

CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE PRO-VITA  
SALA SAN PIO X, VIA DELLA CONCILIAZIONE 5  
3 MAGGIO 2013

## **THE PERENNIAL NEWNESS OF THE GOSPEL OF LIFE**

### **Introduction**

First of all, I wish to thank the organizers of today's international meeting for the promotion of the apostolate of respect for human life. It is my desire, by my presence and with my words, to pay tribute to your tireless work in defending and fostering the inviolability of innocent and defenseless human life from the moment of conception until the moment of natural death. It is especially fitting that our meeting is the prelude for the Fourth March for Life in Rome, at which, in the City of Saints Peter and Paul, so important and beloved in all the world, an international gathering will give strong and public witness to the unchanging truth about human life.

My reflection addresses the perennial newness of the announcement of the good news about human life, made in the image and likeness of God.<sup>1</sup> In other words, man can never tire of reflecting upon and honoring the immeasurable and unceasing love of God for the one earthly creature whom He has created for friendship, for communion, with Himself. In these days when we are celebrating the Paschal Mystery, how can we not wonder at the love of God for man which reached its highest and perfect expression in the Incarnation of God the Son, so that He could win in our human nature the victory over sin and death, and win for us, for whom he deigned to become a brother, a lasting share in His own life. God the Son Incarnate – who suffered, died on the Cross, and rose from the dead – has ascended to the right hand of God the Father, so that He might be alive for us always in the Church. Seated in glory at the right hand of the Father, Christ never ceases to pour forth from His glorious pierced Heart the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit into our hearts. The good news, the gospel of salvation, is indeed always new, always at work on our behalf in the Church.

My reflection centers upon the remarkable articulation of the good news regarding

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gn 1, 26.

human life by Pope Saint John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*. The opening words of the Encyclical Letter underline the critical importance of the daily proclamation of the Gospel of Life:

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.<sup>2</sup>

The first and most fundamental way of radiating the truth which Our Lord Jesus never fails to teach us in the Church is a strong witness to the inviolable dignity of all human life, from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. The personal conversion and the transformation of the world to which we are called by Christ must, first of all, find expression in the safeguarding and fostering of every human life, especially of "the least of these my brethren," in accord with Our Lord's Parable on the Last Judgment.<sup>3</sup>

Writing about the mission of the Church in the world, Pope John Paul II underlined the heart of the mission, declaring:

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).<sup>4</sup>

The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, at the very core of Her being expresses the

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<sup>2</sup> "Evangelium vitae penitus implicatum insidet in Iesu nuntio. Ab Ecclesia amanter cotidie susceptum animosa id oportet fidelitate enuntietur velut redditum nuntibus cuiusve aetatis et cuiuslibet cultus humani formae." Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Litterae encyclicae *Evangelium vitae*, "De vitae humanae inviolabili bono", 25 Martii 1995, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 87 (1995), 401, n. 1. [Hereafter, EV] English translation: Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, "On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life," 25 March 1995 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), p. 3, no. 1. [Hereafter, EVEng]

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mt 25:40, 45

<sup>4</sup> "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 *Mc* 16, 15)." EV, 403, n. 3. English translation: EVEng, p. 6, no. 3.

unconditional, immeasurable, and unceasing love of God the Father for every man. The pierced Heart of Jesus and the blood which flowed therefrom is a sign of the “rivers of living water” which never cease to flow from the glorious Heart of Jesus into the hearts of all believers, and from their hearts to the hearts of all men.<sup>5</sup>

Pope John Paul II recalled the profound and enduring effect of the piercing of the Heart of Jesus after He had died on the cross for the salvation of all men:

The blood of Christ, while it reveals the grandeur of the Father’s love, *shows how treasured man is in God’s eyes and how inestimable is the good of his life.*<sup>6</sup>

He went on to explain how the blood of Christ reveals the call of every man to care unconditionally for his fellow man:

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*).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Jn 7:38*.

<sup>6</sup> “Christi sanguis, dum permagnam Patris dilectionem revelat, *ostendit simul quemadmodum pretiosus sit ante Dei oculos homo et inaestimabile sit eius vitae bonum.*” EV, p. 429, n. 25. English translation: EEng, p. 45, no. 25. Note: The English translation has been corrected throughout by the Author in what regards the translation of the word “*bonum*”, which expresses the metaphysical goodness of human life. The official English version translates “*bonum*” with the English word “value” which comes from the language of economics and expresses a relative, subjective assessment. In the passage above, the words “treasured” and “inestimable” have been used by the Author to translate the Latin “*pretiosus*” and “*inaestimabile*”, which the official English version renders as “precious” and “priceless.”

<sup>7</sup> “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 divitias 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 *Gn 1, 27; 2, 18-24*).” EV, 429, n. 25. English translation: EEng, pp. 45-46, no. 25.

Participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the highest and most perfect expression of life in Christ, of communion with the Holy Trinity, is the ultimate and unfailing source of the inspiration and strength to safeguard and foster human life. In the words of Pope John Paul II,

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*.<sup>8</sup>

The first and most important component of the apostolate of respect for human life is communion with Christ Who is the Gospel of life, through the Holy Eucharist and Penance, and through their extension by means of daily prayer and devotion.

I now offer three reflections on the Gospel of life and a new evangelization. First, I reflect on the relationship of a new evangelization, and the Gospel of life. Next, I reflect on the constitutive elements of the Gospel of life. Lastly, I reflect on the principal means of proclaiming the Gospel of life. The heart of these reflections is drawn from Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, seen in relationship with the papal magisterium both of Pope Paul VI, his predecessor, and of Pope Benedict XVI, his successor.

