

Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You

A Pastoral Letter on the Human Dignity
of the Unborn, Holy Communion,
and Catholics in Public Life

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Introduction

*“Before I formed you in the womb
I knew you, before you were born
I dedicated you, a prophet to the
nations I appointed you” (Jer 1:5).*

These words from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah speak profoundly and movingly to the great love and purpose for which God brings each one of us into the world from the first moment of our existence. Sadly, though, in today’s “throw-away culture”—as Pope Francis so vividly refers to it—the dignity of each and every human person is not accorded the value inherent to it. In a culture that values profit, power, prestige, and pleasure over all else, many people end up being victims of this throw-away culture, from struggling immigrants and working poor to the elderly and physically challenged. This throw-away mindset also fuels the serious damage inflicted on the environment, which especially adversely impacts the poor. But when it is an innocent human being’s very existence—a moral absolute—that is thrown away, it is a sign that a society has truly become severely disordered. Such is the plight of the unborn and the state of our society.

In 2023 our nation will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the infamous *Roe* decision. Generations of Americans have now grown up not knowing what it is like to live in a country that values and protects the lives of the smallest, most defenseless and vulnerable members of its society. Fifty years, over 60,000,000 deaths, and many more millions of scarred lives later, it is time for a frank and honest reassessment. Abortion not only kills the child, it deeply wounds the woman. How could it not? The maternal instinct is very powerful: a mother will go to great lengths to protect her child. Indeed, how often have those of us in Church ministry heard the lament from post-abortive women, “I didn’t want to go through with it, but I felt like I had no choice”? This lament exposes the lie of the “pro-choice” slogan.

This is especially a time for us Catholics, whose faith calls us to advocate for the universal good of a consistent ethic of life, in every stage and in every condition, to call our country back to respect for human life. And this is especially so for Catholics who are prominent in all walks of public life—entertainment, media, politics, education, the corporate world, and so forth—as they have such a powerful influence on shaping the attitudes and practices of people in our nation.

Abortion is the axe laid to the roots of the tree of human rights: when our culture encourages the

violation of life at its youngest and most vulnerable condition, other ethical norms cannot stand for long. In this pastoral letter, then, I would like to address four topics: the necessity for Catholics and

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all people of good will to understand how gravely evil abortion is; how to avoid sinful cooperation in this evil; how these principles apply to the question of Catholics and the reception of Holy Communion; and the special responsibility that Catholics prominent in public life have with regard to the common good. The letter is thus structured in four sections, corresponding to each of these four considerations. I begin with principles of law and science because abortion is not a “Christian” or “Catholic” issue: the dignity of the human person is a value that is, or should be, affirmed by us all.



SECTION 1

The Human Foundation

Law and Science

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men . . . are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” With these stirring words, the Declaration of Independence affirms that fundamental human rights do not find their source in any individual, court, or government: fundamental human rights are not bestowed, they are inherent and must be acknowledged as such. These truths are self-evident because they emerge from the very nature of what it is to be human, and they are accessible to reason alone. The assertion of these unalienable rights in our Declaration of Independence is not a matter of religious doctrine, but rather it flows from the same natural law basis as the answers to other moral questions upon which our laws are based: forbidding stealing, lying, cheating, racial discrimination, homicide, and so forth. Furthermore, these inherent rights, knowable by human reason, are presented in the Declaration with a definite order of priority. Thus, one’s right to the pursuit of happiness is limited when it deprives another of the right to liberty or life; one’s right to

liberty is limited when it deprives another of the right to life. The right to life itself is the foundation of all other rights. Without protection of the right to life, no other talk of rights makes sense.

Who possesses the right to life? The natural law teaches, and the Declaration proclaims, that every human being possesses the dignity that forms the foundation of these unalienable rights. Proponents of abortion raise a chorus of theoretical questions about “what constitutes human life? When does it begin?” The answer from science is clear: a new, genetically-distinct human life begins at conception, defined as fertilization: “Development of the embryo begins at Stage 1 when a sperm fertilizes an oocyte and together they form a zygote.”¹ Because an embryo is a unique and developing human organism, it follows that she or he possesses an inherent right to life from the moment of conception. Thus, the violent invasion of the act of abortion ends a human life. Likewise, those contraceptives which prevent the implantation of the embryo are in fact abortifacients that kill an innocent, growing human being.

