustificatur nullaque rerum consecutione; funditus communioni inter personas obsistit, primario consilio propriam vitam ad Deum dirigendi omnino adversatur (Cfr. *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, nn. 1753-1755; IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Veritatis Splendor*, 81-82).

Hoc iam sensu moralia praeepta negantia pergravem vim habent affirmantem: illud “non” quod illa sine condicione postulant limen significat quod transcendere non potest et infra quod homo liber descendere non potest, et pariter minimum quiddam indicat ab ipso homine servandum et ex quo proficisci debet ad multimodis illud “sic” dicendum, unde *quaevis provincia bonorum* magis magisque occupetur (Cfr. *Matth.* 5, 48). Mandata, nominatim negantia moralia praeepta, initium sunt ac paene prima statio, quae est necessaria ad iter in libertatem faciendum: “Prima est ergo libertas, carere criminibus... sicut est homicidium, adulterium, aliqua immunditia fornicationis, furtum, fraus, sacrilegium et cetera huiusmodi. Cum coeperit ea non habere homo (debet autem non habere omnis christianus homo), incipit caput erigere ad libertatem, sed ista inchoata est, non perfecta libertas” (S. AUGUSTINI *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 41, 10: CCL 36, 363; cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Veritatis Splendor*, 13).

76. Mandatum illud “non occides” itineris cuiusdam statuit initium verae libertatis, quae nos concitat ut naviter vitam provehamus atque mores habitusque certos efficiamus ad eius servitium: ita agentes officia nostra exhibemus personis nobis demandatis atque rebus veritateque Deo animum nostrum gratum ob magnum vitae beneficium declaramus (Cfr. *Ps.* 139 (138), 13-14).

Creator concedit hominis vitam eius responsali industriae non ut ad lubitum ea utatur, sed ut eandem prudenter custodiat eamque amabili fidelitate temperet. Foederis Deus cuiusque hominis vitam alii homini eius fratri concedit secundum reciprocata dandi et accipiendi officia, secundum donationem sui et alterius acceptionem. In plenitudine temporis cum homo factus est atque vitam pro hominibus tradidit, Dei Filii significavit ad quam altitudinem et profundum haec mutui auxilii lex pervenire posset. Spiritus sui donatione Christus materiam novasque significaciones

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1755-1755; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 81-82: AAS 85 (1993), 1198-1199.

<sup>100</sup> *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 41, 10: CCL 36, 363; cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 13: AAS 85 (1993) 1144.

reciprocity, to our being entrusted to one another. The Spirit who builds up communion in love creates between us a new fraternity and solidarity, a true reflection of the mystery of mutual self-giving and receiving proper to the Most Holy Trinity. The Spirit becomes the new law which gives strength to believers and awakens in them a responsibility for sharing the gift of self and for accepting others, as a sharing in the boundless love of Jesus Christ himself.

77. This new law also gives spirit and shape to the commandment “You shall not kill”. For the Christian it involves an absolute imperative to respect, love and promote the life of even brother and sister, in accordance with the requirements of God’s bountiful love in Jesus Christ. “He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn 3:16).

The commandment “You shall not kill”, even in its more positive aspects of respecting, loving and promoting human life, is binding on every individual human being. It resounds in the moral conscience of everyone as an irrepressible echo of the original covenant of God the Creator with mankind. It can be recognized by everyone through the light of reason and it can be observed thanks to the mysterious working of the Spirit who, blowing where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8), comes to and involves every person living in this world.

It is therefore a service of love which we are all committed to ensure to our neighbour, that his or her life may be always defended and promoted, especially when it is weak or threatened. It is not only a personal but a social concern which we must all foster: a concern to make unconditional respect for human life the foundation of a renewed society.

We are asked to love and honour the life of every man and woman and to work with perseverance and courage so that our time, marked by all too many signs of death, may at last witness the establishment of a new culture of life, the fruit of the culture of truth and of love.

#### Chapter IV

##### *You did it to me*

##### For a New Culture of Human Life

*“You are God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9): a people of life and for life*

78. The Church has received the Gospel as a proclamation and a source of joy and salvation. She has received it as a gift from Jesus, sent by the Father “to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18). She has received it through the Apostles, sent by Christ to the whole world (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19-20). Born from this evangelizing activity, the Church hears every day the echo of Saint Paul’s words of warning: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). As Paul VI wrote, “*evangelization is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize*”.<sup>101</sup>

Evangelization is an all-embracing, progressive activity through which the Church participates in the prophetic, priestly and royal mission of the Lord Jesus. It is therefore inextricably linked to *preaching, celebration and the service of charity*. Evangelization is a *profoundly ecclesial act*, which calls all the various workers of the Gospel to action, according to their individual charisms and ministry.

This is also the case with regard to the proclamation of the *Gospel of life*, an

addit legi mutuum subsidiorum, ipsi videlicet hominis demandationi homini. Spiritus, qui in amore communionis est artifex, novam fraternitatem novamque solidaritatem inter homines constituit, quod est simulacrum mysterii mutuae donationis et acceptionis sanctissimae nempe Trinitatis. Spiritus ipse nova fit lex, quae fidelibus vim praebet eorumque concitat responsalitem ut mutuum sui donationem et alterius acceptionem experiantur, ipsum Iesu Christi amorem participantem et quidem ad eius mensuram.

77. Nova ex hac lege etiam mandatum “non occides” fovetur et fingitur. Christiano ipsi ergo id tandem importat iussum cuiusque fratris vitam observandi, amandi, provehendi, secundum postulatam et rationis dilectionis Dei in Christo: “Ille pro nobis animam suam posuit; et nos debemus pro fratribus animas ponere” (1 Jo. 3, 16).

Mandatum “non occides”, etiam in eo quod flagitat observantiam amorem et vitae humanae provectionem, singulos homines vincit. Id namque in cuiusque morali conscientia personat tamquam repercussa vox quae deleri non potest, primigenii Foederis Dei cum creatura; ab omnibus agnosci potest rationis sub lumine et servari per arcanum Spiritus ministerium qui ubi vult spirat (Cfr. Jo. 3, 8) atque quemque attingit et complectitur hominem in hoc mundo viventem.

Amoris ideo est servitium omnibus officiose proximo praestandum, ut eius vita custodiatur et usque provehatur, maxime cum debilis est vel minis premitur. Agitur nempe de sollicitudine non modo personali verum et sociali quam omnes colere debemus, locantes tamquam fundamentum renovatae societatis vitae humanae observantiam, nulla inducta condicione.

Rogamur ut cuiusque hominis et mulieris vitam diligamus et observemus atque ut constanter animoseque operemur, ut nostra aetate, quam nimis multa mortiferorum signorum tangunt, nova vitae cultura tandem restituatur quam veritatis amorisque cultus elicit.

#### Caput IV

##### MIHI FECISTIS

##### Pro novo humanae vitae cultu

**“Vos autem populus dei in acquisitionem, ut virtutes annuntietis eius” (1 Petr. 2, 9): populus vitae et pro vita**

78. Receptum quidem Ecclesia Evangelium tamquam laetitiae atque salutis nuntium fontemque. Dono acceptum ab Iesu, a Patre misso “evangelizare pauperibus” (Luc. 4, 18). Per Apostolos id accepit, ab Eo missos in mundum universum (Cfr. Marc. 16, 15; Matth. 28, 19-20). Hoc ex evangelizationis opere orta, Ecclesia cotidie in semet ipsa resonare sentit Apostoli monitorium verbum: “Vae mihi est, si non evangelizavero” (1 Cor. 9, 16). Sicut scripsit Paulus VI: “*Evangelizandi munus habendum est gratia ac vocatio Ecclesiae propria, verissimamque eius indolem exprimit. Ecclesia evangelizandi causa exstat*” (PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14).

Opus quidem generale dynamicumque exstat evangelizatio, utpote quod Ecclesiam implicet in eius participatione muneris prophetici, sacerdotalis atque regalis Domini Iesu. Secum fert idcirco illa uno vinculo copulatos nuntii modos, celebrationis atque ministerii caritatis. Actio est penitus ecclesialis, in causam revocans cunctos diversos Evangelii operarios, ratione habita priorum cuiusque charismatum propriique ministerii.

Ita fit etiam cum agitur de *Evangelio vitae* nuntiando,

<sup>101</sup> Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 14: AAS 68 (1976), 13.

integral part of that Gospel which is Jesus Christ himself. We are at the service of this Gospel, sustained by the awareness that we have received it as a gift and are sent to preach it to all humanity, “to the ends of the earth” (*Acts* 1:8). With humility and gratitude we know that we are the *people of life and for life*, and this is how we present ourselves to everyone.

**79.** We are the *people of life* because God, in his unconditional love, has given us the *Gospel of life* and by this same Gospel we have been transformed and saved. We have been ransomed by the “Author of life” (*Acts* 3:15) at the price of his precious blood (cf. *1 Cor* 6:20; 7:23; *1 Pet* 1:19). Through the waters of Baptism we have been made a part of him (cf. *Rom* 6:4-5; *Col* 2:12), as branches which draw nourishment and fruitfulness from the one tree (cf. *Jn* 15:5). Interiorly renewed by the grace of the Spirit, “who is the Lord and giver of life”, we have become a *people for life* and we are called to act accordingly.

*We have been sent.* For us, being at the service of life is not a boast but rather a duty, born of our awareness of being “God’s own people, that we may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light” (cf. *1 Pet* 2:9). On our journey *we are guided and sustained by the law of love*: a love which has as its source and model the Son of God made man, who “by dying gave life to the world”.<sup>102</sup>

*We have been sent as a people.* Everyone has an obligation to be at the service of life. This is a properly “ecclesial” responsibility, which requires concerted and generous action by all the members and by all sectors of the Christian community. This community commitment does not however eliminate or lessen the responsibility of each *individual*, called by the Lord to “become the neighbour” of everyone: “Go and do likewise” (*Lk* 10:37).

Together we all sense our duty to *preach the Gospel of life*, to *celebrate it* in the Liturgy and in our whole existence, and to *serve it* with the various programmes and structures which support and promote life.

“*That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you*” (*1 Jn* 1:3): *proclaiming the Gospel of life*

**80.** “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us” (*1 Jn* 1:1, 3). *Jesus is the only Gospel*: we have nothing further to say or any other witness to bear.

*To proclaim Jesus is itself to proclaim life.* For Jesus is “the word of life” (*1 Jn* 1:1). In him “life was made manifest” (*1 Jn* 1:2); he himself is “the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us” (*1 Jn* 1:2). By the gift of the Spirit, this same life has been bestowed on us. It is in being destined to life in its fullness, to “eternal life”, that every person’s earthly life acquires its full meaning.

Enlightened by this *Gospel of life*, we feel a need To proclaim it and to bear witness to it in all its *marvellous newness*. Since it is one with Jesus himself, who makes all things new<sup>103</sup> and conquers the “oldness” which comes from sin and leads to death,<sup>104</sup> this Gospel exceeds every human expectation and reveals the sublime heights to which the dignity of the human person is raised through grace. This is how Saint Gregory of Nyssa understands it: “Man, as a being, is

quod est pars explens Evangelium quod est Iesus Christus. Huic Evangelio nos famulamur, roborati illa conscientia nos id dono recepisse nosque missos esse ut idem renuntiemus hominibus cunctis “usque ad ultimum terrae” (*Act.* 1, 8). Humilem ideo gratiamque fovemus conscientiam nos esse populum vitae et pro vita, atque hac sub ratione coram omnibus exhibemus nos.

79. *Populus vitae* sumus quia, amore suo gratuito, *Evangelium vitae* donavit nobis Deus, quo ex Evangelio commutati atque salvati sumus. “Dux vitae” (Cfr. *ibid.* 3, 15) nos recuperavit sanguine suo pretioso (Cfr. *1 Cor.* 6, 20; 7, 23; *1 Petr.* 1, 19) atque per baptismatis lavacrum complantati sumus in eo (Cfr. *Rom.* 6, 4-5; *Col.* 2, 12), sicut palmites ab unica eadem arbore sucum trahentes fertilitatemque (Cfr. *Io.* 15, 5). Intus renovati gratia Spiritus “qui est Dominus vitamque donat”, facti sumus *populus pro vita* atque ut tales nos praebeamus invitatur.

*Mittimur*: servire vitae non est iactatio nobis sed munus, a conscientia oriens nos esse “populum quem Deus acquisivit ut virtutes eius annuntiet” (Cfr. *1 Petr.* 2, 9). Nostro in itinere *nos ducit sustentatque lex amoris*: amor quidem cuius fons et exemplar est Dei Filius homo factus, ipse qui “moriendo vitam dedit mundo” (Cfr. *Missale Romanum*, «Oratio celebranti ante Communionem»).

*Mittimur velut populus*. Munus serviendi vitae omnes atque singulos obstringit. Responsalitas est proprie “ecclesialis”, quae omnium membrorum omniumque christianae communitatis partium compositam beneficamque postulat operam. Sociale tamen munus *cuiusque personae* responsalitem non tollit neque minuit, cui sane Domini mandatum dirigitur ut “proximus fiat” cuiuscumque hominis: “Vade et tu fac similiter” (*Luc.* 10, 37).

Una simul omnes munus persentimus *nuntiandi Evangelium vitae*, *id celebrandi* in liturgia inque tota existentia, *ei serviendi* variis inceptis formisque praesidii et proventus.

**“Quod vidimus et audivimus, annuntiamus et vobis” (1 Io. 1, 3): annuntiare evangelium vitae**

80. “Quod fuit ab initio, quod audivimus, quod vidimus oculis nostris, quod perspeximus, et manus nostrae contractaverunt de Verbo vitae... annuntiamus et vobis, ut et vos communionem habeatis nobiscum” (*Ibid.* 1, 1, 3). *Unicum Evangelium est Iesus*: nihil aliud nobis dicendum et testificandum.

*Vere Iesu nuntius est nuntius vitae*. Ipse enim est “Verbum vitae” (*Ibid.* 1, 1). In eo “vita apparuit” (*Ibid.* 1, 2); immo ipse est “vita aeterna, quae erat coram Patre et apparuit nobis” (*Ibid.*). Haec ipsa vita, per Spiritus donum, homini tributa est. Destinata ad vitam consummatam, “ad vitam aeternam”, cuiusque etiam terrestris vita suam adipiscitur plenam significationem.

Hoc *vitae Evangelio* illuminati, id profecto renuntiamus testificamurque eius in peculiari *inopinataque novitate*, quae id denotat: quoniam aequatur cum ipso Iesu, qui novitatis cuiusque est causa (Cfr. S. IRENAEI *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 34, 1: *SCh* 100/2, 846-847: «Omnem novitatem attulit, semetipsum afferens, qui fuerat annuntiatus») atque dormitor “senectutis” a peccato originem ducentis atque ad mortem vehementis (Cfr. S. THOMAE *In Psalmos Davidis Lectura*, 6, 5:

<sup>102</sup> Cf. *Roman Missal*, prayer of the celebrant before communion.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. SAINT IRENAEUS: “Omnem novitatem attulit, semetipsum afferens, qui fuerat annuntiatus”, *Adversus Haereses*: IV, 34, 1: *SCh* 100/2, 846-847.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, “Peccator inveterascit, recedens a novitate Christi”, *In Psalmos Davidis Lectura*: 6, 5.

of no account; he is dust, grass, vanity. But once he is adopted by the God of the universe as a son, he becomes part of the family of that Being, whose excellence and greatness no one can see, hear or understand. What words, thoughts or flight of the spirit can praise the superabundance of this grace? Man surpasses his nature: mortal, he becomes immortal; perishable, he becomes imperishable; fleeting, he becomes eternal; human, he becomes divine”.<sup>105</sup>

Gratitude and joy at the incomparable dignity of man impel us to share this message with everyone: “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us” (1 Jn 1:3). We need to bring the *Gospel of life* to the heart of every man and woman and to make it penetrate every part of society.