### **A New Evangelization and the Gospel of Life**

By his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "On Evangelization in the Modern World" Pope Paul VI called the Church to take up the work of a new evangelization. He described evangelization as the Church's "... deepest inspiration, that which comes to her directly from the Lord: To the whole world! To all creation! Right to the ends of the earth!"<sup>9</sup> After reflecting on the first proclamation of the Gospel which "... is addressed to those who have never heard the Good News of Jesus, or to children,"<sup>10</sup> he declared:

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<sup>8</sup> "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." EV, 429, n. 25. English translation: EVEng, p. 46, no. 25.

<sup>9</sup> "... altissimum mentis instinctum in se excitat, qui ad eam proxime a divino Magistro proficiscitur, hisce verbis resonantibus: mundo universo! omni creaturae! usque ad ultimum terrae!" Paulus PP. VI, Adhortatio Apostolica *Evangelii nuntiandi*, "De Evangelizatione in mundo huius temporis", 8 Decembris 1975, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68 (1976), 40, n. 50. [Hereafter, EN] English translation: Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, nd), p. 35, n. 50. [Hereafter, ENEng]

<sup>10</sup> "... ad eos praesertim habetur, qui Bonum Iesu Nuntium numquam audierunt, aut pueris..." EN, 40, n. 52. English translation: ENEng, p. 35, n. 52.

But, as a result of the frequent situations of dechristianization in our day, it also proves equally necessary for innumerable people who have been baptized but who live quite outside Christian life, for simple people who have a certain faith but an imperfect knowledge of the foundations of that faith, for intellectuals who feel the need to know Jesus Christ in a light different from the instruction they received as children, and for many others.<sup>11</sup>

The degree of secularization to which Pope Paul VI referred with concern in 1975 only continues to increase exponentially, also due to a grave impoverishment or even lack of adequate catechesis in the Church during the past four decades.

Pope John Paul II addressed the increasing gravity of this situation with steadfast vigor. The pontificate of Pope John Paul II, in fact, may be rightly described as a tireless call to recognize the Church's challenge to be faithful to her divinely given mission in a completely secularized society and to respond to the challenge by means of a new evangelization. A new evangelization consists in teaching the faith through preaching, catechesis and all forms of Catholic education, in celebrating the faith in the Sacraments and in prayer and devotion which are their extension, and in living the faith by the practice of the virtues – all as if for the first time, that is, with the engagement and energy of the first disciples and of the first missionaries to our native place.

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, “On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World,” Pope John Paul II described the contemporary situation of the Church in a world which is increasingly secularized, marked by a pervasive and constant spread of relativism, which “inspires and sustains a life lived ‘as if God did not exist’”.<sup>12</sup> Not by chance, in addressing in *Evangelium Vitae* the

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<sup>11</sup> “... cum crebro hodie eae invaluerint condiciones, quibus a lege christiana prorsus disceditur – plurimis hominibus, qui sacro quidem tincti sunt baptismate, sed extra quamvis formam vitae christianae degunt, plebi simplici, quae quandam possidet fidem, sed eius fundamenta vix cognoscit, viris studia colentibus, qui opus sibi esse sentiunt, ut Iesum Christum agnoscant alia ratione sibi propositum quam institutione, quae puerili aetate tradi solet, necnon aliis multis.” EN, 40-41, n. 52. English translation: ENEng, p. 36, no. 52.

<sup>12</sup> “... inhiant ac proclamant ita esse vivendum «etsi Deus non daretur.»” Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Adhortatio Apostolica *Christifideles Laici*, “De vocatione et missione Laicorum in Ecclesia et in mundo,” 30 Decembris 1988, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81 (1989), 454, no. 34. [Hereafter, CL]. English translation: Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 30 December 1988, “On the Vocation and the Mission

culture of death which tragically marks a totally secularized society, he made reference to such a way of living in ignorance of God and of the order with which He has created the world and, above all, man. He declared:

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.<sup>13</sup>

He went on to describe the situation which “inevitably leads to a *practical materialism*, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism,”<sup>14</sup> and in which man exchanges his very being for material possessions and pleasures, rejects suffering as meaningless, and views his body and sexuality in abstraction from his person.

The consequences for the proclamation of the Gospel of life are evident. Having described the philosophical foundations of the culture of death, Pope John Paul II drew this powerful conclusion:

In the materialistic perspective described so far, *interpersonal relations are seriously impoverished*. The first to be harmed are women, children, the sick or 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 who they “are”, but for what they “have, do and produce”. This is the supremacy of the strong over the weak.<sup>15</sup>

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of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World” (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, nd), p. 95, no. 34. [Hereafter, CLEng].

<sup>13</sup> “Vivens reapse «perinde ac si Deus non sit», non modo a Dei mysterio, verum etiam a mundi ipsius arcano suaeque vitae aberrat.” EV, 426, n. 22. English translation: EEng, p. 40, no. 22.

<sup>14</sup> “...necessario ad *materialismum practicum* ducit, in quo individualismus, utilitarismus et hedonismus grassantur.” EV, 426, n. 23. English translation: EEng, p. 40, no. 23.

<sup>15</sup> “In materialistico ambitu hucusque proposito, *inter personas necessitudines magnam imminutionem experiuntur*. Detrimentum primi accipiunt mulier, puer, 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.” EV, 427, n. 23. English translation: EEng, p. 42, no. 23. The English translation has been slightly modified by the Author.

For instance, the world today is increasingly witness to the supremacy of powerful economic and political forces which make the pretense to define man, and the relationship between man and woman, apart from the truth of the nature of man, male and female.

To remedy the situation of a totally secularized culture, the saintly Pontiff observed, “a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world.”<sup>16</sup> He hastened to add that, if the remedy is to be effected, the Church herself must be evangelized anew. Fundamental to understanding the radical secularization of our culture is to understand also how much this secularization has entered into the life of the Church Herself. Pope John Paul II declared:

But for this [the mending of the Christian fabric of society] to come about what is needed is to *first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself* present in these countries and nations.<sup>17</sup>

He, therefore, called upon the lay faithful to fulfill their particular responsibility, that is, “to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response – consciously perceived and stated by all in varying degrees – to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society.”<sup>18</sup> Making more specific the call, he clarified that the fulfillment of the responsibility of the lay faithful requires that they “know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to take up again in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “... consortium humanum spiritu christiano ubique denuo imbuendum est.” CL, 455, no. 34. English translation: CLEng, p. 96, no. 34.