The horror of abortion is manifest in the biological reality of what really happens in the “termination of pregnancy,” how violent it is. Witness the Congressional testimony of Dr. Anthony Levatino, who performed abortions before renouncing the practice. In his remarks before Congress, Dr. Levatino describes in gruesome detail the procedure of killing a 24-week-old unborn baby. The abortionist, he explains, after draining the uterus of the amniotic fluid that was protecting the child, inserts a claw-like instrument into the womb. The claw-like instrument begins tearing the child apart, gradually dismembering the baby, removing the body parts one limb at a time. Dr. Levatino describes the toughest part of the procedure, extracting the baby’s head:

The head of a baby that age is about the size of a large plum and is now free floating inside the uterine cavity. You can be pretty sure you have hold of it if the Sopher clamp is spread about as far as your fingers will allow. You will know you have it right when you crush down on the clamp and see white gelatinous material coming through the cervix. That was the baby’s brains. You can then extract the skull pieces. Many times a little face will come out and stare back at you.²

How can anyone in good conscience dare to describe such a procedure as “safe”?

We are all called to oppose abortion because we acknowledge the human being’s right to life, the unique human identity of each living, developing embryo from the moment of conception, and the horrendous violence of the procedure itself. In

Fundamental human rights are not bestowed, they are inherent and must be acknowledged as such.

addition to these human motivations, we as Catholics are prompted by religious motivations as well. This does not mean that we seek to impose our religious beliefs on others, but it does mean that our religious understanding of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God deepens our resolve to join hands with others, regardless of religious convictions or lack of them, to serve, teach, heal, and protect the human community, especially those most in need. We share with others the conviction that human dignity is innate; but we also believe it is of inestimable value. Our Savior has taught us that the two great commandments are to love God with all our heart, all our mind, and all our strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt 22:36–40;

The Teaching of the Church—*Then*:

“You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born” (Didache, ch. 2).

“You shall not kill the child by obtaining an abortion. Nor, again, shall you destroy him after he is born” (Epistle of Barnabas, ch. 19).

Dated between AD 70 and 130, these two documents are considered by many scholars to be among the oldest surviving extra-biblical Christian texts.

Mk 12:28–31; Lk 10:27). And, because we believe that Jesus Christ is truly both our brother, human like us in all things but sin, and truly God incarnate, He unites in Himself the two commandments: in Christ we love God by loving and serving our neighbor. Christ made this truth explicit in His parable of the Last Judgment. When the king is asked, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?” the king answers: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:37–40).

Far from being “pre-occupied” with abortion, the Catholic Church provides a wide variety of medical, social, and educational services both here in the United States and throughout the world. Catholics champion various expressions of this discipleship: opposing racism, fighting for the rights of the oppressed, assisting the sick and the elderly, working for greater economic equality, and so on. Some say that we should devote our energies solely to “non-controversial” needs and keep quiet about abortion; we should concede that, unlike all these other issues, this is a “private matter.” But it is not. Indeed, the very existence of that growing child is the fruit of communion between two persons, and the mother and father are themselves part of a constellation of human relationships. All of these people are harmed to a greater or lesser degree by the act of ending the unborn child’s life.

It is for good reason, then, that the bishops of the United States speak of this as the “pre-eminent”

political issue of our time and place “because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed.”³

Aware of the profound effects of abortion, the Church also engages in helping women and their families. Further, the erosion of reverence for inherent human dignity poisons the wider culture, contributing to disregard for the rights of “the other,” whoever he or she may be. Our increasingly polarized and uncivil society manifests a lack of respect for “the other” across a broad spectrum of issues, and the Catholic Church is committed to rebuilding human solidarity. In the case of the killing of the unborn, the Church strives to be a voice for the voiceless, speaking on behalf of those who quite literally cannot speak for themselves.

Outreach

The Catholic Church offers a variety of outreaches to women who are grieving their abortion, as well as others affected by it. Project Rachel is one such example. The Church also offers life-giving assistance to women trying to cope with a pregnancy for which they are not prepared. For more information, inquire at your local parish.