**81.** This involves above all proclaiming *the core* of this Gospel. It is the proclamation of a living God who is close to us, who calls us to profound communion with himself and awakens in us the certain hope of eternal life. It is the affirmation of the inseparable connection between the person, his life and his bodiliness. It is the presentation of human life as a life of relationship, a gift of God, the fruit and sign of his love. It is the proclamation that Jesus has a unique relationship with every person, which enables us to see in every human face the face of Christ. It is the call for a “sincere gift of self” as the fullest way to realize our personal freedom.

It also involves making clear all *the consequences* of this Gospel. These can be summed up as follows: human life, as a gift of God, is sacred and inviolable. For this reason procured abortion and euthanasia are absolutely unacceptable. Not only must human life not be taken, but it must be protected with loving concern. The meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love, and in this light human sexuality and procreation reach their true and full significance. Love also gives meaning to suffering and death; despite the mystery which surrounds them, they can become saving events. Respect for life requires that science and technology should always be at the service of man and his integral development. Society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person’s life.

**82.** To be truly a people at the service of life we must propose these truths constantly and courageously from the very first proclamation of the Gospel, and thereafter *in catechesis, in the various forms of preaching, in personal dialogue and in all educational activity*. Teachers, catechists and theologians have the task of emphasizing the *anthropological reasons* upon which respect for every human life is based. In this way, by making the newness of the *Gospel of life* shine forth, we can also help everyone discover in the light of reason and of personal experience how the Christian message fully reveals what man is and the meaning of his being and existence. We shall find important points of contact and dialogue also with nonbelievers, in our common commitment to the establishment of a new culture of life.

Faced with so many opposing points of view, and a widespread rejection of sound doctrine concerning human life, we can feel that Paul’s entreaty to

«Peccator inveterascit, recedens a novitate Christi»), hoc Evangelium omnem hominis expectationem excedit patefacitque quas ad sublimas attollatur celsitudines per gratiae donum personae humanae dignitas. His verbis sanctus Gregorius Nyssenus eam contemplatur: “Is qui pro nihilo in rebus universis reputatus est homo, qui cinis, qui fenum, qui vanitas est, conciliatur, atque in locum filii assumitur a Deo rerum universarum. Quae gratiarum actio huic beneficio par inveniri potest? quae vox, quae sententia, quis cogitationis motus, quibus insuperabile beneficium celebretur? Excedit homo suam ipsius naturam, immortalis ex mortali; ex fragili atque caduco, integer et incorruptus; ex diario atque temporario, sempiternus; in summa, Deus ex homine evadens” (S. GREGORII NYSSENI *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VII: PG 44, 1280). Grata beneficii memoria atque laetitia de hominis immensa dignitate impellunt nos ut nuntii huius omnes reddamus participes: “Quod vidimus et audivimus, annuntiamus et vobis, ut et vos communionem habeatis nobiscum” (1 Jo. 1, 3). Perveniat oportet *Evangelium vitae* ad cuiusque viri mulierisque cor idemque in totius societatis intimos sensus immittatur.

81. Agitur in primis de huius Evangelii *intima parte* annuntianda. Est quidem nuntius Dei viventis et proximi, qui nos vocat ad altam communionem secum nosque ducit ad vitae aeternae certam spem; exstat illa confirmatio altissimae necessitudinis intercedentis inter humanam personam, eius vitam eiusque corporalitatem; est vitae humanae demonstratio veluti vitae cognitionis, doni a Deo recepti, eius amoris fructus simulque notae; renuntiatio est singularis Iesu vinculi cum unoquoque homine, cuius vi agnoscitur in cuiusvis hominis vultu ipsius Christi vultus; significatio est “sinceri doni sui ipsius” veluti munus atque locus plenae effectiois propriae libertatis. Eodem tamen tempore enumerandae sunt huius ipsius Evangelii *consecutiones*, quae ita summam perstringi possunt: vita humana, Dei donum pretiosum, sacra et inviolabilis est, eaque de causa, separatim, absolute reiciuntur abortus procuratus atque euthanasia; hominis vita non modo interimenda non est, sed amatoria diligentia tuenda; significationem suam invenit vita in amore recepto atque tradito, sub cuius prospectu plenam adipiscuntur veritatem sexualitatis humanae generatio; hoc in amore dolores quoque et obitus sensum accipiunt atque quamvis maneat mysterium quo involvuntur, fieri possunt salutis eventus; erga vitam observantia postulat ut scientia atque technica ars semper in bonum hominis dirigantur inque eius integram progressionem; a tota hominum societate colenda tuenda atque provehenda est cuiusque humanae personae dignitas, quovis temporis momento atque qualibet in eius vitae condicione.

82. Ut nos praestemus populum vitae servientem constanter audenterque hae doctrinae nobis sunt proponendae iam inde a prima Evangelii nuntiatione atque, dein, *in catechesi inque diversis praedicationis formis, in personali dialogo atque qualibet in institutoria ratione*. Praeceptorum stat munus et educatorum catechistarum theologorumque apta ponendi in luce *anthropologicas rationes*, reverentiam cuiusvis hominis vitae constituentes atque sustinentes. Hoc modo, dum germanam *Evangelii vitae* collustramus novitatem, omnibus auxilium ministrare poterimus ad detegendum, sub rationis experientiaeque lumine, qua via christianus nuntius hominem plane illustret eiusque naturae et existientiae significationem; praestantes inveniemus opportunitates congressionis et dialogi etiam cum non credentibus, qui una simul conamur novam vitae culturam provehere.

Dissimilibus admodum vocibus circumsaepos, dum sana de hominis vita doctrina a multis reicitur, ad nos

<sup>105</sup> *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VII: PG 44, 1280.

Timothy is also addressed to us: “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). This exhortation should resound with special force in the hearts of those members of the Church who directly share, in different ways, in her mission as “teacher” of the truth. May it resound above all for us who are *Bishops*: we are the first ones called to be untiring preachers of the *Gospel of life*. We are also entrusted with the task of ensuring that the doctrine which is once again being set forth in this Encyclical is faithfully handed on in its integrity. We must use appropriate means to defend the faithful from all teaching which is contrary to it. We need to make sure that in theological faculties, seminaries and Catholic institutions sound doctrine is taught, explained and more fully investigated.<sup>106</sup> May Paul’s exhortation strike a chord in all *theologians, pastors, teachers* and in all those responsible for *catechesis and the formation of consciences*. Aware of their specific role, may they never be so grievously irresponsible as to betray the truth and their own mission by proposing personal ideas contrary to the *Gospel of life* as faithfully presented and interpreted by the Magisterium.

In the proclamation of this Gospel, we must not fear hostility or unpopularity, and we must refuse any compromise or ambiguity which might conform us to the world’s way of thinking (cf. Rom 12:2). We must be *in the world* but not of *the world* (cf. Jn 15:19; 17:16), drawing our strength from Christ, who by his Death and Resurrection has overcome the world (cf. Jn 16:33).

“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14): celebrating the *Gospel of life*

**83.** Because we have been sent into the world as a “people for life”, our proclamation must also become a *genuine celebration of the Gospel of life*. This celebration, with the evocative power of its gestures, symbols and rites, should become a precious and significant setting in which the beauty and grandeur of this Gospel is handed on.

For this to happen, we need first of all to *foster*, in ourselves and in others, a *contemplative outlook*.<sup>107</sup> Such an outlook arises from faith in the God of life, who has created every individual as a “wonder” (cf. Ps 139:14). It is the outlook of those who see life in its deeper meaning, who grasp its utter gratuitousness, its beauty and its invitation to freedom and responsibility. It is the outlook of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the Creator and seeing in every person his living image (cf. Gen 1:27; Ps 8:5). This outlook does not give in to discouragement when confronted by those who are sick, suffering, outcast or at death’s door. Instead, in all these situations it feels challenged to find meaning, and precisely in these circumstances it is open to perceiving in the face of every person a call to encounter, dialogue and solidarity.

It is time for all of us to adopt this outlook, and with deep religious awe to rediscover the ability to *revere and honour every person*, as Paul VI invited us to do in one of his first Christmas messages.<sup>108</sup> Inspired by this contemplative outlook, the new people of the redeemed cannot but respond with *songs of joy, praise and thanksgiving for the priceless gift of life*, for the mystery of every

etiam dirigitur Pauli supplicatio Timotheo dicta: “Praedica verbum, insta opportune, importune, argue, increpa, obsecra in omni longanimitate et doctrina” (2 Tim. 4, 2). Resonet oportet adhortatio haec in corde eorum quotquot in Ecclesia altius, quamvis diversa ratione, eius participant munus veritatis “magistrae”. Resonet in primis pro nobis *Episcopis*: a nobis ante omnes flagitatur ut *Evangelii vitae* fiamus strenui nuntii; nobis pariter concreditur munus curandi integram fidelemque propagationem doctrinae his in Litteris Encyclicis iterum propositae atque recurrendi ad commodissima quaeque consilia, ut a qualibet ei contraria doctrina amoveantur christifideles. Praecipua adhibenda est cura ut in theologicis Facultatibus, in Seminariis inque diversis catholicis Institutionibus sanae doctrinae cognitio propagetur collustretur atque altius pervestigetur (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Veritatis Splendor*, 116). Pauli adhortatio pro omnibus resonet *theologis*, pro *pastoribus* et pro iis quotquot *institutioni, catechesi atque mentium formationi* operam dant: de munere sibi tributo conscii, numquam omnino in se recipienti responsalitem adducendi in discrimen veritatem suamque propriam missionem, dum sententias referunt proprias contrarias *Evangelio vitae* ab Ecclesiae Magisterio fideliter proposito atque explicato.

Hoc in Evangelio annuntiando, metuendus nobis non est infensus animus popularisve offensio, atque media consilia et ambiguitas, quae nos accomodarent huius saeculi menti (Cfr. Rom. 12, 2), prorsus sunt recusanda. In mundo esse debemus, sed non *de mundo* (Cfr. Io. 15, 19; 17, 16), virtute nobis a Christo tradita, qui morte et resurrectione sua vicit mundum (Cfr. *ibid.* 16, 33).

“Confitebor tibi, quia mirabiliter plasmatus sum” (Ps. 139 (138), 14): celebrare evangelium vitae

83. Cum in mundum missi simus tamquam “populus pro vita”, nuntius noster fieri debet etiam *vera propriaque Evangelii vitae celebratio*. Immo haec celebratio ipsa, gestuum suorum, imaginum rituumque evocativa virtute, condicio fit pretiosa atque insignita ad pulchritudinem magnitudinemque huius Evangelii transmittendas.

Ad hunc finem oportet quam primum *colantur*, in nobis atque in aliis, *obtus ac prospectus* (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Centesimus Annus*, 37). Ille quidem ex fide in Deum vitae oritur, qui hominem quemque mirabiliter plasmavit (Cfr. Ps. 139 (138), 14). Obtutus est eius qui vitam intuetur ipsius in altitudine, dum percipit gratuitatis pulchritudinisque eius mensuras ac provocationis ad libertatem adque responsalitem. Obtutus est illius qui rebus potiri non vult, quas tamen veluti donum accipit, in ipsis Creatoris repercussum detegens omnique in persona viventem eius imaginem (Cfr. Gen. 1, 27; Ps. 8, 6). Talis obtutus in deditionem non venit quadam desperatione debilitatus coram infirmis dolentibus et vitae segregibus atque in mortis limine constitutis; his tamen in omnibus rerum condicionibus interrogari se sinit ut inveniat significationem atque, his praesertim in circumstantiis, se aperit ad detegendam in cuiusque personae vultu appellationem ad comparationem, ad dialogum et solidaritatem.

Oportet iam omnes hunc intuitum excipiant, iterum pares facti, animo sancta admiratione pleno, *homini cuique venerando et colendo*, sicut sane nos hortatus est Paulus VI quodam suo natalicio nuntio (Cfr. PAULI VI *Nuntius occasione Nativitatis Domini diei festi datus*, anno 1967, die 25 dec. 1967: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, V (1967) 710 ss.). Eiusmodi contemplativo obtutu

<sup>106</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 116: AAS 85 (1993), 1224.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 37: AAS 83 (1991), 840.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Message for Christmas 1967: AAS 60 (1968), 40.



individual's call to share through Christ in the life of grace and in an existence of unending communion with God our Creator and Father.

**84.** *To celebrate the Gospel of life means to celebrate the God of life, the God who gives life:* "We must celebrate Eternal Life, from which every other life proceeds. From this, in proportion to its capacities, every being which in any way participates in life, receives life. This Divine Life, which is above every other life, gives and preserves life. Every life and every living movement proceed from this Life which transcends all life and every principle of life. It is to this that souls owe their incorruptibility; and because of this all animals and plants live, which receive only the faintest glimmer of life. To men, beings made of spirit and matter, Life grants life. Even if we should abandon Life, because of its overflowing love for man, it converts us and calls us back to itself. Not only this: it promises to bring us, soul and body, to perfect life, to immortality. It is too little to say that this Life is alive: it is the Principle of life, the Cause and sole Wellspring of life. Every living thing must contemplate it and give it praise: it is Life which overflows with life" [Ps-Dion, *Div.Nom.*6:1-2).<sup>109</sup>

Like the Psalmist, we too, in our *daily prayer* as individuals and as a community, praise and bless God our Father, who knitted us together in our mother's womb, and saw and loved us while we were still without form (cf. *Ps* 139:13, 15-16). We exclaim with overwhelming joy: "I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works. You know me through and through" (*Ps* 139:14). Indeed, "despite its hardships, its hidden mysteries, its suffering and its inevitable frailty, this mortal life is a most beautiful thing, a marvel ever new and moving, an event worthy of being exalted in joy and glory".<sup>110</sup> Moreover, man and his life appear to us not only as one of the greatest marvels of creation: for God has granted to man a dignity which is near to divine (*Ps* 8:5-6). In every child which is born and in every person who lives or dies we see the image of God's glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being, a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ.

We are called to express wonder and gratitude for the gift of life and to welcome, savour and share the *Gospel of life* not only in our personal and community prayer, but above all in the *celebrations of the liturgical year*. Particularly important in this regard are the *Sacraments*, the efficacious signs of the presence and saving action of the Lord Jesus in Christian life. The Sacraments make us sharers in divine life, and provide the spiritual strength necessary to experience life, suffering and death in their fullest meaning. Thanks to a genuine rediscovery and a better appreciation of the significance of these rites, our liturgical celebrations, especially celebrations of the Sacraments, will be ever more capable of expressing the full truth about birth, life, suffering and death, and will help us to live these moments as a participation in the Paschal Mystery of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

**85.** In celebrating the *Gospel of life* we also need to *appreciate and make good use of the wealth of gestures and symbols present in the traditions and customs of different cultures and peoples*. There are special times and ways in

excitatus, novus redemptorum populus necessario se effundit *laetitiae hymnis, laudis atque gratiarum actionis pro inaeestimabili vitae dono, pro mysterio cuiusque hominis vocationis ad participandam in Christo gratiae vitam communionisque sine fine existentiam cum Deo Creatore et Patre.*

84. *Celebrare Evangelium vitae idem est ac Deum vitae celebrare, Deum scilicet qui donat vitam:* "Laudanda est nobis Vita aeterna, ex qua per se, et omnis vita manat; et a qua vivere in omnia quoquo modo vitam participantia, convenienter unicuique, disseminatur... (Haec) vita divina est per se vitae vivificatrix et effectrix; et omnis vita, vitalisque motio est ex vita quae est supra omnem vitam, et omne principium omnis vitae. Ex ipsa etiam animae habent, quod non intereant, et animantia germinaque quod ultimo vitae gradu gaudeant... (Vita) dat insuper hominibus, licet compositis, vitam quae angelicam proxime attingit, et nos aversos etiam exuberantia benignitatis ad se convertit revocatque, et (quod divinius est) nos totos, animas dico et coniuncta corpora, ad perfectam et immortalem vitam translaturam se promisit: ... (est) vitalis et vitae principalis vita, et omnis vitae causa..., tamquam omnigena omnisque vita concipitur ac celebratur, et ut nullius indiga, ...vitae superplena" (PSEUDO-DIONYSII AREOPAGITAE *De Divinis Nominibus*, 6, 1-3: PG 3, 856 s.).