<sup>17</sup> “Id [consortium humanum spiritu christiano imbuendum] tamen possibile erit, si *christianus communitatum ipsarum ecclesialium contextus*, quae his in regionibus et nationibus degunt, *renovetur*.” CL, 455, no. 34. English translation: CLEng, p. 96, no. 34.

<sup>18</sup> “...testari quomodo christiana fides responsum constituat unice plene validum, ab omnibus plus minusve conscie agnitum et invocatum, ad quaestiones et exspectationes, quas vita ipsa homini et societatibus imponit singulis.” CL, 455, no. 34. English translation: CLEng, p. 96, no. 34.

<sup>19</sup> “...hiatum inter Evangelium et vitam in seipsis superare valeant, in quotidianis familiae navitatibus, in labore et in societate unitatem vitae componentes, quae in Evangelio lucem et vim pro sua plena invenit adimpletione.” CL, p. 455, no. 34. English translation: CLEng, p. 96, no. 34.

## Constitutive Elements of the Gospel of Life

What are the constitutive elements of the Gospel of life which the Church is called to teach, celebrate, and live, in accord with the demands of a new evangelization?

### The Natural Moral Law

The first constitutive element is the truth about the inviolability of innocent human life written in every human heart. In other words, the first constitutive element of the Gospel of life is the natural moral law, of which the first precept is the safeguarding and promotion of human life.<sup>20</sup> At the very beginning of *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II made clear the relationship of the Church's teaching regarding human life to the moral law which can be known by reason. He declared:

The Church knows that this *Gospel of life*, which she has received from her Lord, 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 good 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>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, art. 2.

<sup>21</sup> “Novit Ecclesia illud *Evangelium vitae* sibi a Domino suo commendatum 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 (cf. *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 agnitione hominum nititur consortio ipsaque politica communitas.” EV, 402, n. 2. English translation: EEng, pp. 4-5, n. 2.

What then is the relationship between the natural moral law and the Church's moral teaching? While God has first revealed to every human heart the truth about human life by the Creation, He has perfectly revealed the truth in all of its splendor by the Redemptive Incarnation of His only-begotten Son. What is more, the coming of God the Son as man into the world, His saving Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, and His abiding presence in the Church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit give man the grace to live fully in accord with the truth. Pope John Paul II explained the relationship thus:

Through the words, the actions and the very person of Jesus, man is given the possibility of “knowing” *the complete truth* concerning the good 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.*<sup>22</sup>

The human conscience, if it has not been corrupted by grave confusion and error, naturally recognizes the inviolable dignity of every human life and commands that it be safeguarded and promoted.

### Natural Moral Law and Conscience

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<sup>22</sup> “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 adamussum talem veritatem faciendi (cfr *Io* 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.*” EV, 434, n. 29. English translation: EEng, p. 53, n. 24.

Essentially connected with the discussion of the natural moral law is the correct understanding of conscience. Pope John Paul II, relating the intent of his Encyclical Letter, drew particular attention to the relationship of the Gospel of life with conscience. He wrote:

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 the path.<sup>23</sup>

He reflected upon the situation of the conscience which “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.”<sup>24</sup> He did not fail to warn about the gravity of the situation, declaring:

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.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, the very existence of the conscience gives hope of a transformation of the situation. Pope John Paul II observed:

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.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “... *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.” EV, 407, n. 6. English translation: EEng, p. 11, no. 6.

<sup>24</sup> “... etiam ob instrumentorum socialis communicationis praepotentes virtutes, *pergravi mortiferoque* periculo hodie subditur: *permixtionis* scilicet *boni malique*, quod attinet ad idem fundamentale vitae ius.” EV, 427, n. 24. English translation: EEng, p. 43, no. 24.

<sup>25</sup> “Cum conscientia, lucens scilicet animae oculus (cfr *Mt 6, 22-23*), dicit «malum bonum et bonum malum» (*Is 5, 20*), iter persollicitae depravationis et caliginosissimae moralis caecitatis iam est ingressa.” EV, 428, n. 24. English translation: EEng, p. 43, no. 24.

<sup>26</sup> “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

Notwithstanding pervasive confusion and error regarding the fundamental truth of the inviolable dignity of human life, the Gospel of life corresponds always to the deepest desire of man, which is to know and live the truth in love.

It is the conscience, the voice of God speaking to souls, which is, in the words of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, “the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.”<sup>27</sup> As such, the conscience is ever attuned to Christ Himself Who instructs and informs it through His Vicar, the Roman Pontiff, and the Bishops in communion with the Roman Pontiff. Blessed Cardinal Newman observed that conscience “is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives.”<sup>28</sup>

Today, one must be attentive to a false notion of conscience, which would actually use the conscience to justify sinful acts. In his 2010 Christmas Address to the Roman Curia, Pope Benedict XVI reflected at some length on the notion of conscience in the writings of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, contrasting it with a false notion of conscience which is pervasive in our time.

He described the Church’s understanding of conscience, as faithfully and brilliantly taught by the Blessed Cardinal Newman, with these words:

In modern thinking, the word “conscience” signifies that for moral and religious questions, it is the subjective dimension, the individual, that constitutes the final authority for decision. The world is divided into the realms of the objective and the subjective. To the objective realm belong things that can be calculated and verified by experiment. Religion and morals fall outside the scope of these methods and are therefore considered to lie within the subjective realm. Here, it is said, there are in the final analysis no objective criteria. The ultimate instance that can decide here is therefore the subject alone, and precisely this is what the word

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potest, ad vitam humanam accipiendam et ministrandam.” EV, 428, n. 24. English translation: EVEng, p. 43, no. 24.