SECTION 2

Cooperation in Moral Evil

Abortion advocates argue that they are empowering women, but in fact the widespread practice of contraception and abortion has created a tremendous burden for a pregnant woman. Formerly, a woman who found herself with child in difficult circumstances relied on family, friends, and religious and social service organizations for support and assistance; there was a sense of shared responsibility. And, very often the father of the child recognized his responsibility for the situation and would respond accordingly. Now, the contraceptive culture has changed all that: the pregnancy has become “her problem.” She should have prevented it from happening, and now she alone has to make the problem go away. Worse still, it is not uncommon for the very people who should help her (the father of the child, her family and friends) to encourage and even pressure her to have an abortion. This sad state of affairs brings me to my second point: abortion is *never* solely the mother’s act. Others, to a greater or lesser degree, share culpability whenever this evil is perpetrated. Over the centuries the Church has developed a nuanced ethical teaching on what we call “cooperation in moral evil,” and

this is relevant to the question of when such participation precludes a Catholic from receiving the Eucharist, which also has a particular application to Catholics in public life.

The major distinction is between *formal* and *material cooperation* in evil. The key to formal cooperation is that I will the evil that is being done by another, and my cooperation is given to help bring it about. This applies clearly to those who willingly kill or assist in killing the child, but also to others who pressure or encourage the mother to have an abortion, pay for it, provide financial assistance to organizations to provide abortions, or support candidates or legislation to make abortion more readily available. *Formal cooperation in evil is never morally justified.* For decades now western culture has been in denial about the harsh reality of abortion. The topic is swathed in sophistries by its advocates and discussion about it is forbidden in many venues. It is my conviction that this conspiracy of disinformation and silence is fueled by fear of what it would mean to recognize the reality with which we are dealing. How can we face the enormity of this outrage? The only way we can

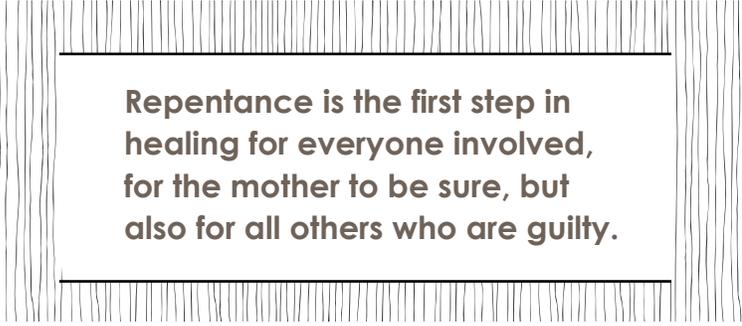
bear to do so is with confidence in the mercy of God, whose compassionate love provides us with the opportunity for conversion and repentance. Christ bestows His forgiveness abundantly, and God's grace will assist us, for we are all in need of conversion in various ways. This repentance is the first step in healing for everyone involved, for the mother to be sure, but also for all others who are guilty. Only when we as individuals and as a society see evil for what it is, and acknowledge our culpability and seek conversion, can we begin to heal. I exhort, I beg my fellow Catholics who are guilty of this grave offense to turn to God in the sacrament of Reconciliation, receive His forgiveness, and do penance. This message of conversion is at the heart of the Gospel and the Church's mission.

Material cooperation means that I do not agree with or intend the object of the act, but I contribute to the act in some way. Material cooperation is further distinguished as *immediate* (cooperation in the act itself) or *mediate* (cooperation involving attendant circumstances of the act). In the case of abortion, for example, if a person does not want the woman to have an abortion but still assists in the procedure, this is immediate material cooperation. If this person does not participate in the act itself, but helps with preparation or follow-up, the cooperation is mediate. *Immediate material cooperation in a grave evil can never be morally justified*: the person is guilty of participating in the evil act, even if he or she believes the action is wrong.

Mediate cooperation can be of different kinds, depending on whether it is closer to the act itself (proximate) or more removed from it (remote). For example, assisting in the preparation of the patient would be *proximate mediate cooperation*, while processing forms for admitting patients to a hospital

that, among many other things, performs abortions would be *remote mediate cooperation*. Is such cooperation permitted, and if so, when?