Nos quoque sicut Psalmista *prece cotidiana*, singulari et communi, laudamus benedicimusque Deum Patrem nostrum, qui formavit renes nostros, nos contexit in utero matris, nosque imperfectos adhuc oculis suis vidit et amavit (Cfr. *Ps. 139 (138)*, 13, 15-16), atque eximio ardentique gaudio clamamus: "Confitebor tibi, quia mirabiliter plasmatus sum; mirabilia opera tua, et anima mea cognoscit nimis" (*Ibid.* 14). Ita sane, "haec mortalis vita, praeter angores suos, obscura mysteria sua, dolores suos suamque funestam fragilitatem, est eventus pulcherrimus, mirum semperque ardens ostentum, dignus qui celebretur eventus in laetitia et gloria" (PAULI VI *Cogitationes de morte*, Istituto Paolo VI, Brescia 1988, p. 24). Homo insuper eiusque vita non celsissima inter creationis prodigia tantum apparent: dedit enim homini Deus divinam fere dignitatem (Cfr. *Ps.* 8, 6-7). Quolibet in puero nascente atque quolibet in homine vivente vel moriente gloriae Dei imaginem agnoscimus: hanc celebramus nos gloriam unoquoque in homine, Dei viventis signo, Christi Iesu imagine.

Ad stuporem expromendum vocamur gratumque animum nostrum ob vitam dono acceptam, adque *Evangelium vitae* excipiendum, fruendum communicandumque non singulari tantum vel communi prece, sed praesertim *per liturgici anni celebrationes*. Memoranda hic sunt singulariter *Sacramenta*, praesentiae vivificantisque Domini Iesu actionis salutaria signa in christiana existentia: homines reddunt ea vitae divinae participes, necessarium dum tribuunt spiritale robur ad explendam eius in veritate vivendi significationem et patiendi moriendique. Per veram rituum significationis patefactionem perque eorum aequam existimationem, liturgicae celebrationes, sacramentales singillatim, potestatem usque habebunt plenam enuntiandi veritatem de ortu, de vita, de dolore deque morte, eisque auxilium praebebunt ut has rerum veritates vivant tamquam paschalis mysterii Christi mortui ac resuscitati participationem.

85. In *Evangelio vitae* celebrando *aestimentur oportet et magnificentur gestus et signa quibus diversae traditiones consuetudinesque culturales et populares ditantur*. Sunt quidem opportunitates formaeque

<sup>109</sup> PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *On the Divine Names*, 6, 1-3: PG 3, 856-857.

<sup>110</sup> PAUL VI, *Pensiero alla Morte*, Istituto Paolo VI, Brescia 1988, 24.

which the peoples of different nations and cultures express joy for a newborn life, respect for and protection of individual human lives, care for the suffering or needy, closeness to the elderly and the dying, participation in the sorrow of those who mourn, and hope and desire for immortality.

In view of this and following the suggestion made by the Cardinals in the Consistory of 1991, I propose that a *Day for Life* be celebrated each year in every country, as already established by some Episcopal Conferences. The celebration of this Day should be planned and carried out with the active participation of all sectors of the local Church. Its primary purpose should be to foster in individual consciences, in families, in the Church and in civil society a recognition of the meaning and value of human life at every stage and in every condition. Particular attention should be drawn to the seriousness of abortion and euthanasia, without neglecting other aspects of life which from time to time deserve to be given careful consideration, as occasion and circumstances demand.

**86.** As part of the spiritual worship acceptable to God (cf. *Rom* 12:1), the *Gospel of life* is to be celebrated above all in *daily living*, which should be filled with self-giving love for others. In this way, our lives will become a genuine and responsible acceptance of the gift of life and a heartfelt song of praise and gratitude to God who has given us this gift. This is already happening in the many different acts of selfless generosity, often humble and hidden, carried out by men and women, children and adults, the young and the old, the healthy and the sick.

It is in this context, so humanly rich and filled with love, that *heroic actions* too are born. These are *the most solemn celebration of the Gospel of life*, for they proclaim it *by the total gift of self*. They are the radiant manifestation of the highest degree of love, which is to give one's life for the person loved (cf. *Jn* 15:13). They are a sharing in the mystery of the Cross, in which Jesus reveals the value of every person, and how life attains its fullness in the sincere gift of self. Over and above such outstanding moments, there is an everyday heroism, made up of gestures of sharing, big or small, which build up an authentic culture of life. A particularly praiseworthy example of such gestures is the donation of organs, performed in an ethically acceptable manner, with a view to offering a chance of health and even of life itself to the sick who sometimes have no other hope.

Part of this daily heroism is also the silent but effective and eloquent witness of all those "brave mothers who devote themselves to their own family without reserve, who suffer in giving birth to their children and who are ready to make any effort, to face any sacrifice, in order to pass on to them the best of themselves".<sup>111</sup> In living out their mission "these heroic women do not always find support in the world around them. On the contrary, the cultural models frequently promoted and broadcast by the media do not encourage motherhood. In the name of progress and modernity the values of fidelity, chastity, sacrifice, to which a host of Christian wives and mothers have borne and continue to bear outstanding witness, are presented as obsolete ... We thank you, heroic mothers, for your invincible love! We thank you for your intrepid trust in God and in his love. We thank you for the sacrifice of your life ... In the Paschal Mystery, Christ restores to you the gift you gave him. Indeed, he has the power to give

congressionis quibus, diversis in Civitatibus et civilibus cultus humani formis, patefiunt laetitia pro vita oriente, cuiuslibet humanae existentiae reverentia atque tutela, cura pro dolentibus vel ex inopia laborantibus, assiduitas aetate provecitis vel morientibus praebita, communicatio doloris cum luctu confectis, immortalitatis spes desideriumque.

Hoc sub prospectu, etiam Patrum Cardinalium in Consistorio anno MCMXCI congregatorum vota excipientes, proponendam censemus unaquamque in Natione annuam *Diei vitae* celebrationem, sicut iam alicubi fit quarundam Episcopaliū Conferentiarum inceptu. Paretur necesse est celebreturque eiusmodi Dies diligentem praebentibus operam singulis partibus cuiusque particularis Ecclesiae. Huius celebrationis praecipuum consilium in eo est ut in conscientis, in familiis, in Ecclesia inque civili societate cognitio excitetur significationis atque boni vitae humanae quovis temporis momento qualibetve in condicione, dum in media mentis intentione ponitur abortus euthanasiaeque gravitas, quin ceterae neglegantur vitae formae et species, quae attento animo separatis temporibus sunt considerandae, prout historicae rerum condicionis progressus suadebit.

86. In ratione spiritalis cultus Deo grati (Cfr. *Rom* 12, 1), *Evangelii vitae* celebratio suam postulat effectiōnem praesertim in *cotidiana existentia*, quae in caritate erga alios agitur atque sui ipsius oblatione. Hac ratione tota nostra existentia fiet vera et officii conscia acceptio doni vitae atque sincera grataque laus in Deum qui nobis talem tribuit donationem. Quod iam accidit plurimis in signis donationis, modestae saepe et absconditae, quae primos exhibent actores viros et mulieres, parvulos et adultos, iuvenes et seniores, sanos et aegrotos.

Hoc in rerum contextu, humanitatis caritatisque pleno, *heroicae oriuntur res gestae*. Quae sunt *sollemnissima Evangelii vitae celebratio*, utpote quae illud *tota sui ipsius donatione* proclamant; sunt clara supremae caritatis significatio, actio scilicet ponendi vitam pro amico dilecto (Cfr. *Io* 15, 13); sunt mysterii Crucis participatio, qua Iesus patefacit quantum pretium habeat sibi vita cuiusque hominis atque quo modo ea in sincerae sui ipsius donationis plenitudine efficiatur. Praeter facta celebra rerum cotidianarum exstat heroica virtus, quae parvis magnisque constat beneficiarum actibus unde verus aliter vitae cultus. Quos inter plurimi ducenda est organorum donatio rationibus ethica disciplina probabilibus effecta, ut salutis vel etiam vitae ipsius opportunitas aegris praebeatur omni nonnumquam spe destitutis.

Ad eandem heroicam viam tacita pertinet testificatio fecundissima quidem atque eloquentissima "omnium matrum fortium, quae suae familiae sine condicione se dedunt, quae in dolore pariunt filios suos, quaeque expeditae sunt ad quemlibet laborem aggrediendum, ad quodlibet sacrificium obeundum, ut eis referant quidquid optimum in se custodiant" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Homilia in beatificationem Isidori Bakanja, Elisabethae Canori Mora et Ioannulae Beretta Molla*, 4, die 24 apr. 1994: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVII, 1 (1994) 999). In sua missione complenda "heroicae illae matres non semper suo in ambitu auxilium inveniunt. Immo, civilis cultus exemplaria, praedicata saepe atque communicationis socialis instrumentis divulgata, matris condicione non favent. Progressionis rerumque novarum nomine bona fidelitatis, castitatis sacrificii iam superatum putatur, et

<sup>111</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the Beatification of Isidore Bakanja, Elisabetta Canori Mora and Gianna Beretta Molla (24 April 1994): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25-26 April 1994, 5.

you back the life you gave him as an offering”.<sup>112</sup>

“What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works?” (Jas 2:14): *servicing the Gospel of life*

87. By virtue of our sharing in Christ’s royal mission, our support and promotion of human life must be accomplished through the *service of charity*, which finds expression in personal witness, various forms of volunteer work, social activity and political commitment. This is a *particularly pressing need at the present time*, when the “culture of death” so forcefully opposes the “culture of life” and often seems to have the upper hand. But even before that it is a need which springs from “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). As the Letter of James admonishes us: “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled’, without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (2: 14-17).

In our service of charity, *we must be inspired and distinguished by a specific attitude*: we must care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to become neighbours to everyone (cf. Lk 10:29-37), and to show special favour to those who are poorest, most alone and most in need. In helping the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned--as well as the child in the womb and the old person who is suffering or near death--we have the opportunity to serve Jesus. He himself said: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). Hence we cannot but feel called to account and judged by the ever relevant words of Saint John Chrysostom: “Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not neglect it when you find it naked. Do not do it homage here in the church with silk fabrics only to neglect it outside where it suffers cold and nakedness”.<sup>113</sup>

*Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent*. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to “*show care*” for all life and for the life of everyone. Indeed, at an even deeper level, we need to go to the very roots of life and love.

It is this deep love for every man and woman which has given rise down the centuries to an *outstanding history of charity*, a history which has brought into being in the Church and society many forms of service to life which evoke admiration from all unbiased observers. Every Christian community, with a renewed sense of responsibility, must continue to write this history through various kinds of pastoral and social activity. To this end, appropriate and effective programmes of *support for new life* must be implemented, with special closeness to mothers who, even without the help of the father, are not afraid to bring their child into the world and to raise it. Similar care must be shown for

tamen in iis nuptarum matrumque christianarum greges eminentur et adhuc eminent... Gratias vobis agimus, heroicae matres, de vestra invicta caritate! Gratias vobis agimus de intrepida in Deum inque eius amorem fiducia. Gratias vobis agimus de vitae vestrae sacrificio... Christus in Paschali mysterio vobis reddit donum quod Ei tribuistis. Ipsi enim est facultas restituendi vitam quam dono Ei protulistis” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Homilia in beatificationem Isidori Bakanja, Elisabethae Canori Mora et Ioannulae Beretta Molla*, 5, die 24 apr. 1994: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Poalo II*, XVII, 1 (1994) 995 s.).

“**Quid proderit, fratres mei, si fidem quis dicat se habere, opera autem non habeat?**” (Iac. 2, 14); **evangelio vitae servire**

87. Participazione regalis Christi muneris, fulcimentum vitaeque humanae proventus ad effectonem sunt adducenda per *caritatis servitium*, quod personali testificatione explicatur, per multiplicia voluntaria munera, sociali animatione atque politico officio. Haec est *peculiaris momenti postulatio aetate nostra*, qua “moris cultura” tam firmiter opponitur “culturae vitae” atque saepe superior evadere videtur. Prius tamen postulatio est quaedam quae oritur ex “fide, quae per caritatem operatur” (Gal. 5, 6), sicut hortatur nos Epistula Iacobi: “Quid proderit, fratres mei, si fidem quis dicat se habere, opera autem non habeat? Numquid poterit fides salvare eum? Si frater aut soror nudi sunt et indigent victu cotidiano, dicat autem aliquis de vobis illis: «Ite in pace, calefacimini et saturamini», non dederitis autem eis quae necessaria sunt corporis, quid proderit? Sic et fides, si non habeat opera, mortua est in semetipsa” (Iac. 2, 14-17).

Est in caritatis ministerio *habitudo quidam qui nos concitare atque insignire debet*: proximum curare nos oportet veluti personam a Deo nostro officio commissam. Tamquam Iesu discipuli, ut praestemus nos cuiusque hominis proximos (Cfr. Luc. 10, 29-37) vocamur, peculiari utentes diligentia in pauperimum, admodum solum atque egentissimum. Praesertim adiuvantes esurientem, sitientem, hospitem, nudum, infirmum, in carcere inclusum – ut sic etiam infantem nondum natum, senem dolentem vel morti propinquum – nos Christo Iesu famulamur, sicut Ille dixit: “Quamdiu fecistis uni de his fratribus meis minimis, mihi fecistis” (Matth. 25, 40). Quam ob rem fieri non potest quin rogemur et iudicemur illa sententia semper valida sancti Ioannis Chrysostomi: “Vis corpus Christi honorare? Non despicias ipsum nudum: neque hic sericis vestibus honores, foris autem frigore ac nuditate afflictum negligas” (S. IOANNIS CHRYSOSTOMI *In Matthaeum*, hom. 50, 3: PG 58, 508).

*Caritatis servitium erga vitam oportet altam induat unitatem*: tolerare non potest singularum partium sententias vel discrimina, quia hominis vita sacra atque inviolabilis est in quolibet suo gradu et condicione; donum est ipsa invisibile. Agitur *de cura habenda totius vitae atque vitae omnium*. Immo, altius adhuc, agitur de itinere ad ipsas vitae caritatisque origines.

Initium prorsus ducendo ex alta in omnem virum mulieremque caritate, per saeculorum decursu orta est *insolita caritatis historia* quae in vitam ecclesiam civilemque induxit plurimas structuras ministerii vitae, quae cuiusque probi spectatoris admirationem excitant. Est historia quam, renovata proprii officii significatione, omnis christiana communitas pergat conscribere oportet multiplici pastoralis socialique navitate. Hac ratione ad actum sunt adducendae modestae et efficaces compages *comitandi vitam oborientem*, peculiari modo iuxta matres quae parere atque suum filium instituere non timent etiam deficientis patris auxilio. Par adhibenda est cura erga vitam dolore

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *IN Matthaeum*, Hom. L. 3: PG 58, 508.

the life of the marginalized or suffering, especially in its final phases.

**88.** All of this involves a patient and fearless *work of education* aimed at encouraging one and all to bear each other's burdens (cf. *Gal* 6:2). It requires a continuous promotion of *vocations to service*, particularly among the young. It involves the implementation of long-term practical *projects and initiatives* inspired by the Gospel.

Many are the *means* towards this end which *need to be developed* with skill and serious commitment. At the first stage of life, *centres for natural methods of regulating fertility* should be promoted as a valuable help to responsible parenthood, in which all individuals, and in the first place the child, are recognized and respected in their own right, and where every decision is guided by the ideal of the sincere gift of self. *Marriage and family counselling agencies* by their specific work of guidance and prevention, carried out in accordance with an anthropology consistent with the Christian vision of the person, of the couple and of sexuality, also offer valuable help in rediscovering the meaning of love and life, and in supporting and accompanying every family in its mission as the "sanctuary of life". Newborn life is also served by *centres of assistance and homes or centres where new life receives a welcome*. Thanks to the work of such centres, many unmarried mothers and couples in difficulty discover new hope and find assistance and support in overcoming hardship and the fear of accepting a newly conceived life or life which has just come into the world.