<sup>27</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman, “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk,” V, in *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching II*, (London: Longmans Green, 1885), p. 248. Quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1778.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

“conscience” expresses: in this realm only the individual, with his intuitions and experiences, can decide. Newman’s understanding of conscience is diametrically opposed to this. For him, “conscience” means man’s capacity for truth: the capacity to recognize precisely in the decision-making areas of his life – religion and morals – a truth, *the* truth. At the same time, conscience – man’s capacity to recognize truth – thereby imposes on him the obligation to set out along the path towards truth, to seek it and to submit to it wherever he finds it. Conscience is both capacity for truth and obedience to the truth which manifests itself to anyone who seeks it with an open heart.<sup>29</sup>

Conscience, therefore, does not set individuals apart from one another as arbiters of what is right and good, but unites them in the pursuit of the one truth, ultimately Our Lord Jesus Christ Who is the only arbiter of the right and good, so that their thoughts, words and actions put that truth into practice.

The proclamation of the Gospel of life should be marked by a profound confidence in the human heart upon which the moral law has been inscribed. At the same time, it should be ready to refute the false claim that unconditional respect for the inviolable dignity of innocent human life is merely a confessional matter and to illustrate how it is at the very foundation of the common good.

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<sup>29</sup> “Nel pensiero moderno, la parola «coscienza» significa che in materia di morale e di religione, la dimensione soggettiva, l’individuo, costituisce l’ultima istanza della decisione. Il mondo viene diviso negli ambiti dell’oggettivo e del soggettivo. All’oggettivo appartengono le cose che si possono calcolare e verificare mediante l’esperienza. La religione e la morale sono sottratte a questi metodi e perciò sono considerate come ambito del soggettivo. Qui non esisterebbero, in ultima analisi, dei criteri oggettivi. L’ultima istanza che qui può decidere sarebbe pertanto solo il soggetto, e con la parola «coscienza» si esprime, appunto, questo: in questo ambito può decidere solo il singolo, l’individuo con le sue intuizioni ed esperienze. La concezione che Newman ha della coscienza è diametralmente opposta. Per lui «coscienza» significa la capacità di verità dell’uomo: la capacità di riconoscere proprio negli ambiti decisivi della sua esistenza – religione e morale – una verità, *la* verità. La coscienza, la capacità dell’uomo di riconoscere la verità, gli impone con ciò, al tempo stesso, il dovere di incamminarsi verso la verità, di cercarla e di sottomettersi ad essa laddove la incontra. Conscienza è capacità di verità e obbedienza nei confronti della verità, che si mostra all’uomo che cerca col cuore aperto.” Benedictus PP. XVI, Allocutio, “Omina Nativitatis novique Anni Curiae Romanae significantur”, 20 Decembris 2010, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 103 (2011), 39-40. [Hereafter, Greeting2010] English translation: Pope Benedict XVI, “Benedict XVI’s Christmas greeting to the College of Cardinals, the Roman Curia and the Governorate: Resolved in faith and in doing good,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 22-29 December 2010, p. 14. [Hereafter, Greeting2010Eng]

### Natural Moral Law, Conscience, and Politics

Later, in the same 2010 Christmas Address, Pope Benedict XVI recalled his “encounter with the world of culture in Westminster Hall,”<sup>30</sup> during his pastoral visit to the United Kingdom, during which he reflected “on the proper place of religious belief within the political process.”<sup>31</sup> Taking inspiration from the example of Saint Thomas More, he addressed directly “the ethical foundations of civil discourse.”<sup>32</sup> As a service to culture in general, he set forth the Catholic understanding of the matter with these words:

The central question at issue, then, is this: where is the ethical foundation for political choices to be found? The Catholic tradition maintains that the objective norms governing right action are accessible to reason, prescinding from the content of revelation. According to this understanding, the role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers – still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion – but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles.<sup>33</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI noted that the role of religion in public discourse “is not always welcomed,” for various reasons which can also include “distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism.”<sup>34</sup>

He observed, however, that such distortions do not justify the exclusion of religion from public discourse, for “reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated

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<sup>30</sup> “... incontro con il mondo della cultura nella Westminster Hall ...” Greeting2010, 38. English translation: Greeting2010Eng, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Benedictus PP. XVI, Allocutio, “Iter Apostolicum Summi Pontificis in Regnum Unitum: Londinii in Aula Vestmonasteriensi colloquium Benedicti XVI cum primoribus Societatis Civilis; cum doctis vivis culturae, scientiis et operum conductioni deditis; cum Corpore Legatorum et Religiosis Auctoritatibus”, 17 Septembris 2010, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 102 (2010), 635. [Hereafter, Westminster]

<sup>32</sup> Westminster, 636.

<sup>33</sup> Westminster, 636-637.

<sup>34</sup> Westminster, 637.

by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take account of the dignity of the human person.”<sup>35</sup> What remains necessary and true is the right relationship of faith and reason. He concluded:

This is why I would suggest that the world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization.”<sup>36</sup>

Religion, he continued, “is not a problem for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national conversation.”<sup>37</sup> In the light of the irreplaceable role of religion in public life, he expressed his “concern at the increasing marginalization of religion, particularly of Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance.”<sup>38</sup>

He then gave a telling description of some of the more troubling manifestations of the effort to alienate religion from the public forum. His words which I now quote shed light on the absurdity and indeed moral perversity of a public order which fails to respect the proper role of religion:

There are those who would advocate that the voice of religion be silenced, or at least relegated to the purely private sphere. There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none. And there are those who argue – paradoxically with the intention of eliminating discrimination – that Christians in public roles should be required at times to act against their conscience. These are worrying signs of a failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the

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<sup>35</sup> Westminster, 637.

<sup>36</sup> Westminster, 637.

<sup>37</sup> Westminster, 637.