We all have a moral duty to avoid cooperating in evil as much as possible, but Catholic moral theology recognizes that there can be circumstances in which it is permissible to cooperate in a mediate material way in an evil act. Such is the complexity of life and the interconnectedness of human society that we cannot avoid some association with evil. Prudential judgments must be made, and circumstances may suggest that I cooperate in a mediate material way either to gain some good or to prevent the loss of some good. Such cooperation must involve actions that are either good in themselves or morally neutral, and they must be



Repentance is the first step in healing for everyone involved, for the mother to be sure, but also for all others who are guilty.

proportionate to the gravity of the evil and the degree of my involvement in it. Here again we see the twin bases of moral discernment: the act itself, and the intention of the one performing it. As to the first, the greater the gravity of the wrongdoing, the more serious must be the reason for the material cooperation to be licit. As to the second, the greater the gravity of the wrongdoing, the more remote must the cooperation be if it is to be morally permissible.

Determining when mediate material cooperation in evil is permissible requires careful reflection and an honest appraisal of the circumstances. Such cooperation may be permissible, for instance, in the example above regarding the receptionist in a health care facility that performs abortions among many other medical procedures (although the

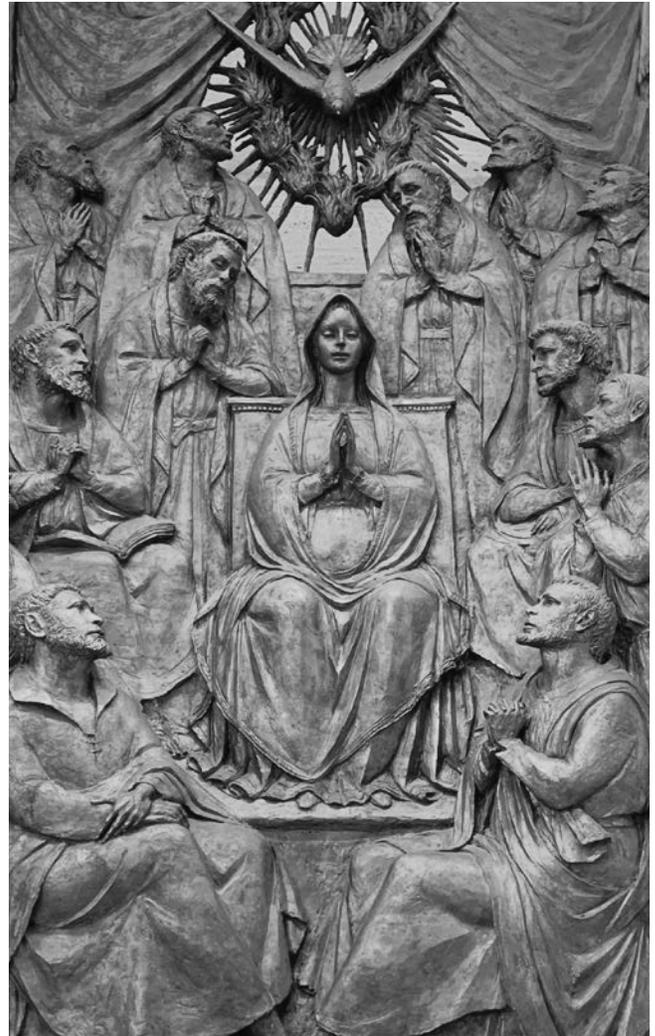
The widespread practice of contraception and abortion has created a tremendous burden for a pregnant woman.

individual should also actively seek employment elsewhere if possible). Another and even clearer example is that of a legislator who votes for a parental consent

law: even though the law presupposes the legality of abortion itself, this law restricts access to this evil somewhat, and the legislator could judge that this good offers a justification for mediate material cooperation. St. John Paul II addressed this precise issue in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (n. 73), a document I would urge everyone to read.