When life is challenged by conditions of hardship, maladjustment, sickness or rejection, other programmes--such as *communities for treating drug addiction, residential communities for minors or the mentally ill, care and relief centres for AIDS patients, associations for solidarity especially towards the disabled*--are eloquent expressions of what charity is able to devise in order to give everyone new reasons for hope and practical possibilities for life.

And when earthly existence draws to a close, it is again charity which finds the most appropriate means for enabling the *elderly*, especially those who can no longer look after themselves, and the *terminally ill* to enjoy genuinely humane assistance and to receive an adequate response to their needs, in particular their anxiety and their loneliness. In these cases the role of families is indispensable; yet families can receive much help from social welfare agencies and, if necessary, from recourse to *palliative care*, taking advantage of suitable medical and social services available in public institutions or in the home.

In particular, the role of *hospitals, clinics* and *convalescent homes* needs to be reconsidered. These should not merely be institutions where care is provided for the sick or the dying. Above all they should be places where suffering, pain and death are acknowledged and understood in their human and specifically Christian meaning. This must be especially evident and effective in *institutes staffed by Religious or in any way connected with the Church*.

**89.** Agencies and centres of service to life, and all other initiatives of support and solidarity which circumstances may from time to time suggest, need to be directed by *people who are generous in their involvement and fully aware* of the importance of the *Gospel of life* for the good of individuals and society.

*A unique responsibility belongs to health-care personnel: doctors, pharmacists, nurses, chaplains, men and women religious, administrators and volunteers.* Their profession calls for them to be guardians and servants of human life. In today's cultural and social context, in which science and the practice of

affectam vel segregatione, peculiari modo senescente iam aetate.

88. Haec omnia secum ferunt constans animosumque *institutorum opus*, quod omnes et quemque sollicitet ut alter alterius onera portet (Cfr. *Gal.* 6. 2); perpetuam quandam postulat profectionem *vocationum ad ministerium*, praesertim inter iuvenes; *propositorum consiliorumque* definitorem continet effectorem, quae firma sint atque Evangelio imbuta.

Multiplicibus profecto idonea ratione atque gravi officio *utendum est instrumentis*. Ipso in vitae ortu, *instituta pro naturalibus fertilitatis moderandae modis* provehi debent veluti validum paternitati maternitatisque responsali auxilium, in qua persona unaquaeque, initio facta a filio, agnoscitur et observatur per se ipsam, atque quaelibet optio excitatur et gubernatur ratione sincerae donationis sui ipsius. Etiam *familiarum et coniugum consultoria*, per suam consultationis provisionisque singularem industriam actam sub luce cuiusdam anthropologiae quae christianae adhaeret considerationi personae, coniugum et sexualitatis, pretiosum constituunt ministerium ad amoris vitaeque momentum detegendum atque ad omnem sustentandam et comitandam familiam in eius missione "vitae sacrae". Vitae orienti serviunt etiam *instituta vitam tuentia atque domus vel instituta ad vitae acceptionis hospitium* posita. Eorum ob navitatem, non paucae innuptae--matres atque coniuges in difficultatibus versantes rursus rationes et persuasiones inveniunt et curam adiumentumque accipiunt ut incommoda timoresque exsuperent in accipienda vita oboriente vel vix nata.

Coram vita in angustiis, in depravatione, morbo et segregatione, alia instrumenta -- sicut *communitates sanandis hominibus toxico dependentibus, communitates minoribus vel mente aegris hospitium praebentes, sedes curationis et hospitalitatis pro laborantibus morbo AIDS, consociationes solidaritatis praesertim pro inhabilibus* -- clara existant significatione rerum quas caritas invenire novit ut cuique novas spei rationes atque definitas vitae condiciones exhibeat. Sub exitum autem terrestri vitae, caritas adhuc modos quosdam peraptos invenit ut senes, peculiariter qui opibus suis sufficienter non sunt praediti, atque *insanabiliter aegrotantes*, de cura humana gaudere possint ac rectas responsiones accipere postulationibus suis, singulari modo anxietati suae et solitudini. Familiarum officium substitui non potest his in casibus: suum tamen validum auxilium illae reperire possunt in socialibus adiutoriis praestandis structuris et, cum necesse est, in usurpatione *curarum dolorem lenientium*, aptis adhibitis sanitatis socialisque rationis ministeriis tum in hospitibus publicis tum domi praestitis. Iterum proprie est considerandum momentum *valetudinariorum, clinicarum atque curationis domorum*: eorum vera proprietates non spectat solummodo ad instituendas structuras in quibus cura agatur aegrotorum et morientium, sed praesertim ad praebendos ambitus in quibus angustia, dolor atque mors agnoscuntur et explanantur in sua ipsarum humana notione propriaeque christiana. Singillatim talis identitas clara et valida apparere debet in *institutis quae a religiosis diriguntur vel, quavis ratione, quae cum Ecclesia nectuntur*.

89. Hae compages atque sedes ministerii erga vitam, omniaque alia incepta praesidii causa et solidaritatis inita prout rerum adiuncta interdum suadere poterunt, incitentur oportet a *personis benefice praeparatis quae plane sint consciae fortitudinis Evangelii vitae* pro bono singulorum et societatis.

*Peculiaris profecto responsalitas committitur sanitatis ministris qui sunt: medici, pharmacopolae, aegrorum ministri, cappellani, religiosi viri et mulieres, administratores atque voluntarii adiutores.* Eorum ipsorum munus eos custodes vitaeque hominis cultores constituit. In culturali socialique nostrae aetatis

medicine risk losing sight of their inherent ethical dimension, health-care professionals can be strongly tempted at times to become manipulators of life, or even agents of death. In the face of this temptation their responsibility today is greatly increased. Its deepest inspiration and strongest support lie in the intrinsic and undeniable ethical dimension of the health-care profession, something already recognized by the ancient and still relevant *Hippocratic Oath*, which requires every doctor to commit himself to absolute respect for human life and its sacredness.

Absolute respect for every innocent human life also requires the *exercise of conscientious objection* in relation to procured abortion and euthanasia. “Causing death” can never be considered a form of medical treatment, even when the intention is solely to comply with the patient’s request. Rather, it runs completely counter to the health-care profession, which is meant to be an impassioned and unflinching affirmation of life. Biomedical research too, a field which promises great benefits for humanity, must always reject experimentation, research or applications which disregard the inviolable dignity of the human being, and thus cease to be at the service of people and become instead means which, under the guise of helping people, actually harm them.

**90.** *Volunteer workers* have a specific role to play: they make a valuable contribution to the service of life when they combine professional ability and generous, selfless love. The *Gospel of life* inspires them to lift their feelings of good will towards others to the heights of Christ’s charity; to renew every day, amid hard work and weariness, their awareness of the dignity of every person; to search out people’s needs and, when necessary, to set out on new paths where needs are greater but care and support weaker.

If charity is to be realistic and effective, it demands that the *Gospel of life* be implemented also by means of certain *forms of social activity and commitment in the political field*, as a way of defending and promoting the value of life in our ever more complex and pluralistic societies. *Individuals, families, groups and associations*, albeit for different reasons and in different ways, all have a responsibility for shaping society and developing cultural, economic, political and legislative projects which, with respect for all and in keeping with democratic principles, will contribute to the building of a society in which the dignity of each person is recognized and protected and the lives of all are defended and enhanced.

This task is the particular responsibility of *civil leaders*. Called to serve the people and the common good, they have a duty to make courageous choices in support of life, especially through *legislative measures*. In a democratic system, where laws and decisions are made on the basis of the consensus of many, the sense of personal responsibility in the consciences of individuals invested with authority may be weakened. But no one can ever renounce this responsibility, especially when he or she has a legislative or decision-making mandate, which calls that person to answer to God, to his or her own conscience and to the whole of society for choices which may be contrary to the common good. Although laws are not the only means of protecting human life, nevertheless they do play a very important and sometimes decisive role in influencing patterns of thought and behaviour. I repeat once more that a law which violates an innocent person’s natural right to life is unjust and, as such, is not valid as a law. For this reason I urgently appeal once more to all political leaders not to pass laws which, by disregarding the dignity of the person, undermine the very fabric of society.

contextu, cum est periculum ne scientia et ars medica amittant suam germanam ethicam rationem, ipsi graviter aliquando sollicitari possunt ut artifices fiant in vita adulteranda, vel etiam mortis actores. Prae eiusmodi temptatione eorum responsalitas hodie maxima facta est suamque altissimam reperit incitationem firmissimumque adiumentum in interiore necessariaque morali mensura medicae professionis, sicut iam illud semperque validum confirmavit *Hippocratis iusiurandum*, secundum quod cuique medico est adlaborandum pro absoluta vitae humanae reverentia eiusque sacra indole.

Integra cuiusque humanae vitae innocentis observantia usum etiam postulat *repugnantiae ex conscientia* coram abortione procurata atque euthanasia. Numquam “occidendi actio” considerari potest cura quaedam medica, ne tum quidem cum propositum solum inest obsequendi cuidam postulationi aegroti: agitur enim potius de sententia contraria professioni medicae, cuius est ardentem firmiterque vitam fovere. Investigatio etiam biomedica, provincia quidem alliciens atque nova magna beneficia promittens in commodum humani generis, repellere semper debet exercitationes, inquisitiones inductionesve quae, inviolabilem dignitatem humanam neglegentes, iam hominum ministerio non inserviunt et mutantur in rerum veritates quae, dum eos iuvare videntur, ipsos opprimunt.

90. Ad singulares peragens partes vocantur *personae voluntarium exercentes ministerium*: validam ferunt opem in vitae adiumentum, cum professionalem nectunt facultatem cum sincera gratuitaque caritate. *Evangelium vitae* eos incitat ut merae filanthropiae sensus efferant ad caritatis Christi modum; ut cotidie recuperent, inter fatigationes ac lassitudines, dignitatis cuiusque hominis conscientiam; ut personarum necessitates explorent, initis, si necesse fuerit, novis itineribus ubi instantius premit necessitas, cura vero et adiumentum sunt debiliora. Tenax veritas caritatis postulat ut Evangelio vitae etiam per modos incitationis socialis atque publici officii serviantur, dum vitae momentum defenditur atque proponitur in nostra societate magis in dies implicata et multis patente opinionibus. *Singuli, familiae, coetus, associationes* habent, titulo quidem atque modo diverso, responsalitatem quandam in animatione sociali atque in conficiendis propositis culturalibus, oeconomicis, politicis et ad leges scribendas pertinentibus quae, omnium iuribus servatis atque secundum rationem consociationis popularis, operam dent ad aedificandam quandam societatem in qua cuiusque personae dignitas agnoscat et observetur, et omnium vita defendatur et provehatur.

Eiusmodi officium peculiari ratione ad illos spectat qui *rem publicam gubernant*. Selecti ut homini atque communi bono inserviant, eorum est animosas pro vita perficere electiones, in ambitu praesertim *praeceptorum legibus constitutorum*. Popularibus in regiminibus, ubi leges sententiaeque secundum multorum consensionem feruntur, minui quidem potest in cuiusque conscientia eorum qui auctoritate fruuntur ipsa propriorum officiorum responsalitas. Hanc tamen deponere nemini unquam licet, maxime cum cui data est potestas legum ferendarum aut consiliorum capiendorum, unde obstringitur ut Deo suaeque conscientiae respondeat necnon omni societati de decisionibus quae forsitan genuino bono communi obstiterint. Tametsi leges non unicum sunt instrumentum, quo vita humana defendatur, partes tamen magni momenti explicant, immo praegraves aliquando, in cuiusdam mentis consuetudinisque provectione. Iterum dicimus: norma quae naturalem legem violat ad vitam cuiusdam innocentis pertinentem, est iniusta ideoque legis momentum habere non potest. Quam ob rem fortiter iteramus exhortationem Nostram ad omnes viros politicos ne

The Church well knows that it is difficult to mount an effective legal defence of life in pluralistic democracies, because of the presence of strong cultural currents with differing outlooks. At the same time, certain that moral truth cannot fail to make its presence deeply felt in every conscience, the Church encourages political leaders, starting with those who are Christians, not to give in, but to make those choices which, taking into account what is realistically attainable, will lead to the re-establishment of a just order in the defence and promotion of the value of life. Here it must be noted that it is not enough to remove unjust laws. The underlying causes of attacks on life have to be eliminated, especially by ensuring proper support for families and motherhood. *A family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies.* For this reason there need to be set in place social and political initiatives capable of guaranteeing conditions of true freedom of choice in matters of parenthood. It is also necessary to rethink labour, urban, residential and social service policies so as to harmonize working schedules with time available for the family, so that it becomes effectively possible to take care of children and the elderly.

91. Today an important part of policies which favour life is the *issue of population growth*. Certainly public authorities have a responsibility to “intervene to orient the demography of the population”.<sup>114</sup> But such interventions must always take into account and respect the primary and inalienable responsibility of married couples and families, and cannot employ methods which fail to respect the person and fundamental human rights, beginning with the right to life of every innocent human being. It is therefore morally unacceptable to encourage, let alone impose, the use of methods such as contraception, sterilization and abortion in order to regulate births.

The ways of solving the population problem are quite different. Governments and the various international agencies must above all strive to create economic, social, public health and cultural conditions which will enable married couples to make their choices about procreation in full freedom and with genuine responsibility. They must then make efforts to ensure “greater opportunities and a fairer distribution of wealth so that everyone can share equitably in the goods of creation. Solutions must be sought on the global level by establishing a true *economy of communion and sharing of goods*, in both the national and international order”.<sup>115</sup> This is the only way to respect the dignity of persons and families, as well as the authentic cultural patrimony of peoples.

Service of the *Gospel of life* is thus an immense and complex task. This service increasingly appears as a valuable and fruitful area for positive cooperation with our brothers and sisters of other Churches and ecclesial communities, in accordance with the *practical ecumenism* which the Second Vatican Council authoritatively encouraged.<sup>116</sup> It also appears as a providential area for dialogue

promulgent leges quae, personae dignitatem neglegentes, funditus ipsam civilem convictionem extenuent.

Novit Ecclesia difficile esse in popularis regiminis plurimum partium ambitu, ob fortium culturalium opinionum et quidem diversae propensionis instantiam, validam legalemque inducere vitae tutelam. Firmiter tamen tenet necessario in cuiusvis hominis ima conscientia moralem veritatem habere altam resonantiam, ideoque politicos viros hortatur, christianos in primis, ne animo deficiant, sed potius optiones faciant quae, ratione habita verarum opportunitatum, iustum restituant rerum ordinem vitae bono confirmando provehendoque. Hoc sub rerum prospectu prae oculis habeatur non sufficere iniquarum legum amotionem. Causae sunt removendae violationem vitae foventes, atque praesertim familiae matrumque conditioni aequum tribuendum est tutamentum: *familiaris disciplina* constituatur oportet *omnium socialium et politicarum rationum* cardo atque gubernatrix. Incepta ideo instituantur socialia et ad leges composita, quae verae libertatis tueantur condiciones in paternitatis maternitatisque optione agenda; iterum praeterea componendae sunt operum disciplinae, urbis constituendae consilia necnon domorum ministeriorumque exercendorum, ut tempora operibus familiaeque tribuenda inter se conciliantur atque infantium senumque curatio reapse effici possit.

91. Pars quidem magni momenti in arte politica pro vita hodie efficitur ex *quaestionibus demographicis*. Magistratum profecto est “consilia capere ad populi demographiam dirigendam” (*Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, n. 2372); eiusmodi tamen consilia praesumere semper et observare debent praecipuum atque non inalienabilem responsalitem coniugum et familiarum, neque uti possunt rationibus parum reverentibus personam eiusque capitalia iura, initio ducto ab iure ad vitam cuiusvis personae humanae innocentis. Nulla ergo morali ratione permitti potest ut, ad natorum continendum numerum, suadeantur nedum iniungantur viae quales sunt anticonceptio, sterilizatio et abortus.