<sup>38</sup> Westminster, 637.

legitimate role of religion in the public square.<sup>39</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI concluded with an invitation to safeguard and foster the right relationship of faith and reason, which is essential to the pursuit of the common good, of the good of society. In the 2010 Christmas Address, he concluded his reference to his speech in Westminster Hall with these urgent words:

This fundamental [moral] consensus derived from the Christian heritage is at risk wherever its place, the place of moral reasoning, is taken by the purely instrumental rationality of which I spoke earlier. In reality, this makes reason blind to what is essential. To resist this eclipse of reason and to preserve its capacity for seeing the essential, for seeing God and man, for seeing what is good and what is true, is the common interest that must unite all people of good will. The very future of the world is at stake.<sup>40</sup>

There can be no question of the urgency with which Pope Benedict XVI was calling Catholics and all persons of good will, in accord with the new evangelization so steadfastly advanced by Pope John Paul II, to reverse the decline of western Christian culture by engaging public discourse with the fundamental truths of the moral law, as taught to us by reason and illuminated by the Catholic faith.

### Inviolable Dignity of Innocent Human Life

Having set forth clearly the natural moral law and its relationship with Catholic teaching, Pope John Paul II made three authoritative declarations of the content of the moral law in what pertains to the Gospel of life. The first statement reads:

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*

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<sup>39</sup> Westminster, 637.

<sup>40</sup> “Questo consenso [morale] di fondo proveniente dal patrimonio cristiano è in pericolo là dove al suo posto, al posto della ragione morale, subentra la mera razionalità finalistica di cui ho parlato poco fa. Questo è in realtà un accecamento della ragione per ciò che è l’essenziale. Combattere contro questo accecamento della ragione e conservarle la capacità di vedere l’essenziale, di vedere Dio e l’uomo, ciò che è buono e ciò che è vero, è l’interesse comune che deve unire tutti gli uomini di buona volontà. È in gioco il futuro del mondo.” Greeting2010, 39. English translation: Greeting2010Eng, p. 14.

*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>41</sup>

Having stated the perennial teaching of the Church regarding the inviolable dignity of innocent human life, Pope John Paul II made clear that the conscious and deliberate destruction of an innocent human life is always and everywhere evil “and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end.”<sup>42</sup> Such an act is, in the words of Pope John Paul II, “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.”<sup>43</sup>

#### Destruction of Innocent Human Life and Procured Abortion

The next two authoritative statements are applications of the first. The second applies the truth of the inviolable dignity of innocent human life to the question of procured abortion. Pope John Paul II declared:

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...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

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<sup>41</sup> “Quapropter Nos auctoritate usi Petro eiusque Successoribus a Cristo collata, coniuncti cum Ecclesiae catholicae Episcopis, *confirmamus directam voluntariamque hominis innocentis interfectionem 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 e universali Magisterio explanatur.” EV, 465, n. 57. English translation: EEng, pp. 101-102, no. 57

<sup>42</sup> “... nec potest licitum haberi unquam nec uti finis neque ut via ab bonum propositum.” EV, 465, n. 57. English translation: EEng, p. 102, no. 57.

<sup>43</sup> “Gravis namque inoboedientia est morali legi, immo ipsi Deo eius auctori ac vindici; primariae praeterea virtuti iustitiae contradicit et caritatis.” EV, 465, n. 57. English translation: EEng, p. 102, no. 57.

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>44</sup>

Although time does not permit the treatment of a number of moral issues directly related to procured abortion, Pope John Paul II makes clear that practices like experimentation on human embryos and selective, so-called "eugenic," abortion utilizing prenatal diagnostic techniques are always and everywhere evil.<sup>45</sup>

### Destruction of Innocent Human Life and Euthanasia

The third authoritative statement applies the truth of the inviolable dignity of innocent human life to the practice of euthanasia. After having distinguished "an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering,"<sup>46</sup> 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,"<sup>47</sup> Pope John Paul II declared:

Taking into account these distinctions, in harmony with the Magisterium of my Predecessors and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, *I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God*, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by

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<sup>44</sup> "Auctoritate proinde utentes Nos a Christo Beato Petro eiusque Successoribus collata, consentientes cum Episcopis qui abortum crebrius respuerunt quique ... 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 exsistat innocentis hominis occisio. Haec doctrina naturali innititur lege Dei que scripto Verbo, transmittitur Ecclesiae Traditione atque ab ordinario et universali Magisterio exponitur." EV, 472, n. 62. English translation: EVEng, p. 112, no. 62.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. EV, 472-474, n. 63.

<sup>46</sup> "... actio vel omissio quae suapte natura et consilio mentis mortem affert ut hoc modo omnis dolor removeatur." EV, 475, n. 65. English translation: EVEng, p. 117, no. 65.

<sup>47</sup> "... consilium illud, quo quis tractionem 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." EV, 475, n. 65. English translation: EVEng, p. 117, no. 65.

the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.<sup>48</sup>

Once again, time does not permit the discussion of the moral issues directly related to euthanasia, for example, so-called assisted suicide, which Pope John Paul II addresses after having enunciated the authoritative teaching in the matter.<sup>49</sup>

### **Principal Means of Proclaiming the Gospel of Life**

What then are the principal means of proclaiming the Gospel of life? The fundamental locus of the proclamation of the Gospel of life is the family, in which the children witness the Gospel of life in the relationship of their parents with one another and in the relationship of the parents with them. Such witness pertains not only to the beginning of human life, in the correct understanding and living of human sexuality, but also to the end of life in the acceptance of human suffering as the way of unconditional love of others, in accord with the teaching of the Lord which Saint Paul masterfully articulates in the Letter to the Colossians.<sup>50</sup> The Gospel of life is integral to the spiritual worship at the heart of the family. Lifting up their hearts to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus in the Eucharistic sacrifice, parents and children are purified and strengthened to live Christ's pure and selfless love in their relationships with each other.