To summarize: **it is never morally permissible to cooperate in a formal way in an evil act. It is never morally permissible to cooperate in an immediate material way in the act itself.** There can be circumstances where it is permitted to cooperate in a mediately material way in an evil act, and this is determined by the seriousness of the evil and one's proximity to or distance from it. However, given the reality that abortion violates the most fundamental moral principle, the right to life itself, the teaching of our faith is clear: those who kill or assist in killing the child (even if personally opposed to abortion), those who pressure or encourage the mother to have an abortion, who pay for it, who provide financial assistance to organizations to

provide abortions, or who support candidates or legislation for the purpose of making abortion a more readily available "choice" are all cooperating with a very serious evil. *Formal cooperation and immediate material cooperation in evil is never morally justified.*



SECTION 3

The Question of Reception of the Holy Eucharist

The Church's teaching and discipline on worthiness to receive Holy Communion has been consistent throughout her history, going back to the very beginning. The earliest account of the Last Supper is found in the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, written within thirty years of the event itself. Immediately after describing Our Lord's institution of the Holy Eucharist, St. Paul offers this admonition:

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself [1 Cor 11:27–29].

To eat and drink “without discerning the body” means not discerning the reality of the Body of Christ. This refers both to the sacramental Body of Christ, the Eucharist, and to His mystical Body, the Church. Jesus Christ cannot be separated from His Body; to receive His Eucharistic Body and Blood while repudiating essential doctrines of

His Mystical Body is to eat and drink judgment on oneself. St. Paul urged the members of his communities temporarily to exclude serious wrongdoers from their midst (e.g., 1 Cor 5:1–5), the First Letter of St. John invoked this practice (1 Jn 1:10), and Jesus Himself speaks of this in the case of those who refuse to listen to the Church (Mt 18:17). The purpose of such exclusion is medicinal: it is intended to help the wrongdoer realize that he or she has wandered from Christ's fold by their ongoing evil behavior.

To receive the Blessed Sacrament in the Catholic liturgy is to espouse publicly the faith and moral teachings of the Catholic Church, and to desire to live accordingly.

The earliest description of our Catholic Eucharistic liturgy in Rome is found in the middle of the second century. St. Justin Martyr describes the order of Sunday worship, and also explains

The Teaching of the Church—Now:

“Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us.... This defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be.”

Pope Francis
***Evangelii gaudium*, n. 213**

the criteria for reception of the Eucharist: “No one may share the Eucharist with us unless he believes what we teach is true; unless he is washed in the regenerating waters of baptism for the remission of his sins, and unless he lives in accordance with the principles given us by Christ.” To apply these ancient requirements to the present topic, those who reject the teaching of the Church on the sanctity of human life and those who do not seek to live in accordance with that teaching should not receive the Eucharist. It is fundamentally a question of integrity: to receive the Blessed Sacrament in the Catholic liturgy is to espouse publicly the faith and moral teachings of the Catholic Church, and to desire to live accordingly. We all fall short in various ways, but there is a great difference between struggling to live according to the teachings of the Church and rejecting those teachings.

It is important to state that “worthiness” in this matter does not concern the inner state of one’s soul: only God can judge that. None of us is truly worthy to receive the very Body and Blood of Christ Himself, but God in His great mercy and condescension invites us to receive and makes us worthy to do so. The Eucharist itself is a medicine and a channel of God’s forgiveness for our lesser sins. If we are conscious of grave sin, however, we must have recourse to the sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving the Gift. Confidence in God must not give way to presumption. We are a Church of sinners, and we need to avail ourselves of the many graces Christ offers us in the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Christ Himself gave us these two sacraments and we should regularly receive His forgiveness in confession.

In examining one's conscience about being properly disposed to receive the Holy Eucharist, the definitions regarding the kind and degree of cooperation in an evil act serve as a necessary guiding principle. Most of the time this is a private matter. There are, however, circumstances in which such is not the case, occasions when those in public life violate the boundaries of justifiable cooperation. In the case of public figures who profess to be Catholic and promote abortion, we are not dealing with a sin committed in human weakness or a moral lapse: this is a matter of persistent, obdurate, and public rejection of Catholic teaching. This adds an even greater responsibility to the role of the Church's pastors in caring for the salvation of souls.



More from Pope Francis

“Sad to say, some countries and international institutions are also promoting abortion as one of the so-called ‘essential services’ provided in the humanitarian response to the pandemic. It is troubling to see how simple and convenient it has become for some to deny the existence of a human life as a solution to problems that can and must be solved for both the mother and her unborn child” (Video Message to the United Nations, September 25, 2020).