Aliae prorsus sunt viae ad quaestionem demographicam resolvendam: Res publicae variaque internationalia Instituta spectare debent in primis ad creandas condiciones oeconomicas, sociales, ad salutem pertinentes et culturales quae coniugibus permittant eligere procreationem plena libertate veraque responsalitate; oportet etiam contendat in “occasionibus corroborandis et divitiis maiore iustitia distribuendis, ut omnes aequo modo bona creata participent. Necessae est solutiones creentur per omnem orbem valentes, genuinam instaurando *oeconomiam communionis distributionisque bonorum*, tum in campo internationali tum nationali” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Allocutio ad participae IV Conferentiae Generalis Episcopatus Americae Latinae in urbe Sancti Dominici*, 15, die 12 oct. 1992: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XV, 2 (1992) 326). Haec sola est via quae personarum familiarumque dignitatem servet germanumque ipsum populorum culturale patrimonium. Amplum igitur et multiplex est erga *Evangelium vitae* ministerium. Nobis apparet illud magis magisque veluti ambitus pretiosus atque propitius ad diligenter navitatem cum fratribus aliarum Ecclesiarum et ecclesialium Communitatum promovendam secundum illud *optatum operum oecumenismi* cui Concilium Vaticanum II graviter quidem favit (Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12; *Gaudium et Spes*, 90). Exhibetur

<sup>114</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2372.

<sup>115</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo (12 October 1992), No. 15: AAS 85 (1993), 819.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 90.

and joint efforts with the followers of other religions and with all people of good will. *No single person or group has a monopoly on the defence and promotion of life. These are everyone's task and responsibility.* On the eve of the Third Millennium, the challenge facing us is an arduous one: only the concerted efforts of all those who believe in the value of life can prevent a setback of unforeseeable consequences for civilization.

*"Your children will be like olive shoots around your table" (Ps 128:3): the family as the "sanctuary of life"*

92. Within the "people of life and the people for life", *the family has a decisive responsibility.* This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to "guard, reveal and communicate love".<sup>117</sup>

Here it is a matter of God's own love, of which parents are co-workers and as it were interpreters when they transmit life and raise it according to his fatherly plan.<sup>118</sup> This is the love that becomes selflessness, receptiveness and gift.

Within the family each member is accepted, respected and honoured precisely because he or she is a person; and if any family member is in greater need, the care which he or she receives is all the more intense and attentive.

The family has a special role to play throughout the life of its members, from birth to death. It is truly "the *sanctuary of life*: the place in which life--the gift of God--can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth".<sup>119</sup> Consequently the role of the family in building a culture of life is *decisive and irreplaceable.*

As the *domestic church*, the family is summoned to proclaim, celebrate and serve the *Gospel of life*. This is a responsibility which first concerns married couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an ever greater *awareness of the meaning of procreation* as a unique event which clearly reveals that *human life is a gift received in order then to be given as a gift.* In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, "as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them".<sup>120</sup>

It is above all in *raising children* that the family fulfils its mission to proclaim the *Gospel of life*. By word and example, in the daily round of relations and choices, and through concrete actions and signs, parents lead their children to authentic freedom, actualized in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity and all the other values which help people to live life as a

etiam opportuna provincia ad dialogum atque operam consociandam cum aliarum religionum assectoribus cunctisque cum bonae voluntatis hominibus: *defensio atque humanae vitae proventus nullius hominis sunt monopolium, sed omnium munus et responsalitas.* Provocatio quae ob oculos versatur tertio millennio adveniente est ardua profecto: solummodo consentiens opus consociatum omnium qui momentum tribuunt vitae vitabit civilis cultus interitum cuius consecutiones neque mente fingi possunt. **"Ecce hereditas domini filii, merces fructus ventris" (Ps 127 (126), 3): familia "vitae sacrarium"**

92. Intra "populum vitae et pro vita", *decretoria est familiae responsalitas*: quae quidem profluit ex ipsa eius natura – prout scilicet illa est communitas vitae amorisque, matrimonio nixa – atque ex eius officio "custodiendi, revelandi et communicandi amore" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 17). Agitur de amore ipso Dei, cuius parentes constituti sunt adiutores et fere interpretes in vita transmittenda eaque educanda secundum consilium eius uti Patris (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 50). Est igitur amor qui fit gratia, acceptio, doia, acceptio, donatio : in familia quisque agnoscitur, observatur et honoratur quatenus est persona, et si quis est egentior, intentior ac vigilantior in eum est cura.

Familia provocatur per totum vitae ipsius sodalium spatium, ab oriente vita ad mortem. Ipsa est vere "*vitae sacrarium*... locus ubi vita, Dei donum, apte accipi potest et defendi contra multiplices incursiones quibus obicitur, et crescere valet prout verus humanus postulat actus" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Centesimus Annus*, 39). Hanc ob causam, *decretorium atque pemecessarium* est familiae officium in cultura vitae contenda.

Familia sicut *ecclesia domestica* vocatur ad annuntiandum, celebrandum atque adiuvandum *Evangelium vitae*. Illud spectat praesertim ad coniuges qui vocantur ut trames sint vitae, fundamento posito in continenter renovata *sensus generationis* conscientia, quae eventus praecipuus habetur quo ostenditur *vitam humanam idcirco dono accipi ut vicissim donetur.* In nova vita procreanda parentes animadvertunt filium, "fructum mutuae donationis in amore, donum vicissim ambobus exstare, donum nempe ex dono profluens" (EIVSDEM *Allocutio ad participes VII conventus Episcoporum Europae de argumento «Habitus aetate nostra erga nativitatem mortemque: provocatio quaedam ad evangelizandum»*, 5, die 17 oct. 1989: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XII, 2 (1989) 945. Filii exhibentur veluti donum quoddam in biblica traditione (cfr. *Ps. 127 [126], 3*); ii sunt signum benedictionis in hominem qui ambulat in viis Domini (cfr. *Ps. 128 [127], 3-4*).

Suam annuntiandi *Evangelium vitae* operam familia praesertim per *filiorum institutionem* explet. Verbis et exemplo, in cotidianis necessitudinibus et optionibus, per gestus et clara signa, parentes filios ad veram instruunt libertatem, quae ad effectum adducitur per sinceram sui ipsius donationem, et in iis observantiam colunt alterius, iustitiae sensum, fervidam acceptionem, dialogum, promptum adiutorium, hominum mutuum

<sup>117</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 17: AAS 74 (1982), 100.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

<sup>119</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 39 AAS 83 (1991), 842.

<sup>120</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Address to Participants in the Seventh Symposium of European Bishops, on the theme of "Contemporary Attitudes towards Life and Death: a Challenge for Evangelization" (17 October 1989), No. 5: *Insegnamenti XII*, 2 (1989), 945. Children are presented in the Biblical tradition precisely as God's gift (cf. *Ps 127:3*) and as a sign of his blessing on those who walk in his ways (cf. *Ps 128 3-4*).



gift.

In raising children Christian parents must be concerned about their children's faith and help them to fulfil the vocation God has given them. The parents' mission as educators also includes teaching and giving their children an example of the true meaning of suffering and death. They will be able to do this if they are sensitive to all kinds of suffering around them and, even more, if they succeed in fostering attitudes of closeness, assistance and sharing towards sick or elderly members of the family.

**93.** The family *celebrates the Gospel of life* through *daily prayer*, both individual prayer and family prayer. The family prays in order to glorify and give thanks to God for the gift of life, and implores his light and strength in order to face times of difficulty and suffering without losing hope. But the celebration which gives meaning to every other form of prayer and worship is found in *the family's actual daily life together*, if it is a life of love and self-giving.

This celebration thus becomes a *service to the Gospel of life*, expressed through *solidarity* as experienced within and around the family in the form of concerned, attentive and loving care shown in the humble, ordinary events of each day. A particularly significant expression of solidarity between families is a willingness to *adopt or take in* children abandoned by their parents or in situations of serious hardship. True parental love is ready to go beyond the bonds of flesh and blood in order to accept children from other families, offering them whatever is necessary for their well-being and full development. Among the various forms of adoption, consideration should be given to *adoption-at-a-distance*, preferable in cases where the only reason for giving up the child is the extreme poverty of the child's family. Through this type of adoption, parents are given the help needed to support and raise their children, without their being uprooted from their natural environment.

As "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good",<sup>121</sup> solidarity also needs to be practised through *participation in social and political life*. Serving the *Gospel of life* thus means that the family, particularly through its membership of family associations, works to ensure that the laws and institutions of the State in no way violate the right to life, from conception to natural death, but rather protect and promote it.

**94.** Special attention must be given to the *elderly*. While in some cultures older people remain a part of the family with an important and active role, in others the elderly are regarded as a useless burden and are left to themselves. Here the temptation to resort to euthanasia can more easily arise.

Neglect of the elderly or their outright rejection are intolerable. Their presence in the family, or at least their closeness to the family in cases where limited living space or other reasons make this impossible, is of fundamental importance in creating a climate of mutual interaction and enriching communication between the different age-groups. It is therefore important to preserve, or to re-establish where it has been lost, a sort of "covenant" between generations. In this way parents, in their later years, can receive from their children the acceptance and solidarity which they themselves gave to their children when they brought them into the world. This is required by obedience to the divine commandment to honour one's father and mother (cf. *Ex* 20:12;

necessitudinem necnon quodlibet aliud bonum ad vitam agendam veluti donationem.

Oportet institutoria opera christianorum parentum inserviat filiorum fidei atque adiumentum fiat iis oblatum ut vocationem explant a Deo acceptam. Pertinet porro ad institutoriam parentum industrias docere filios atque testificari verum doloris et mortis sensum: illud explorare poterunt si valebunt animum intendere ad circumstantes dolores et multo prius si scierint vicinitatis excolere affectiones, adiutricis operae atque benevolentiam erga aegrotos et senes in ipso familiari ambitu.

93. Familia praeterea *Evangelium vitae celebrat prece cotidiana*, singulari ac familiari: laudat per eam et gratias agit Domino ob vitae donum atque lucem exposcit et robur ad difficultatis dolorisque vincenda discrimina, semper spem servans. At celebratio quae profert alias precis cultusque divini formas, illa est quae in familiae cotidiana existentia sese declarat, si existentia amore donationeque constat.

Celebratio sic mutatur in *ministerium Evangelio vitae*, quod exprimitur per *consociatam operam*, quae sane intus et circa familiam probatur veluti sollicita curiosaque animi intentio quotidianis in humilibusque et parvis actionibus. Consociatae inter familias operae declaratio significantior est quidem prompta voluntas *adoptionis* vel *tutela*e puerorum a parentibus derelictorum vel quoquo modo in gravis discriminis condicionibus versantium. Sincerus matris patrisque amor novit etiam ultra carnis sanguinisque necessitudinem aliarum familiarum excipere pueros eisque omnia necessaria tribuere, ut ipsis vita et progressio plena praestentur. Inter adoptionis formas digna prorsus quae etiam proponatur est *adoptatio e longinquo*, quae quidem anteponenda videtur quotiescumque relicto oritur dumtaxat ex condicionibus gravis paupertatis ipsius familiae. Eiusmodi enim adoptione parentibus adiumenta praebentur necessaria ad sustentandos educandosque filios, nulla inducta necessitate eos amovendi ab ipsorum naturali ambitu.

Si intellegitur veluti "voluntas firma et constans bonum curandi commune" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38), solidaritas postulat ut efficiatur etiam per *socialis politicaeque communicationis formas*. Servire igitur *Evangelio vitae* postulat ut familiae, praesertim per participationem congruarum consociationum, gnavam dent operam ne leges atque Rei publicae institutiones quavis ratione ius ad vitam laedant, a conceptione ad usque naturalem mortem, immo id defendant provehantque.

94. Peculiaris habenda est ratio *de hominibus aetate provectis*. Dum enim quibusdam in culturis persona annis senior custoditur in familia actiosa cum industria, aliis vero in culturis inutile pondus habetur senex atque sibi ipsi relinquitur: hac in rerum condicione acrior fit sollicitatio decurrendi ad euthanasiam.

Senum exclusio a sociali vita vel eorum plana repudiatio mala sunt quae tolerari non possunt. Eorum in familia praesentia vel saltem familiae vicinitas, cum ob domiciliorum angustias aliave de causa eiusmodi praesentia haberi non possit, maximum induunt momentum in habitu constituendo alternae vicissitudinis atque locupletis communicationis inter diversas vitae aetates. Oportet ergo servetur vel instauraretur ubi amissa est quaedam inter generationes "pactio", ut parentes seniores itineris sui finem attingentes filiorum benignitatem experiantur solidaritatemque quam alii erga eos vitam ingredientibus significaverunt: postulat id obtemperantia mandato divino *colendi patrem matremque* (Cfr. *Ex* 20, 12; *Lev.* 19, 3). Nec id solum. Senex enim non est

<sup>121</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 38: AAS 80 (1988), 565-566.

Lev 19:3). But there is more. The elderly are not only to be considered the object of our concern, closeness and service. They themselves have a valuable contribution to make to the *Gospel of life*. Thanks to the rich treasury of experiences they have acquired through the years, the elderly can and must *be sources of wisdom and witnesses of hope and love*.

Although it is true that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family”,<sup>122</sup> it must be admitted that modern social, economic and cultural conditions make the family’s task of serving life more difficult and demanding. In order to fulfil its vocation as the “sanctuary of life”, as the cell of a society which loves and welcomes life, *the family urgently needs to be helped and supported*. Communities and States must guarantee all the support, including economic support, which families need in order to meet their problems in a truly human way. For her part, the Church must untiringly promote a plan of pastoral care for families, capable of making every family rediscover and live with joy and courage its mission to further the *Gospel of life*.

“Walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8): *bringing about a transformation of culture*

95. “Walk as children of light... and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:8, 10-11). In our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the “culture of life” and the “culture of death”, there is need to *develop a deep critical sense*, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs.

What is urgently called for is a *general mobilization of consciences* and a *united ethical effort* to activate a *great campaign in support of life*. *All together, we must build a new culture of life*: new, because it will be able to confront and solve today’s unprecedented problems affecting human life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper and more dynamic conviction by all Christians; new, because it will be capable of bringing about a serious and courageous cultural dialogue among all parties. While the urgent need for such a cultural transformation is linked to the present historical situation, it is also rooted in the Church’s mission of evangelization. The purpose of the Gospel, in fact, is “to transform humanity from within and to make it new”.<sup>123</sup> Like the yeast which leavens the whole measure of dough (cf. Mt 13:33), the Gospel is meant to permeate all cultures and give them life from within,<sup>124</sup> so that they may express the full truth about the human person and about human life.

We need to begin with *the renewal of a culture of life within Christian communities themselves*. Too often it happens that believers, even those who take an active part in the life of the Church, end up by separating their Christian faith from its ethical requirements concerning life, and thus fall into moral subjectivism and certain objectionable ways of acting. With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread is the culture of life today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth. At the same time, we need to promote a serious and in-depth exchange about basic issues of human life with everyone, including non-believers, in intellectual circles, in the various professional

solummodo habendus benevolentiae obiectum, affectionis coniunctionisque. Etiam ipse potest pretiosam operam *Evangelio vitae* conferre. Potest et debet, ob praestans patrimonium experientiae per annorum decursum acceptum, *sapientiae distributor fieri, spei et caritatis testis*.

Si quidem illud verum est quod “sors futura hominum generis e familia pendet” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 85), necesse est agnoscamus aetate nostra condiciones sociales, oeconomicas culturalesque saepe magis arduum graviusque reddere familiae officium vitae inserviendi. Oportet atque urget ut *ipsa familia adiuvetur et sustineatur* in sua explenda vocatione “sacrae vitae”, cellulae scilicet illius societatis quae vitam amet et suscipiat. Ab hominum societate Civitatibusque tribuendum est subsidium vel oeconomicum, quo accepto difficultatibus suis familiae responderi valeant humaniore ratione. Ecclesia vicissim enixe fovere debet pastorem navitatem quae par sit ut quamque familiam incitet ut reperiat laetanterque et animose vivat suam erga *Evangelium vitae* missionem.

“**Ut filii lucis ambulate**” (Eph. 5, 8): **ad conversionem quandam culturalem efficiendam**

95. “Ut filii lucis ambulate... probantes quid sit beneplacitum Domino, et nolite communicare operibus infructuosis tenebrarum” (*Ibid.* 5, 8, 10-11). In aetatis nostrae statu sociali, signato gravi contentione inter “culturam vitae” et “culturam mortis”, oportet *altus inducatur criticus sensus*, ut vera dignoscantur bona germanaeque necessitates.