Pope John Paul II declared:

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

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<sup>48</sup> “His rite interpositis distinctionibus, Magisterium Nos Decessorum Nostrorum iterantes atque in communionem 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 adnixa, Ecclesiae Traditione traducitur atque Magisterio ordinario et universali explicatur.” EV, 477, n. 65. English translation: EEng, p. 119, no. 65.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. EV, 477-478, n. 66.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Col 1:24.

men and women, children and adults, the young and the old, the healthy and the sick.<sup>51</sup>

In no. 92 of *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II treated at length the “*decisive responsibility*” of the family for the proclamation of the Gospel of life.<sup>52</sup> He illustrated at some length the critical role of the family not only in teaching the welcome due to new human life but also in teaching the meaning of suffering and death. As he observed, “[t]he family has a special role to play throughout the life of its members, from birth to death.”<sup>53</sup>

Pope John Paul II, quoting from his homily on the occasion of the beatification of Saint Gianna Beretta Molla, the heroic apostle of life of the present time, gave special attention to “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>54</sup> Without in any way diminishing the dignity of the husband and father in the family, the Gospel of life in the present time particularly requires a new understanding and lived appreciation of Christian wives and mothers.

Later on in the Encyclical Letter, Pope John Paul II devoted special attention to the “unique and decisive” role of women in the new evangelization and, therefore, in the proclamation of the Gospel of life.<sup>55</sup> He declared:

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

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<sup>51</sup> “In ratione spiritalis cultus Deo grati (cfr *Rom* 12, 1), Evangelii vitae celebratio suam postulat effectiorem 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 seniors, sanos et aegrotos.” EV, 498, n. 86. English translation: EVEng, p. 152, no. 86.

<sup>52</sup> “... *decretoria ... responsalitas*.” EV, 505, n. 92. English translation: EVEng, p. 163, n. 92.

<sup>53</sup> “Familia provocatur per totum vitae ipsius sodalium spatium, ab oriente vita ad mortem.” EV, 506, n. 92. English translation: EVEng, p. 164, no. 92.

<sup>54</sup> “... «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».” EV, 498, n. 86. English translation: EVEng, p. 153, no. 86.

<sup>55</sup> “... prorsus singulare fortasse et decretorium...” EV, 514, n. 99. English translation: EVEng, p. 176, no. 99.

exploitation.<sup>56</sup>

Reflecting upon motherhood, he further observed:

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 requisite for an authentic cultural change.<sup>57</sup>

It is clear that the new evangelization regarding the inviolable dignity of innocent human life, from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death, depends upon a new proclamation of the truth regarding woman and motherhood.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> "... ipsarum enim est promovere «novum feminimum» 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." EV, 514, n. 99. English translation: EVEng, p. 176, no. 99.

<sup>57</sup> "Mater enim excipit secumque fert alterum, ei modum intra se crescendo 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." EV, 515, n. 99. English translation: EVEng, p. 177, no. 99.

<sup>58</sup> At the end of no. 99 of *Evangelium vitae*, Pope John Paul II devoted "a special word to *women who have had an abortion*." Acknowledging the complexity of factors involved in the decision to procure an abortion, the gravity of the evil involved in the act, and the enduring "wound" which the deed leaves in the "heart," he urged them to have hope, honestly acknowledging what they have done and abandoning themselves with trust to divine mercy, especially by means of the Sacrament of Penance. He reminded them that they in fact "can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life." Referring to the aborted child, he wrote, in the English version found on the Vatican website: "To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child." The definitive Latin text reads: "Infantem autem vestrum potestis Eidem Patri Eiusque misericordiae cum spe committere." (EV, 515, n. 99). The English translation adds to the word "hope" the qualifier "sure", which is not found in the Latin text. The Latin text does not explain the meaning of "hope" as used in the context.

In an edition of the Latin original published by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana in 1995, there is a different and problematic text which reads: "Tunc percipietis nihil periisse et licebit vobis etiam ab infante vestro veniam petere, qui nunc in Domino vivit." (Ioannis Pauli PP II, Litterae encyclicae «*Evangelium vitae*», [Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995], p. 123, n. 99). The same text is found in translation in

In this regard, it is important to make clear the relationship between the practice of the virtues of purity, chastity and modesty, that is the living of the truth regarding human sexuality and human life, and the practice of justice. Respect for human life is related essentially to respect for the integrity of marriage and the family. The attack on the innocent and defenseless life of the unborn has its origin in an erroneous view of human sexuality, which attempts to eliminate, by mechanical or chemical means, the essentially procreative nature of the conjugal act. This error maintains that the artificially altered act retains its integrity. The claim is that the act remains unitive or loving, even though the procreative nature of the act has been radically violated. In fact, it is not unitive, for one or both of the partners withholds an essential part of the gift of self, which is the essence of the conjugal union. The so-called “contraceptive mentality” is essentially anti-life. Many forms of what is called contraception are in fact abortifacient, that is, they destroy a life which has already been conceived, has already begun.

The manipulation of the conjugal act, as Pope Paul VI courageously observed, has led to many forms of violence against marriage and family life.<sup>59</sup> Through the spread of the contraceptive mentality, especially among the young, human sexuality is no longer seen as the gift of God which draws a man and a woman together in a bond of lifelong and faithful love, crowned by the gift of new human life, but, rather, as a tool for personal gratification.<sup>60</sup> Once sexual union is no longer seen to be procreative by its very nature, human sexuality is abused in ways that are profoundly harmful and indeed destructive of individuals and of society itself. One has only to think of the devastation which is daily wrought in our world by the multi-million dollar industry of pornography on the internet. Fundamental to the

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the edition of the English version of *Evangelium vitae* also printed by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana and used throughout this text. It reads: “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.” (EVEng, 178, no. 99). The text is very problematic inasmuch as it seems to declare as a fact that such children enjoy the Beatific Vision, a position which has virtually no support in the Church’s tradition. While the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in no. 1261, states: “As regards *children who have died without Baptism*, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them,” it earlier declares, in no. 1257: “The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are ‘reborn of water and the Spirit’.”