“It is painful . . . to note that under the pretext of guaranteeing presumed subjective rights, a growing number of legal systems in our world seem to be moving away from their inalienable duty to protect human life at every one of its phases” (Speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, February 8, 2021).

SECTION 4

Catholics in Public Life

As followers of Christ, we must all heed the plea of St. Paul: “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rom 12:2). This is not easy for anyone, but it is especially challenging for Catholics in public life, whose careers depend in large part on popularity. I want to express profound gratitude to Catholics in public life who labor to protect the human dignity of each and every person, especially of the defenseless unborn. This effort requires great courage in our culture, and you are a source of inspiration and pride to your fellow Catholics.

With regard to Catholics in public life who participate in abortion or seek to advance it through legislation or advocacy, precisely because these are actions of which many people are aware it introduces another consideration: scandal. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines scandal as “an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil” (CCC n. 2284). Prominent figures in society help to shape the mores of that society, and in our culture their advocacy of abortion definitely leads others to do evil. This must be stated with clarity: anyone who actively works to promote abortion

shares some of the guilt for the abortions performed because of their actions.

But there is another source of scandal that pertains specifically to Catholics in public life: if their participation in the evil of abortion is not addressed forthrightly by their pastors, this can lead Catholics (and others) to assume that the moral teaching of the Catholic Church on the inviolate sanctity of human life is not seriously held. The constant teaching of the Catholic Church from her very beginning, the repeated exhortations of every Pope in recent times up to and including Pope Francis, the frequent statements by the bishops of the United States, all make it clear what the teaching of the Catholic Church is in regard to abortion. When public figures identify themselves as Catholics and yet actively oppose one of the most fundamental doctrines of the Church—the inherent dignity of each and every human being and therefore the



absolute prohibition of taking innocent human life—we pastors have a responsibility both to them and to the rest of our people. Our responsibility to them is to call them to conversion and to warn them that if they do not amend their lives they must answer before the tribunal of God for the innocent blood that has been shed. Our responsibility to the rest of the Catholic community is to assure them that the Church of Jesus Christ does take most seriously her mission to care for “the least of these,” as Our Lord has commanded us, and to correct Catholics who erroneously, and sometimes stubbornly, promote abortion.

This correction takes several forms, and rightly begins with private conversations between the erring Catholic and his or her parish priest or bishop. The experience of some of us in Church leadership over many years demonstrates the sad truth that often such interventions can be fruitless. It can happen that the conversations tend to go nowhere, thus leaving it easy for the individual to continue participating fully in the life of the Church. Such a situation is a cause of scandal to many of the faithful.

Because we are dealing with public figures and public examples of cooperation in moral evil, this correction can also take the public form of exclusion from the reception of Holy Communion. As seen above, this discipline has been exercised throughout our history, going back to the New Testament. When other avenues are exhausted, the only recourse a pastor has left is the public medicine of temporary exclusion from the Lord’s Table. This is a bitter medicine, but the gravity of the evil of abortion can sometimes warrant it. Speaking for myself, I always keep before me the words from the prophet Ezekiel: “When I say to the wicked, ‘You wicked, you must die,’ and you do not speak up to warn the wicked about their ways, they shall die in their sins, but I will hold you

responsible for their blood” (Ez 33:8). I tremble that if I do not forthrightly challenge Catholics under my pastoral care who advocate for abortion, both they and I will have to answer to God for innocent blood.

To my fellow Catholics who openly advocate for the legitimacy of abortion, I beg you to heed the perennial call to conversion God Himself addresses to His people down

through the ages: “I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the LORD swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them” (Dt 30:19–20). Your Catholic ideals inspire you in your work to help those who experience discrimination, violence, and injustice, and you deserve the gratitude of your fellow Catholics and our nation for this service. But we cannot empower the weak by crushing the weakest! A compassionate, inclusive society must make room at the table for the most defenseless, and it should help a woman to keep her unborn child, not kill her or him. If you find that you are unwilling or unable to abandon your advocacy for abortion, you should not come forward to receive Holy Communion. To publicly affirm the Catholic faith while at the same time publicly rejecting one of its most fundamental teachings is simply dishonest. Heeding this perennial call to conversion is the only way to live the Catholic faith with integrity.