Quam primum inducantur necesse est *generalis conscientiarum motus moralisque communis nisus*, qui excitare valeant *validum sane opus ad vitam tuendam: omnibus nobis simul coniunctis nova exstruenda est vitae cultura*: nova, quae scilicet possit hodiernas de vita hominis ineditas quaestiones suscipere atque solvere; nova, utpote quae acriore et elacriore ratione omnium christianorum conscientiam promoveat; nova demum, quae accommodata sit ad gravem animosamque culturalem suscitandam comparisonem cum omnibus. Huius culturalis conversionis necessitas coniungitur cum aetatis nostrae historica rerum condicione, at praesertim inhaeret in ipso evangelizandi munere quod proprium est Ecclesiae. Evangelium enim eo spectat “ut perficiat interiorem mutationem” et “humanitatem novam efficiat” (PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18); est veluti fermentum quo pasta tota fermentatur (Cfr. *Matth.* 13, 33), atque, qua tale, perfundere debet omnes culturas easque intus pervadere (Cfr. PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20), ut integram declarent de homine deque eius vita veritatem.

Initium faciendum est a *vitae cultura renovanda intra ipsas christianas communitates*. Nimis enim saepe fideles, vel qui navam gerunt operam in ecclesiali vita, seuiunctionem quandam inferunt inter christianam fidem eiusque moralia circa vitam postulata, progredientes hac ratione ad moralem quandam subjectivismum adque vivendi mores qui probari non possunt. Nos ipsos igitur simili cum perspicuitate magnoque animo percontari debemus de cultura vitae quae hac aetate magis vulgata est inter singulos christianos, inter familias, coetusstrarumque dioecesium communitates. Eadem perspicuitate eodemque consilio seligantur itinera nobis perseguenda ut vitae serviamus secundum eius veritatis plenitudinem. Simul vero comparatio provehenda est acris quidem altaeque cum

<sup>122</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 86: AAS 74 (1982), 188.

<sup>123</sup> PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 18: AAS 68 (1976), 17.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 20: *loc. cit.*, 18.

spheres and at the level of people's everyday life.

96. The first and fundamental step towards this cultural transformation consists in *forming consciences* with regard to the incomparable and inviolable worth of every human life. It is of the greatest importance *to re-establish the essential connection between life and freedom*. These are inseparable goods: where one is violated, the other also ends up being violated. There is no true freedom where life is not welcomed and loved; and there is no fullness of life except in freedom. Both realities have something inherent and specific which links them inextricably: the vocation to love. Love, as a sincere gift of self,<sup>125</sup> is what gives the life and freedom of the person their truest meaning.

No less critical in the formation of conscience is *the recovery of the necessary link between freedom and truth*. As I have frequently stated, when freedom is detached from objective truth it becomes impossible to establish personal rights on a firm rational basis; and the ground is laid for society to be at the mercy of the unrestrained will of individuals or the oppressive totalitarianism of public authority.<sup>126</sup>

It is therefore essential that man should acknowledge his inherent condition as a creature to whom God has granted being and life as a gift and a duty. Only by admitting his innate dependence can man live and use his freedom to the full, and at the same time respect the life and freedom of every other person. Here especially one sees that "at the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God".<sup>127</sup> Where God is denied and people live as though he did not exist, or his commandments are not taken into account, the dignity of the human person and the inviolability of human life also end up being rejected or compromised.

97. Closely connected with the formation of conscience is the *work of education*, which helps individuals to be ever more human, leads them ever more fully to the truth, instils in them growing respect for life, and trains them in right interpersonal relationships.

In particular, there is a need for education about the value of life *from its very origins*. It is an illusion to think that we can build a true culture of human life if we do not help the young to accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and in their close interconnection. Sexuality, which enriches the whole person, "manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love".<sup>128</sup> The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which have led to contempt for new life. Only a true love is able to protect life. There can be no avoiding the duty to offer, especially to adolescents and young adults, an authentic *education in sexuality and in love*, an education which involves *training in chastity* as a virtue which fosters personal maturity and makes one capable of respecting the "spousal" meaning of the body.

omnibus, etiam cum non credentibus, de praecipuis vitae humanae quaestionibus, in locis ubi notiones et cogitationes enodantur sicut diversis in provinciis artium ac professionum atque ubi cuiusque hominis cotidie transigitur vita.

96. Primus fundamentalisque gressus ad hanc culturalem mutationem consistit in *moralis conscientiae institutione* de immenso inviolabilique cuiusque humanae vitae bono. Maxime interest ut *necessarius detegatur nexus inter vitam libertatemque*. Bona sunt quae dividi non possunt: cum alterum laeditur, necesse est ut etiam alterum laedatur. Vera libertas non est ubi vita non colitur et diligitur; neque plena est vita nisi in libertate. Duae autem hae rerum veritates necessitudinem insitam peculiaremque continent qua indissolubili modo nectuntur: vocationem ad amorem. Hic amor, prout sincerum sui ipsius donum (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24), firmissimus est sensus vitae atque libertatis cuiusque personae.

Haud minoris ponderis in conscientia informanda est *nova detectio constitutivi vinculi quod libertatem cum veritate coniungit*. Ut haud semel confirmavimus, si libertas ab objectiva veritate abstrahitur, iura hominis solido rationis fundamento niti nequeunt, atque hac ratione principia ponuntur quorum virtute in vita sociali sive anarchicum arbitrium singulorum sive absolutum regimen contumeliosum publicae auctoritatis constituentur (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Centesimus Annus*, 17; EIUSDEM *Veritatis Splendor*, 95-101). Pernecessarium itaque censetur ut homo originale perscipiat suae conditionis evidentiam qua creaturae, quae a Deo existentiam et vitam tamquam donum et munus accipit: tantummodo hanc suam agnoscens innatam dependentiam in propria existentia, homo suam libertatem et vitam plene perficere potest simulque vitam et libertatem cuiusque alterius hominis radicatus revereri. Hic praesertim "mediam... partem cuiuslibet culturae occupat hominis adfectus ante maximum omnium arcanum: Dei mysterium" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Centesimus Annus*, 24). Quoties Deus negatur, et vivitur tamquam ille non sit vel nulla iam habetur ratio eius mandatorum, negantur facile quoque et laeduntur personae humanae dignitas eiusque vitae inviolabilitas.

97. Conscientiae formationi arte consociatur *opus institutorium*, quod hominem iuvat ut in dies magis homo fiat, magis magisque eum in veritate inserit, ad provectionem vitae observationem convertit, ad aequas inter personas necessitudines format.

Peculiarem in modum necesse est ut institutio fiat ad bonum vitae *initio sumpto ab ipsis eius radicibus*. Inanis est spes verum humanae vitae cultum construendi, cum iuvenes auxilio privantur ad accipiendam et vivendam sexualitatem, amorem et vitam secundum authenticum eorum sensum eorumque in intima cohaerentia. Sexualitas, totius personae thesaurus, "suam demonstrat intimam significationem, dum provehit hominem ad sui donum in amore" (EIUSDEM *Familiaris Consortio*, 37). Vulgaris sexualitatis subaestimatio inter praecipuas enumeratur causas quae ad vitae nascentis contemtionem ducunt: verus dumtaxat amor scit vitam custodire. Nemo itaque eximitur ab onere praebendi adolescentibus potissimum et iuvenibus authenticam *educationem ad sexualitatem et ad amorem*, ad institutionem quae *formationem ad castitatem*

<sup>125</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 17: AAS 83 (1991), 814; Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 95-101: AAS 85 (1993), 1208-1213.

<sup>127</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 24: AAS 83 (1991), 822.

<sup>128</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 37 AAS 74 (1982), 128.

The work of educating in the service of life involves the *training of married couples in responsible procreation*. In its true meaning, responsible procreation requires couples to be obedient to the Lord's call and to act as faithful interpreters of his plan. This happens when the family is generously open to new lives, and when couples maintain an attitude of openness and service to life, even if, for serious reasons and in respect for the moral law, they choose to avoid a new birth for the time being or indefinitely. The moral law obliges them in every case to control the impulse of instinct and passion, and to respect the biological laws inscribed in their person. It is precisely this respect which makes legitimate, at the service of responsible procreation, the *use of natural methods of regulating fertility*. From the scientific point of view, these methods are becoming more and more accurate and make it possible in practice to make choices in harmony with moral values. An honest appraisal of their effectiveness should dispel certain prejudices which are still widely held, and should convince married couples, as well as health-care and social workers, of the importance of proper training in this area. The Church is grateful to those who, with personal sacrifice and often unacknowledged dedication, devote themselves to the study and spread of these methods, as well to the promotion of education in the moral values which they presuppose.

*The work of education cannot avoid a consideration of suffering and death.*

These are a part of human existence, and it is futile, not to say misleading, to try to hide them or ignore them. On the contrary, people must be helped to understand their profound mystery in all its harsh reality. Even pain and suffering have meaning and value when they are experienced in close connection with love received and given. In this regard, I have called for the yearly celebration of the *World Day of the Sick*, emphasizing "the salvific nature of the offering up of suffering which, experienced in communion with Christ, belongs to the very essence of the Redemption".<sup>129</sup> Death itself is anything but an event without hope. It is the door which opens wide on eternity and, for those who live in Christ, an experience of participation in the mystery of his Death and Resurrection.

98. In a word, we can say that the cultural change which we are calling for demands from everyone the courage to *adopt a new life-style*, consisting in making practical choices--at the personal, family, social and international level--on the basis of a correct scale of values: *the primacy of being over having*,<sup>130</sup> *of the person over things*.<sup>131</sup> This renewed life-style involves a passing from *indifference to concern for others, from rejection to acceptance of them*. Other people are not rivals from whom we must defend ourselves, but brothers and sisters to be supported. They are to be loved for their own sakes, and they enrich us by their very presence.

complectitur, quae maturitati personae favet eamque idoneam reddit ad "sponsalem" corporis significationem colendam.

Munus institutionis ad vitam secumfert *formationem coniugum ad consciam officiorum procreationem*. Quae quidem, germana ex sua significatione, postulat ut sponsi dociles fiant vocanti Domino et veluti fideles eius consilii interpretes operentur: quod sane accidit cum coniuges propriam familiam liberaliter ad novas vitas procreandas statuunt aperire, atque sese ostendunt vere ad vitam apertos et adiutores, etiam ubi seris de causis moralibusque praeceptis observatis ipsi animum inducant ut ad certum vel ad incertum tempus alium filium non gignant. Lex tamen moralis eos obstringit ut in quavis condicione inclinationes naturae motusque temperent ac leges biologicas in se ipsis inscriptas observent. Quae omnino observantia, conscio procreandi officio proveniens, *legitimum reddit usum naturalium rationum fecunditatis moderandae*: in dies perfectius usque definiuntur sub aspectu scientifico, atque finitas tribuunt facultates optionum moralibus cum principis congruentium. Aequa existimatio consecutionum inde perceptarum ducere debet ad quasdam opiniones nimium adhuc diffusas tollendas atque ad coniuges necnon administratos sanitatis et adiutores sociales monendos de momento huiusmodi accommodatae formationis. Ecclesia gratam se praebet erga eos qui sua ipsorum cum iactura atque deditione, saepe male intellecta, has vias pervestigare ac diffundere nituntur, dum simul promovent educationem ad virtutes morales, quas illarum usus implicat.

*Opus institutorum negligere non potest dolorem atque obitum*. Reapse, iidem partem constituunt experimenti cuiusque personae, idcirco futile est, non solum devium, velle eos censura afficere aut submovere. Unusquisque vero iuvandus est ad altissimum eorum mysterium in concreta arduaque veritate detegendum. Dolor quoque et aegritudo significatione quadam vestiuntur et excellentia, cum sentiuntur arte coniuncta cum amore recepto et communicato. Hac de causa statuimus ut unoquoque anno celebretur *Dies Mundialis Aegrotis* dicatur, in luce ponentes "salutiferam indolem oblationis dolorum qui in communione cum Christo suscepti ad intimam pertinent redemptionis partem" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Epistula qua constituitur Dies Mundialis Aegrotis dicatur*, 2, die 13 maii 1992: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XV, 1 (1992) 1410). Immo, neque mors est eventus a spe seiunctus: porta est existentiae quae reseratur versus aeternitatem, atque iis quotquot eam in Christo exigunt experientia est participationis cum eius mysterio mortis et resurrectionis.

98. Summatim dicere possumus conversionem culturalem hic exoptatam deponere fortitudinem ab omnibus *ad novam vitae rationem suscipiendam*, quae declaratur dum sub optionum specificarum fundamento – in ambitu personali familiari sociali et internationali – defigitur aequa bonorum mensura: *principatus existentiae supra possessionem* (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 35; PAULI VI *Populorum Progressio*, 15), *principatus personarum supra res ipsas* (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Gratissimam Sane*, 13). Haec renovata vitae ratio transitionem etiam implicat *ab animo indifferenti ad curam erga proximum atque ab eiusdem reiectione ad receptionem*: ceteri censendi non sunt competitores quibus sit resistendum, verum fratres et sorores quibuscumque necessitudo est instituenda; per se ipsi sunt diligendi; ipsa eorum praesentia ditiores nos reddit.

<sup>129</sup> Letter establishing the World Day of the Sick (13 May 1992) No. 2 *Insegnamenti XV*, 1 (1992), 1410.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 35; PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 15: AAS 59 (1967), 265.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane* (2 February 1994), 13: AAS 86 (1994), 892.

In this mobilization for a new culture of life no one must feel excluded: *everyone has an important role to play*. Together with the family, *teachers and educators* have a particularly valuable contribution to make. Much will depend on them if young people, trained in true freedom, are to be able to preserve for themselves and make known to others new, authentic ideals of life, and if they are to grow in respect for and service to every other person, in the family and in society.

*Intellectuals* can also do much to build a new culture of human life. A special task falls to *Catholic intellectuals*, who are called to be present and active in the leading centres where culture is formed, in schools and universities, in places of scientific and technological research, of artistic creativity and of the study of man. Allowing their talents and activity to be nourished by the living force of the Gospel, they ought to place themselves at the service of a new culture of life by offering serious and well documented contributions, capable of commanding general respect and interest by reason of their merit. It was precisely for this purpose that I established the *Pontifical Academy for Life*, assigning it the task of “studying and providing information and training about the principal problems of law and biomedicine pertaining to the promotion of life, especially in the direct relationship they have with Christian morality and the directives of the Church’s Magisterium”.<sup>132</sup> A specific contribution will also have to come from *Universities*, particularly from *Catholic Universities*, and from *Centres, Institutes and Committees of Bioethics*.

An important and serious responsibility belongs to *those involved in the mass media*, who are called to ensure that the messages which they so effectively transmit will support the culture of life. They need to present noble models of life and make room for instances of people’s positive and sometimes heroic love for others. With great respect they should also present the positive values of sexuality and human love, and not insist on what defiles and cheapens human dignity. In their interpretation of things, they should refrain from emphasizing anything that suggests or fosters feelings or attitudes of indifference, contempt or rejection in relation to life. With scrupulous concern for factual truth, they are called to combine freedom of information with respect for every person and a profound sense of humanity.

**99.** In transforming culture so that it supports life, *women* occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a “new feminism” which rejects the temptation of imitating models of “male domination”, in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.

Making my own the words of the concluding message of the Second Vatican Council, I address to women this urgent appeal: “*Reconcile people with life*”.<sup>133</sup> You are called to *bear witness to the meaning of genuine love*, of that gift of self and of that acceptance of others which are present in a special way in the relationship of husband and wife, but which ought also to be at the heart of every other interpersonal relationship. The experience of motherhood makes you acutely aware of the other person and, at the same time, confers on you a particular task: “Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of

A motu hoc novam vitae culturam promovendi nemo exclusus se sentiat: *unusquisque suum grave munus implendum habet*. Una cum familiarum officio, maxime necessarium est illud *docentium et educatorum*. In illorum praesertim est potestate si iuvenes, ad veram libertatem instituti, custodire noverint in semet ipsis necnon circum se diffundere germanas species vitae atque in cuiusque personae observantia et famulatu apud societatem domumque propriam crescere discent.