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Paulus PP. VI, Litterae encyclicae *Humanae vitae*, “De propagatione humanae prolis recte ordinanda”, 25 Iulii 1968, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 60 (1968), 493-494, n. 17.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. EV, 414-415, n. 13; and 511-512, n. 97.

transformation of Western culture is the proclamation of the truth about the conjugal union in its fullness and the correction of the contraceptive thinking which fears life, which fears procreation.

It is instructive to note that Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, makes special reference to Pope Paul VI's Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, underscoring its importance "for delineating the *fully human meaning of the development that the Church proposes*."<sup>61</sup> Pope Benedict XVI makes clear that the teaching in *Humanae Vitae* is not simply a matter of "individual morality," declaring:

*Humanae vitae* indicates the *strong links between life ethics and social ethics*, ushering in a new area of magisterial teaching that has gradually been articulated in a series of documents, most recently John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*.<sup>62</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI makes clear the essential part which a right understanding of human sexuality has in true human development.

In treating the question of procreation, Pope Benedict XVI underscored the critical importance of the right understanding of human sexuality, marriage and the family. He wrote:

The Church, in her concern for man's authentic development, urges him to have full respect for human values in the exercise of his sexuality. It cannot be reduced merely to pleasure or entertainment, nor can sex education be reduced to technical instruction aimed solely at protecting the interested parties from possible disease or the "risk" of procreation. This would be to impoverish and disregard the deeper meaning of sexuality, a meaning which needs to be acknowledged and responsibly appropriated not only by individuals

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<sup>61</sup> "... ut progressionis prorsus humana significatio describatur, quam Ecclesia proponit." Benedictus PP. XVI, Litterae encyclicae *Caritas in veritate*, "De humana integra progressionem in caritate veritateque", 29 Iunii 2009, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 101 (2009), 651, n. 15. [Hereafter, CV] English translation: Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, "On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth," 29 June 2009 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), p. 20, no. 15. [Hereafter, CVEng]

<sup>62</sup> "Litterae encyclicae «*Humanae vitae*» solida vincula designant, quae inter vitae ethicam et ethicam socialem intercedunt, magistrare quoddam insinuantes argumentum, quod gradatim variis in documentis auctum est, novissime in Ioannis Pauli II Litteris encyclicis *Evangelium vitae*." CV, 651, n. 15. English translation: CVEng, p. 21, no. 15.

but also by the community.<sup>63</sup>

The restoration of respect for the integrity of the conjugal act is essential to the future of Western culture, the advancement of a culture of life. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, it is necessary “once more to hold up to future generations the beauty of marriage and the family, and the fact that these institutions correspond to the deepest needs and dignity of the person.”<sup>64</sup> Correspondingly, Pope Benedict XVI noted that “States are called to *enact policies promoting the centrality and integrity of the family* founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary vital cell of society, and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character.”<sup>65</sup>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that “[s]o-called *moral permissiveness* rests on an erroneous conception of human freedom” and that “the necessary precondition for the development of true freedom is to let oneself be educated in the moral law.”<sup>66</sup> As is clear from the above considerations, individual freedom and the freedom of society in general depend upon a fundamental education in the truth about human sexuality and the exercise of that truth in a pure and chaste life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* goes on to observe: “Those in charge of education can reasonably be expected to give young people instruction respectful of the truth, the qualities of the heart, and the moral and spiritual dignity of man.”<sup>67</sup> For the Christian, this entails education in holiness of life and in the respect owed to the inviolable dignity of self, body and soul, and of others as one’s self.

*Evangelium Vitae* refers to many more agents and means of the proclamation of the Gospel of life, such as healthcare workers, volunteers, educators, civil leaders and legislators,

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<sup>63</sup> “Ecclesia, cui cordi est verus hominis progressus, monet eum ad plenam valorum observantiam, in sexualitate quoque exercenda: quae ad meram rem hedonisticam ludicramque redigi non potest, sicut educatio sexualis in technicam institutionem coartari non potest, si tantum cura habeatur eos quorum interest arcendi a quodam contagio vel a generandi «periculo». Hoc modo pauperior fieret et altus sexualitatis sensus extenuaretur, qui econtra agnosci et accipi debet cum responsalitate tam singularum personarum quam communitatis.” CV, 680, n. 44. English translation: CVEng, pp. 73-74, no. 44.

<sup>64</sup> “... novis generationibus adhuc proponendi pulchritudinem familiae et matrimonii, congruentiam huiusmodi institutionum cum altioribus postulatis cordis dignitatisque personae.” CV, 681, n. 44. English translation: CVEng, p. 75, no. 44.

<sup>65</sup> “... Status vocantur ad *normas politicas edendas, praeeminentiam integritatemque familiae promoventes*, quae matrimonio nititur unius viri uniusque mulieris, quaeque exstat prima vitalisque societatis cellula, atque in se recipit etiam quaestiones oeconomicas et nummarias, quod ad ipsius necessitudinis indolem attinet.” CV, 681, n. 44. English translation: CVEng, p. 75, no. 44.

<sup>66</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2526.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 2526.

hospitals, clinics, convalescent homes, Catholic schools and universities, and other institutions and services which assist individuals and families in living the truth of the Gospel of life.<sup>68</sup> Time does not permit an adequate treatment of all of them. I wish, however, to treat briefly two.

In advancing the respect for the inviolable dignity of innocent human life, proper attention must be given to the laws which govern the life of society. While the transformation of hearts is the most fundamental means of the new evangelization, Catholics and all persons of good will must be attentive to promote laws which safeguard the dignity of human life. At the same time, one cannot ignore the irreplaceable role which law plays in culture. Pope John Paul II observed:

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 behavior. 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.<sup>69</sup>

In this regard, involvement in political life is essential to the advancement of the cause of life. Already in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II had declared:

The social role of families is called upon to find expression also in the form of *political intervention*: families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family. Along these lines, families should grow in awareness of being “protagonists” of what is known as “family politics” and

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. EV, 499-505, nn. 87-91.

