



Edinburgh, Sunday 29 October 2017

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On Friday 27 October 1967, Royal Assent was given to the Abortion Act. The legislation was based on a private member's bill introduced the year previous by recently elected Member of Parliament for Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles, 28-year-old David Steel. His stated aim was legally to permit the abortion of the pre-born in very limited circumstances.

Fifty years have now passed. In that time, nearly 9 million abortions have been performed in the United Kingdom. That's approximately one in five pregnancies. In fact, by the time you depart Holy Mass today, over 20 pre-born lives will have been terminated somewhere in the UK. As Lord Steel himself recently said: "I never envisaged there would be so many abortions".

The statistics, however, are but the patina beneath which is to be found countless very individual, very personal stories of mothers, fathers and families whose lives have been damaged, and in many cases very seriously, by abortion. Many of you may be listening to this letter now. Please be assured of my sympathy, my understanding and my prayers. Our Merciful Lord awaits all of us, including you, with arms outstretched, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

As Pope Francis reminds us, the Catholic Church has to be "a field hospital after battle" for those most adversely affected by our contemporary culture.

"The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity," said the Holy Father in the wake of his election as Pope in 2013.

With this in mind, I commend to you such counselling services as the Abortion Recovery Care & Helpline and Project Rachel. Both offer great assistance to women, men and families as they attempt to restore their lives and relationships after an abortion experience. I would ask each parish to make their contact details readily available.

For those of us who profess to be Christian, let us note that the first encounter between our incarnate Lord and St John the Baptist occurs when both are still *in utero*.

"As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy," says Elizabeth upon the visit of her pregnant kinswoman, Mary of Nazareth (Luke 1:44).

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Every life in the womb is of the same infinite worth and value as Our Lady's divine pre-born son because every life in the womb bears his image and his likeness. As Pope Francis said starkly in 2013, "Every child who, rather than being born, is condemned unjustly to being aborted, bears the face of Jesus Christ, bears the face of the Lord, who even before he was born, and then just after birth, experienced the world's rejection."

At the same time, the Holy Father is rightly encouraging us to better assist pregnant mothers in difficulty. He recognises that our supposed pro-choice society often seems to give no-choice to expectant mothers who are seeking support for themselves and their pre-born child at a time of great crisis. Contrary to the glib slogans, abortion is most often not a sign that that a woman is free, but rather that she is under terrible pressure, even desperate.

As for those who do not yet believe in Christ, the inalienable rights of the pre-born still stand undiminished. Take the example of the 1960's Fleet Street journalist, Phyllis Bowman. Jewish by birth, the then-agnostic Phyllis was initially in favour of abortion. But when she began to see its effects on women and their pre-born children, she changed her mind. In 1967, she founded the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children.

In conclusion, let us each of us commit ourselves, through our prayer and our deeds, to build a new culture of life. Let each of us strive to enkindle a civilization of love that cherishes and supports the pre-born child and his or her pregnant, but often frightened and vulnerable, mother. Let each of us begin that great endeavour today.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

*+ Leo Cushley*

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Archbishop of St Andrews & Edinburgh