Docti quoque *ac doctae* ad novum humanae vitae cultum aedificandum conferre plurimum possunt. Peculiare sane officium decet doctos *catholicos*, quorum est navam operam explicare in praestantioribus sedibus humano cultui efformando, in orbe scholarum et apud Studiorum Universitates, in campo scientificae et technicae investigationis, in locis ad artes creandas humanioresque notiones meditandas pertinentibus. Dum eorum ingenium eorumque agendi actio claro Evangelii suco nutriuntur, ipsorum erit partes proprias conferre ad novam vitae culturam provehendam magni momenti adimentum ferendo, quae comprobata sint et talia ut ob suam praestantiam, observationem ac benevolentiam omnium sibi comparent. Proprie hoc sub prospectu *Pontificiam Academiam pro Vita* constituimus, cuius erit peculiare officium “perscrutari, docere et instruere circa praecipuas quaestiones ad biomedicinam adque iura pertinentes, quae vitam provehendam et tuendam respiciunt, quaeque potissimum cum morali christiana et Ecclesiae Magisterii praescriptis necessitudinem habent” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Vitae Mysterium*, 4). Peculiaris opitulatio capienda est etiam ex *Studiorum Universitatibus, praesertim catholicis et ex Sedibus, Institutis et Comitibus pro Bioethica*.

Ingens graveque officium obstringit homines *instrumenta communicationis socialis gerentes*, qui ad studium invitantur ut nuntii tanta efficacitate diffusi ad vitae culturam conferant. Excelsa tum ac sublimia vitae exempla exhibeant oportet atque positiva et aliquando heroica amoris testimonia erga hominem apto in lumine ponant; summa veneratione praestantiam sexualitatis et amoris significant, nulla interposita dubitatione circa ea quae hominis dignitatem deturpant vel despiciunt. Cum aspiciuntur hodiernae vitae eventus, omnino devitent ne in luce collocentur ea quae insinuare possint aut augere sensus vel habitus lentitudinis animi, contemptumque vel repudiationis vitae. In religiosa fidelitate veritati rerum gestarum danda, invitantur ut libertatem informationis, venerationem cuiusque personae et altum humanitatis sensum simul coniungant.

99. In culturali conversione pro vita, *mulieribus* tribuitur prorsus singulare fortasse et decretorium cogitationis et actionis spatium: ipsarum enim est promovere “novum feminismum” qui agnoscere valeat et proferre veram indolem femininam in quolibet convictus civilis gestu, quin in temptationem incuratur imitandi exemplaria “cultus nimii virilitatis”, dum opera datur, ut omnino quodvis genus amoveatur discriminationis violentiae et abusus.

Nos quoque, verba nuntii sub conclusionem Concilii Vaticani II repetentes, hac instanti invitatione mulieres alloquimur: “*Homines cum vita reconciliate*” (CONC. OECUM. VAT. II *Nuntii quibusdam hominum ordinibus dati*: «Ad Mulieres», die 8 dec. 1965). Vocatae estis ad testificandam *significationem veri amoris*, illius nempe doni sui et receptionis alterius quae in coniugali societate singillatim adimplentur, quae tamen velut anima cuiusque alterius relationis interpersonalis effici debent. Experientia maternitatis favet in vobis acutae perceptioni adfectus erga alterum et interea proprium

<sup>132</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Motu Proprio *Vitae Mysterium* (11 February 1994), 4: AAS 86 (1994), 386-387.

<sup>133</sup> *Closing Messages of the Council* (8 December 1965): *To Women*.

life, as it develops in the woman's womb . . . This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings not only towards her own child, but every human being, which profoundly marks the woman's personality".<sup>134</sup> A mother welcomes and carries in herself another human being, enabling it to grow inside her, giving it room, respecting it in its otherness. Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health. This is the fundamental contribution which the Church and humanity expect from women. And it is the indispensable prerequisite for an authentic cultural change.

I would now like to say a special word to *women who have had an abortion*. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.

**100.** In this great endeavour to create a new culture of life we are *inspired and sustained by the confidence* that comes from knowing that the *Gospel of life*, like the Kingdom of God itself, is growing and producing abundant fruit (cf. *Mk 4:26-29*). There is certainly an enormous disparity between the powerful resources available to the forces promoting the "culture of death" and the means at the disposal of those working for a "culture of life and love". But we know that we can rely on the help of God, for whom nothing is impossible (cf. *Mt 19:26*).

Filled with this certainty, and moved by profound concern for the destiny of every man and woman, I repeat what I said to those families who carry out their challenging mission amid so many difficulties:<sup>135</sup> *a great prayer for life is urgently needed*, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Through special initiatives and in daily prayer, may an impassioned plea rise to God, the Creator and lover of life, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family and from the heart of every believer. Jesus himself has shown us by his own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil (cf. *Mt 4:1-11*). As he taught his disciples, some demons cannot be driven out except in this way (cf. *Mk 9:29*). Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to *pray and fast* so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit:

vobis quoddam munus concredit: "Singularem quandam communionem cum vitae mysterio, quae in matris visceribus maturescit, in se complectitur maternitas... Praecipuus hic modus consortionis cum novo homine, qui paulatim conformatur, ipse vicissim animi talem habitum gignit erga hominem – non tantum proprium in filium sed etiam erga hominem in universum – ut altissime iam totum exprimat mulieris ingenium" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18). Mater enim excipit secumque fert alterum, ei modum intra se crescendi largitur, spatium tribuit illi ipsum veneratione prosequens in ipsius alteritate. Ita mulier percipit et docet humanum consortium solummodo authenticum esse cum aperitur ad receptionem alterius personae, agnitae et dilectae ob dignitatem quae illi provenit ex eo quod est persona, non vero aliis de causis, uti sunt: commoditas, robur, intellegentia, pulchritudo, valetudo. Hoc est enim praecipuum adiumentum quod Ecclesia humanumque genus a mulieribus exspectant. Haec necessaria est ad authenticam conversionem culturalem praeparatio. Singularem cogitationem ad vos vertimus, *mulieres, quae abortum procuravistis*. Ecclesia probe novit quot condiciones ad tale consilium sumendum vos adduxerint, pariterque novit plerumque quoddam haud facile, fortasse miserandum, intercessisse propositum. Vultus, quod animus vestrum sauciavit, forsitan nondum cicatrice est obductum. Revera, id quod tunc contigit, aliquid prorsus iniustum fuit et remanet. Attamen nolite animo deficere nec spem relinquere. Id potius percipite quod evenit idque in eius veritate interpretamini. Quod si necdum fecistis, cor vestrum humili ac fidenti ratione ad compunctionem aperite: misericordiarum Pater vos exspectat ut veniam vobis offerat et pacem in Sacramento Reconciliationis. Infantem autem vestrum potestis Eidem Patri Eiusque misericordiae cum spe committere. Consilio, amicorum peritorumque affectu suffultae, poteritis vestro difficili testimonio inter eloquentiores iuris omnium ad vitam propugnatores recenseri. Per vestrum ad vitae tutelam munus, quod in effectum forsitan perduxistis novarum creaturarum ortu atque exercuistis receptione necnon praesidio pro hominibus magis propinquate egentibus, artifices eritis novae rationis contuendi vitam hominis.

100. Hac in ingenti navitate novo vitae cultui provehendo, *fulcimur et confirmamur fiducia* illius qui bene novit *Evangelium vitae*, sicut Regnum Dei, crescere uberesque fructus edere (Cfr. *Marc. 4, 26-29*). Infinita est enim inaequalitas inter instrumenta, copiosa quidem et valida, quibus praeditae sunt vires foventes "culturam mortis", et instrumenta quibus fautores "culturae vitae et amoris" instruuntur. Nos tamen recte scimus in Domino nos confidere posse, apud quem nihil sit impossibile (Cfr. *Matth. 19, 26*).

Hanc in animo nutrientes certitudinem et intima sollicitudine compulsi de cuiusque viri et mulieris condicionibus, hodie ea repetimus quae diximus familiis ardua munia exsequi nitentibus inter insidias quae illis adversantur (Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Gratissimam Sane*, 5). *Summa flagitatur pro vita precatio*, quae universum mundum pervadat. Extraordinariis inceptis et cotidianis precibus, singulis ex communitatibus christianis, singulis ex coetibus vel societatibus, ex singulis familiis et ex corde singulorum credentium, effundatur Deo Conditori vitaeque amanti fervida supplicatio. Ipse Iesus proprio nobis ostendit exemplo orationem et ieiunium praecipua esse arma validioraque contra tenebrarum potestates (Cfr. *Matth. 4, 1-11*), suosque discipulos docuit quoddam demoniorum genus dumtaxat hoc modo expelli posse

<sup>134</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 18: AAS 80 (1988), 1696.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane* (2 February 1994), 5: AAS 86 (1994), 872.

the warts which conceal from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil of practices and laws which are hostile to life. May this same power turn their hearts to resolutions and goals inspired by the civilization of life and love.

“We are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:4): the *Gospel of life* is for the whole of human society

101. “We are writing you this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:4). The revelation of the *Gospel of life* is given to us as a good to be shared with all people: so that all men and women may have fellowship with us and with the Trinity (cf. 1 Jn 1:3). Our own joy would not be complete if we failed to share this Gospel with others but kept it only for ourselves.

*The Gospel of life* is not for believers alone: *it is for everyone*. The issue of life and its defence and promotion is not a concern of Christians alone. Although faith provides special light and strength, this question arises in every human conscience which seeks the truth and which cares about the future of humanity. Life certainly has a sacred and religious value, but in no way is that value a concern only of believers. The value at stake is one which every human being can grasp by the light of reason; thus it necessarily concerns everyone.

Consequently, all that we do as the “people of life and for life” should be interpreted correctly and welcomed with favour. When the Church declares that unconditional respect for the right to life of every innocent person—from conception to natural death—is one of the pillars on which every civil society stands, she “wants simply to promote a human State. A State which recognizes the defence of the fundamental rights of the human person, especially of the weakest, as its primary duty”.<sup>136</sup>

*The Gospel of life* is for the whole of human society. To be actively pro-life is to contribute to the *renewal of society* through the promotion of the common good. It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society, such as democracy and peace.

There can be no *true democracy* without a recognition of every person’s dignity and without respect for his or her rights.

Nor can there be *true peace* unless *life is defended and promoted*. As Paul VI pointed out: “Every crime against life is an attack on peace, especially if it strikes at the moral conduct of people... But where human rights are truly professed and publicly recognized and defended, peace becomes the joyful and operative climate of life in society”.<sup>137</sup>

(Cfr. Marc. 9, 29). Humilitatem itaque et audaciam denuo reperimus *orandi et ieiunandi*, ut fortitudo ex Alto proveniens deceptionis et mendacii muros corruere faciat, qui tot nostrorum fratrum sororumque oculos pravam celant indolem actionum et legum quae vitae adversantur, atque eorum corda aperiat ad consilia et proposita vitae et amoris cultu inflammata. **“Haec scribimus nos, ut gaudium nostrum sit plenum” (1 Jo. 1, 4): “evangelium vitae pro hominum civitate datur”**

101. “Haec scribimus nos, ut gaudium nostrum sit plenum” (*Ibid.*). Evangelii vitae revelatio data est nobis tamquam donum cum omnibus communicandum: ut omnes homines nobiscum et cum Trinitate communionem habeant (Cfr. *ibid.* 1, 3). Ne nos quidem pleno gaudio frui possumus si hoc Evangelium aliis non impertimus, sed illud solis pro nobis tenemus.

Evangelium vitae non tantum christianos respicit, *omnibus destinatur*. Quaestio vitam efficiens eiusque tutelam et promotionem non est privilegium dumtaxat christianorum. Etsi ex fide lumen ac robur ingens accipit, ad universas pertinet humanas mentes quae veritatem appetunt quaeque de hominum conditionibus sedulae sunt atque sollicitae. Profecto in vita aliquid sacri est et religiosi, quod tamen minime credentes unos afficit: thesaurus nempe est quo quisque rationis luce utens potest potiri quique proinde omnes necessario respicit.

Hanc ob rem, nisus noster proprius “populi vitae et pro vita” postulat ut recte intellegatur et ex animo excipiatur. Cum Ecclesia proclamat absolutam observantiam iuris ad vitam cuiusque insontis personae – a conceptione ad eius naturalem mortem – inter columnas esse quibus singulae civiles societates sustententur, ipsa “simpliciter vult *Statum humanum promovere*; Statum nempe, qui tutelam iurium fundamentalium personae humanae, praesertim infirmioris, velut officium suum primarium agnoscat” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Allocutio ad participes Congressus «de vitae iure et Europa»*, 1, die 18 dec. 1987: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 3 (1987) 1446).

*Evangelium vitae civitati hominum favet*. Pro vita operari idem est ac conferre ad *societatis renovationem* per aedificationem boni communis. Etenim fieri nequit ut bonum commune aedificetur ita ut non agnoscat et servetur ius ad vitam, quo omnia cetera inalienabilia hominis iura fulciuntur et explicantur. Nec firma habere potest fundamenta illa societas quae – dum bona asserit qualia sunt personarum dignitas, iustitia et pax – sibi obloquitur radicibus, cum diversissimas quidem recipiat perferatque rationes humanam neglegendi ac violandi vitam, praesertim infirmam et segregem. Reverentia una vitae praecipua necessariaque societatis bona generare et praestare valet, cuius modi democratia est et pax.

Nam dari nequit *vera democratia*, nisi dignitas cuiusque personae agnoscitur eiusque iura vindicantur.

Ne pax quidem *vera* dari potest nisi *vita defenditur et promovetur*, uti ait Paulus VI: “Quodlibet delictum contra vitam commissum adgressio est contra pacem, maxime cum populorum consuetudines violantur..., contra vero, ubi iura hominis plane declarantur atque propalam agnoscuntur et proteguntur, pax laetus et efficax redditur ambitus socialis convictus” (PAULI VI *Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam dicatum pro a.D. 1977*, die 8 dec. 1976: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XIV (1976) 1026 s.).

<sup>136</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Address to Participants in the Study Conference on “The Right to Life in Europe” (18 December 1987): *Insegnamenti X*, 3 (1987), 1446.

<sup>137</sup> *Message for the 1977 World Day of Peace: AAS 68* (1976), 711-712.



The “people of life” rejoices in being able to share its commitment with so many others. Thus may the “people for life” constantly grow in number and may a new culture of love and solidarity develop for the true good of the whole of human society.

## Conclusion

**102.** At the end of this Encyclical, we naturally look again to the Lord Jesus, “the Child born for us” (cf. *Is* 9:6), that in him we may contemplate “the Life” which “was made manifest” (1 *Jn* 1:2). In the mystery of Christ’s Birth the encounter of God with man takes place and the earthly journey of the Son of God begins, a journey which will culminate in the gift of his life on the Cross. By his death Christ will conquer death and become for all humanity the source of new life.

The one who accepted “Life” in the name of all and for the sake of all was Mary, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely and personally associated with the *Gospel of life*. Mary’s consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity (cf. *Jn* 10:10). Through her acceptance and loving care for the life of the Incarnate Word, human life has been rescued from condemnation to final and eternal death.

For this reason, Mary, “like the Church of which she is the type, is a mother of all who are reborn to life. She is in fact the mother of the Life by which everyone lives, and when she brought it forth from herself she in some way brought to rebirth all those who were to live by that Life”.<sup>138</sup>

As the Church contemplates Mary’s motherhood, she discovers the meaning of her own motherhood and the way in which she is called to express it. At the same time, the Church’s experience of motherhood leads to a most profound understanding of Mary’s experience as the *incomparable model of how life should be welcomed and cared for*.

“A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1): *the motherhood of Mary and of the Church*

**103.** The mutual relationship between the mystery of the Church and Mary appears clearly in the “great portent” described in the Book of Revelation: “A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (12:1). In this sign the Church recognizes an image of her own mystery: present in history, she knows that she transcends history, inasmuch as she constitutes on earth the “seed and beginning” of the Kingdom of God.<sup>139</sup> The Church sees this mystery fulfilled in complete and exemplary fashion in Mary. She is the woman of glory in whom God’s plan could be carried out with supreme perfection.