<sup>69</sup> “Tametsi leges non unicum sunt instrumentum, quo vita humana defendatur, partes tamen magni momenti explicant, immo praegraves aliquando, in cuiusdam mentis consuetudinisque profectione. 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 promulgent leges quae, personae dignitatem neglegentes, funditus ipsam civilem convictionem extenuent.” EV, 503-504, n. 90. English translation: EEng, p. 160, no. 90.

assume responsibility for transforming society; otherwise families will be the first victims of the evils that they have done no more than note with indifference.<sup>70</sup>

The Holy Father repeated the same exhortation to families in *Evangelium Vitae*.<sup>71</sup>

In this context, I cannot fail to note the grave scandal caused by legislators, judges, and political leaders who profess to be Catholic and who present themselves to receive Holy Communion, while, at the same time, they uphold and even promote laws which violate the moral law in its most fundamental tenets. The Church's discipline, from the time of Saint Paul, has admonished those who obstinately persevere in manifest grave sin not to present themselves for Holy Communion.<sup>72</sup> The discipline is not a punishment but the recognition of the objective condition of the soul of the person involved in such sin. It prevents them from committing sacrilege by violating the incomparable sanctity of the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, and safeguards the Christian community and the community at large from scandal, that is, from being led to believe that the violation of the moral law, for example in what pertains to the inviolable dignity of human life, the integrity of marriage and the family, and the freedom of conscience, is not sinful, does not gravely break communion with Our Lord.

Secondly, I underline the importance of developing and supporting truly pro-life and pro-family media, and of organizing and sustaining public manifestations in support of the inviolable dignity of innocent human life and the integrity of the family. The culture of death advances, in large part, because of a lack of attention and information among the general public. What is more, the thoroughly galvanized anti-life and anti-family agenda of the

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<sup>70</sup> "Sociale familiae munus etiam ratione *politici interventus* est procurandum: familias nempe eniti oportet imprimis ut leges institutionesque Civitatis non modo non laedant, verum fulciant ac defendant firmo modo iura familiae necnon officia. Ita profecto familiae magis consciae debent fieri se «primas partes agere» in «re politica familiari», quae vocatur, in seque recipere officium transformandae societatis: alioquin erunt familiae illorum malorum veluti victimae primae, quae indifferenti animo solum aspicere voluerunt." Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Adhortatio Apostolica *Familiaris consortio*, "De Familiae Christianae muneribus in mundo huius temporis", 22 Novembris 1981, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 74 (1982), 136, n. 44. English translation: Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, "Regarding the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World," 22 November 1981 (Vatican City State: Vatican Polyglot Press, nd), p. 85, n. 44.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. EV, 507-508, n. 93.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 915; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, can. 712; and R. L. Burke, "The Discipline Regarding the Denial of Holy Communion to Those Obstinate Persevering in Manifest Grave Sin," *Periodica de re canonica* 96, 3-58.

pervasive mass media confuses and corrupts minds and hearts, and dulls consciences to the law written by God upon every human heart. Pope John Paul II declared:

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." 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, so that they may express the full truth about the human person and about human life.<sup>73</sup>

Pope John Paul II did not fail to note that such efforts must begin with "*the renewal of a culture of life within Christian communities themselves*."<sup>74</sup> The Church herself must address the situation of so many of her members who, even though they may be active in Church activities, "end up by separating their Christian faith from its ethical requirements regarding

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<sup>73</sup> "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 exstuenta est vitae cultura*: nova, quae scilicet possit hodiernas de vita hominis ineditas quaestiones suscipere atque solvere; nova, utpote quae acriore et alacriore ratione omnium christianorum conscientiam permoveat; nova demum, quae accommodata sit ad gravem animosamque culturalem suscitandam comparationem 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»; est velut fermentum quo pasta tota fermentatur (cf. *Mt* 13, 33), atque, qua tale, perfundere debet omnes culturas easque intus pervadere, ut integram declarent de homine deque eius vita veritatem." EV, 509, n. 95. English translation: EVEng, pp. 168-169, no. 95.

<sup>74</sup> "... *vitae cultura renovanda intra ipsas christianas communitates*." EV, 509, n. 95. English translation: EVEng, p. 169, no. 95.

life, and thus fall into moral subjectivism and certain objectionable ways of acting.”<sup>75</sup> The words of Pope Francis on May 12, 2013, to the participants in the Third Annual March for Life in Rome confirmed the importance of a major public manifestation for the proclamation of the Gospel of life.<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

It is my hope that these reflections inspired by the Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* have helped to underscore the fundamental place of the Gospel of life in the new evangelization which must transform the life of the Church and, through the transformation of the life of the Church, the life of society. Most of all, I hope that they will lead to a new reading of the Encyclical Letter as the inspiration and guide for all labors to overcome the culture of violence and death and to advance the civilization of life and love.

Before the daunting challenges of Christian living, of advancing the cause of life, the answer is the placing of hearts totally within the glorious pierced Heart of Christ. He will transform lives and, through the conversion of lives, He will transform the world. Christ gave the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Mother, to His disciples as their mother. She is constantly drawing hearts to her Immaculate Heart, so that, with her, faithful disciples may give their hearts totally and forever to Christ.

Thank you. God bless you.

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE

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<sup>75</sup> “... seiunctionem quandam inferunt inter christianam fidem eiusque moralia circa vitam postulata, progredientes hac ratione ad moralem quandam subiectivismum adque vivendi mores qui probari non possunt.” EV, 509-510, n. 95. English translation: EEng, p. 169, no. 95

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Papa Francesco, “Rispetto per la vita fin dal concepimento,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 13-14 maggio 2013, p. 7. English translation: Pope Francis, “Respect for life from conception,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 15 May 2013, p. 7.