The “woman clothed with the sun”--the Book of Revelation tells us--“was with child” (12:2). The Church is fully aware that she bears within herself the Saviour of the world, Christ the Lord. She is aware that she is called to offer Christ to the world, giving men and women new birth into God’s own life. But the Church cannot forget that her mission was made possible by the motherhood of Mary, who conceived and bore the One who is “God from God”, “true God from true God”. Mary is truly the Mother of God, the *Theotokos*, in whose motherhood the vocation to motherhood bestowed by God on every woman is raised to its highest level. Thus Mary becomes the model of the Church, called to be the “new Eve”, the mother of believers, the mother of the “living” (cf. *Gen*

“Populus vitae” laetatur quod suam industriam ita cum tot aliis participare potest, ut in dies “populus pro vita” frequentior sit atque novus amoris et solidaritatis cultus in verum civitatis hominum beneficium crescere valeat.

## CONCLUSIO

102. His rite ad finem vergentibus Encyclicis Litteris Nostris oculi sua quidem sponte ad Dominum Iesum convertuntur, qui “parvulus... natus est nobis” (*Is.* 9, 5) ut “vitam” in ipso contempleretur quae “apparuit nobis” (1 *Io.* 1, 2). Huius nativitatis in mysterio congressio Dei cum homine consummatur iterque Dei Filii in terris incohatur, curriculum nempe quod perficietur per vitae donum in Cruce: sua namque morte mortem is debellabit atque cunctis fiet hominibus vitae novae principium.

Pro omnibus inque omnium commodum “vitam” amplexata est Maria, Virgo Mater, quae vinculis ita suis arctissimis cum *Evangelio vitae* copulatur. Annuntiationi concessa illius consensio eiusque maternitas subiacent fonti ipsi mysterii vitae quam venit Christus hominibus ut largiretur (Cfr. *Io.* 10, 10). Quod suscepit sollicitaque curavit vitam Verbi incarnati, hominis vita est erepta postremo sempiternoque mortis iudicio.

Idcirco Maria, “sicut Ecclesia, cuius forma est, mater est omnium ad vitam renascentium. Mater siquidem est Vitae qua vivunt universi; quam dum ex se genuit, nimirum omnes qui ex ea victuri sunt quodammodo regeneravit” (BEATI GUERRICI D’IGNY *In Assumptione B. Mariae*, sermo 1, 2: PL 185, 188). Ecclesia Mariae maternitatem dum contuetur sensum reperit suae propriae maternitatis modumque simul quo incitatur ut eam testetur. Eodem vero tempore materna Ecclesiae experientia latiore reddit illam rationem sive visionem qua percipiatur experimentum Mariae tamquam *inaestimabilis exemplaris tutelae curaeque de vita*.

“Signum magnum apparuit in caelo: mulier amicta sole” (Apoc. 12, 1): *mariae et ecclesiae maternitas*

103. Mutua necessitudo inter Ecclesiae arcanum et Mariam luculenter profecto per “signum magnum” recluditur in Apocalypsis libro descriptum: “Signum magnum apparuit in caelo: mulier amicta sole, et luna sub pedibus eius, et super caput eius corona stellarum duodecim” (*Ibid.*). Quo deinde in ostento sui ipsius arcani speciem deprehendit Ecclesia: in res gestas hominum coniecta novit illa se eam transcendere, quatenus in terris “germen et initium” continet Dei Regni (*Lumen Gentium*, 5). Idem autem mysterium impletum pleno praestantique modo conspicatur Ecclesia in Maria. Gloriosa enim ipsa mulier est in qua Dei consilium maxima potuit absolvi perfectione. “Mulier amicta sole” – prout indicat Apocalypsis – apparuit “in utero habens” (Apoc. 12, 2). In sese orbis Salvatorem, Christum Dominum, portare se penitus sentit Ecclesia destinarique item ut universo eum orbi donet, ad ipsam Dei regenerandis hominibus vitam. Nec tamen oblivisci valet per Mariae maternitatem hoc suum munus impletum esse, quae eum concepit peperitque qui est “Deus de Deo”, “Deus verus de Deo vero”. Revera Mater Dei est Maria, ipsa *Theotokos*, cuius in maternitate vocatio ad maternitatem in summum omnino evadit a Deo in omni femina inscripta. Ita profecto Ecclesiae sese exemplar Maria commonstrat, vocata ut “nova Eva” sit, credentium mater, mater “viventium” (Cfr. *Gen.* 3, 20).

<sup>138</sup> BLESSED GUERRIC OF IGNY, *In Assumptione B. Mariae*, Sermo 1, 2: PL 185, 188.

<sup>139</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 5.

3:20).

The Church's spiritual motherhood is only achieved--the Church knows this too--through the pangs and "the labour" of childbirth (cf. *Rev* 12:2), that is to say, in constant tension with the forces of evil which still roam the world and affect human hearts, offering resistance to Christ: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (*Jn* 1:4-5).

Like the Church, Mary too had to live her motherhood amid suffering: "This child is set... for a sign that is spoken against--and a sword will pierce through your own soul also--that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (*Lk* 2:34-35). The words which Simeon addresses to Mary at the very beginning of the Saviour's earthly life sum up and prefigure the rejection of Jesus, and with him of Mary, a rejection which will reach its culmination on Calvary. "Standing by the cross of Jesus" (*Jn* 19:25), Mary shares in the gift which the Son makes of himself: she offers Jesus, gives him over, and begets him to the end for our sake. The "yes" spoken on the day of the Annunciation reaches full maturity on the day of the Cross, when the time comes for Mary to receive and beget as her children all those who become disciples, pouring out upon them the saving love of her Son: "When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!'" (*Jn* 19:26).

*"And the dragon stood before the woman ... that he might devour her child when she brought it forth" (Rev 12:4): life menaced by the forces of evil*

**104.** In the Book of Revelation, the "great portent" of the "woman" (12:1) is accompanied by "another portent which appeared in heaven": "a great red dragon" (*Rev* 12:3), which represents Satan, the personal power of evil, as well as all the powers of evil at work in history and opposing the Church's mission.

Here too Mary sheds light on the Community of Believers. The hostility of the powers of evil is, in fact, an insidious opposition which, before affecting the disciples of Jesus, is directed against his mother. To save the life of her Son from those who fear him as a dangerous threat, Mary has to flee with Joseph and the Child into Egypt (cf. *Mt* 2:13-15).

Mary thus helps the Church to realize that life is always at the centre of a great struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. The dragon wishes to devour "the child brought forth" (cf. *Rev* 12:4), a figure of Christ, whom Mary brought forth "in the fullness of time" (*Gal* 4:4) and whom the Church must unceasingly offer to people in every age. But in a way that child is also a figure of every person, every child, especially every helpless baby whose life is threatened, because--as the Council reminds us--"by his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person".<sup>140</sup> It is precisely in the "flesh" of every person that Christ continues to reveal himself and to enter into fellowship with us, so that rejection of human life, in whatever form that rejection takes, is really a rejection of Christ. This is the fascinating but also demanding truth which Christ reveals to us and which his Church continues untiringly to proclaim: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (*Mt* 18:5); "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25:40).

*"Death shall be no more" (Rev 21:4): the splendour of the Resurrection*

**105.** The angel's Annunciation to Mary is framed by these reassuring words: "Do not be afraid, Mary" and "with God nothing will be impossible" (*Lk* 1:30,

Spiritualis autem Ecclesiae maternitas non completur – sicut probe novit etiam Ecclesia – nisi inter dolores et cruciatus "ut pariat" (*Apoc.* 12, 2), id est in perpetua cum mali viribus dimicatione quae orbem pererrare haud desinunt hominumque signare et notare animos, Christo ipsi resistendo: "In ipso vita erat, et vita erat lux hominum, et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt" (*Io.* 1, 4-5).

Perinde atque Ecclesia, implere Maria quoque maternitatem suam debuit in doloris signo: "Est hic... in signum cui contradicetur... ut revelentur ex multis cordibus cogitationes... Et tuam ipsius animam pertransiet gladius" (*Luc.* 2, 34-35). Quibus sane verbis Simeon, prima sub ipsa Salvatoris vitae exordia, Mariam alloquitur, breviter comprehenditur lesu repudiatio et cum illo Mariae quae supra Calvariae montem suum attinget culmen. "Iuxta crucem lesu" (*Io.* 19, 25), fit Mariae illius deditionis suscipiendi et pariendi veluti filium unumquemque hominem factum discipulum, in quem redimentem Filii amorem effundit: "Cum vidisset ergo lesus matrem et discipulum, quem diligebat, dicit matri: «Mulier, ecce filius tuus»" (*Ibid.* 19, 26).

**"Draco stetit ante mulierem... ut, cum peperisset, filium eius devoraret" (Apoc. 12, 4): vita cui mali vires insidiantur.**

104. In Apocalypsis libro "signum magnum mulieris" (*Ibid.* 12, 1) comitatur "aliud signum in caelo... draco rufus magnus" (*Ibid.* 12, 3), qui speciem prae se fert Satanae ipsius, maleficae personalis potentiae, eodemque etiam tempore summae omniu mali virtutum quae in hominum operantur historia munerique Ecclesiae adversantur.

Hic quoque illuminat Maria Credentium Communitatem: oppugnatio virium malorum sunt reapse tacita quaedam repugnancia quae, priusquam ferit lesu discipulos, eius obsidet Matrem. Ut Filii vitam eripiat ab iis quotquot illum veluti munitans aliquod periculum metuunt, fugere cum Iosepho et Parvulo in Aegyptum Maria debet (Cfr. *Matth.* 2, 13-15).

Ita enim subvenit Maria Ecclesiae ut *funditus ipsa sentiat vitam semper medium obtinere locum magna in illa pugna* inter bonum et malum, inter lucem ac tenebras. Concupiscit draco devorare eum qui est "puer modo natus" (*Apoc.* 12, 4), figuram Christi quem generat Maria "ubi venit plenitudo temporis" (*Gal.* 4, 4) quemque singulis saeculorum aetatibus exhibere hominibus debet Ecclesia. Quodam tamen modo cuiusvis figura est hominis, omnis parvuli, atque imago cuiusvis creaturae inermis periculisque obnoxiae, quoniam – uti commemorat Concilium – "Ipse..., Filius Dei, incarnatione sua cum omni homine quodammodo se univit" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). In "carne" scilicet cuiusque hominis Christus pergit sese ostendere et nobiscum communionem coniungere, ideoque *hominis vitae repudiatio* variis suis sub formis reapse ipsius Christi est repudiatio. Haec tandem mirifica est ac imperiosa simul veritas quam nobis Christus aperit et eius Ecclesia iterum iterumque indefessa repetit: "Qui susceperit unum parvulum talem in nomine meo, me suscipit" (*Matth.* 18, 5); "Amen dico vobis: quamdiu fecistis uni de minimis meis, mihi fecistis" (*Ibid.* 25, 40). **"Mors ultra non erit" (Apoc. 21, 4): resurrectionis splendor**

105. Ab angelo ad Mariam delata nuntiatio illis vestitur vocabis spe plenis: "Ne timeas, Maria" et "non erit impossibile apud Deum omne verbum" (*Luc.* 1, 30. 37).

<sup>140</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

37). The whole of the Virgin Mother's life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care. The same is true of the Church, which finds "a place prepared by God" (*Rev* 12:6) in the desert, the place of trial but also of the manifestation of God's love for his people (cf. *Hos* 2:16). Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated: "Death with life contended: combat strangely ended! Life's own Champion, slain, yet lives to reign".<sup>141</sup>

*The Lamb who was slain* is alive, bearing the marks of his Passion in the splendour of the Resurrection. He alone is master of all the events of history: he opens its "seals" (cf. *Rev* 5:1-10) and proclaims, in time and beyond, *the power of life over death*. In the "new Jerusalem", that new world towards which human history is travelling, "*death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away*" (*Rev* 21:4).

And as we, the pilgrim people, the people of life and for life, make our way in confidence towards "a new heaven and a new earth" (*Rev* 21:1), we look to her who is for us "a sign of sure hope and solace".<sup>142</sup>

O Mary,  
 bright dawn of the new world,  
 Mother of the living,  
 to you dowe entrust the *cause of life*:  
 Look down, O Mother,  
 upon the vast numbers  
 of babies not allowed to be born,  
 of the poor whose lives are made difficult,  
 of men and women  
 who are victims of brutal violence,  
 of the elderly and the sick killed  
 by indifference or out of misguided mercy.  
 Grant that all who believe in your Son  
 may *proclaim the Gospel of life*  
 with honesty and love  
 to the people of our time.  
 Obtain for them the grace  
 to *accept that Gospel*  
 as a gift ever new,  
 the joy of *celebrating* it with gratitude  
 throughout their lives and  
 the courage to *bear witness to it*  
 resolutely, in order to build,  
 together with all people of good will,  
 the civilization of truth and love,  
 to the praise and glory of God,  
 the Creator and lover of life.

**Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 March, the Solemnity of the  
 Annunciation of the Lord, in the year 1995, the seventeenth of my  
 Pontificate.**

Joannes Paulus II

Tota enim Matris virginis vita illa intexitur certa veritate: Deum prope esse ad eam atque eam pariter sua prosequi benevolentia. Haud secus etiam Ecclesiae accidit, ut "refugium" inveniatur in deserto (*Apoc.* 12, 6) ubi locus probationis est sed etiam declarationis Dei amoris erga proprium populum (Cfr. *Os.* 2, 16). Vivens est Maria verbum consolationis ipsi Ecclesiae in proelio contra mortem. Ostendens nobis Filium, confirmat simul in eo mortis potestates iam esse debellatas: "Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando: dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus" (*Missale Romanum*, *Sequentia Dominicae Resurrectionis*). *Immolatus Agnus* vivit cum signis passionis in resurrectionis claritate. Unus ille dominatur historiae eventibus: aperit "signacula" (Cfr. *Apoc.* 5, 1-10) asseritque intra et ultra tempus *dominationem vitae in mortem*. In "nova Ierusalem", sive in renovato orbe ad quem hominum progreditur historia, "*mors ultra non erit, neque luctus neque clamor neque dolor, quia prima abierunt*" (*Ibid.* 21, 4).

Populi autem instar peregrinantis, vitae videlicet populi ac pro vita, dum fidenter ad "caelum novum et terram novam" (*Ibid.* 21, 1) progredimur, ad ipsam simul intuitum convertimus quae nobis "signum certae spei et solacii" exsistit (*Lumen Gentium*, 68).

O Maria,  
 orbis novi diluculum,  
 Mater viventium,  
 causam omnem tibi vitam commendamus:  
 multitudinem, Mater, respice innumeram  
 infantium quibus interdicitur ne nascantur,  
 pauperum quibus vivere ipsum redditur asperum,  
 mulierum et virorum quibus inhumana crudelitas  
 infligitur,  
 senum atque aegrotantium quibus indifferens animus  
 mortem attulit pietasve fucata.  
 Credentes tuum in Filium effice  
 ut *Evangelium vitae*  
 candide sciant amanterque  
 nostrae aetatis hominibus nuntiare.  
 Ipsi gratiam impetrato  
 ut veluti novum usque donum illud *amplexentur*,  
 laetitiam vero ut memori mente  
 in vitae suae perpetuitate id *venerentur*,  
 pariter constantiam  
 ut actiosa idem tenacitate *testificentur*  
 unde universis cum bonae voluntatis hominibus  
 civilem veritatis amorisque cultum exstruere possint,  
 ad Dei vitae Conditoris et amatoris laudem atque  
 gloriam.

*Datum Romae, apud Sanctum Petrum, die vicesimo quinto mensis Martii, in sollemnitate Annuntiationis Domini, anno MCMXCV, Pontificatus Nostri septimo decimo.*

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

<sup>141</sup> *Roman Missal*, Sequence for Easter Sunday.

<sup>142</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68.