If they do not amend their lives they must answer before the tribunal of God for the innocent blood that has been shed.

The Medicine of Excommunication

During the struggle for civil rights after the Second World War, several American bishops did not hesitate to threaten excommunication to officials who opposed racial integration of Catholic schools. In 1947 Archbishop Joseph Ritter reminded the people of the Archdiocese of St. Louis of this penalty, and a parents' group organized to fight the admission of black students to previously all-white Catholic schools was disbanded. In 1955 Bishop Jules Jeanmard excommunicated assailants of a teacher of an integrated catechism class in Erath, LA. In 1962 Archbishop Joseph Rummel of New Orleans excommunicated three Catholic segregationist leaders who attempted to block his school desegregation order. One of them, Leander Perez, quipped by describing himself as "a Catholic, but not an Archbishop's Catholic." Excommunication is a medicine of last resort to help erring Catholics return to the faith.

Conclusion

Some people may question why the topic of abortion should be addressed at this time, with all of the other crises our country is facing right now: the lingering devastation of an unprecedented pandemic, the scar of racism once again rearing its ugly head, the aftermath of a contested election, escalating and widespread violence, growing divisions and polarizations in our country, and so on. Abortion, after all, has been a contested topic for very many decades now. But it is for good reason that the U.S. bishops call it the pre-eminent issue of our time, for abortion is a specific act that perpetuates a grave moral evil. It is not an attitude that can manifest itself in more serious and less serious ways, nor a matter of prudential judgment in which one decides the best path toward achieving the good. Indeed, when one looks directly at what actually happens in an abortion, it is hard to imagine anything more heinously evil. One such thing is genocide. But with almost one out of five pregnancies in the United States ending in abortion, what we are witnessing before our very eyes is, effectively, a genocide against the unborn.

We all have a role to play in ridding our nation of this scourge, and building a society that respects all life. Some members of society have an especially critical role to play. I would like to address myself to you at this time.

To Catholics in public life who advocate for life: thank you for your courageous witness! Your bold and steadfast stand in the face of what is often fierce opposition gives courage to others who know what is right but might otherwise feel too timid to proclaim it in word and deed. What I said above bears repeating here: you are a source of inspiration and pride for all of us in the Catholic community!

To those who procure abortion or are involved in any way in the abortion industry: look at the evil you are perpetrating square in the face: admit it, accept it for what it is, and turn away from it. Many of your former colleagues have done this, and are finding peace and are repairing their lives by revealing the horrors of the abortion industry from the inside out.

To Catholics in public life who practice abortion or advocate for it: the killing must stop. Please, please, please: the killing must stop. God has entrusted you with a prestigious position in society. You have the power to affect societal practices and attitudes. Always remember that you will one day have to render an account to God for your stewardship of this trust. You are in a position to do something concrete and decisive to stop the killing. Please stop the killing. And please stop pretending that advocating for or practicing a grave moral evil—one that snuffs out an innocent human life, one that denies a fundamental human right—is somehow compatible with the Catholic faith. It is not. Please return home to the fullness of your Catholic faith. We await you with open arms to welcome you back.

To women who have had an abortion and to those others who have been affected by it: God loves you. We love you. God wants you to heal, and so do we, and we have the resources to help you. Please turn to us, because we love you and want to help you and want you to heal. Because of what you have endured, you more than anyone can become a powerful voice for the sanctity of life. Many people have made this turn in their life. You can take this deeply painful and ugly episode in your life and turn it into something beautiful for God, with God's help. Let us help you to do that, so you can experience the healing power of the love of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To all people of good will: let us work together to build a culture of life, starting at the very beginning. Let us work for a society in which every new baby is received as a precious gift from God and given a welcome to the human community. With God's help, we can, collaborating with mutual respect, build a society that, far from throwing it away, respects and affirms the goodness of every human life.

Given in San Francisco, on May 1, 2021

Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker



*Our Lady of Guadalupe,
Patroness of the unborn and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!*



*Saint Joseph,
Patron of the Universal Church, pray for us!*



*Saint Francis of Assisi,
Patron of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, pray for us!*

Notes

¹ Marjorie A. England, *Life Before Birth*, 2nd ed. (United Kingdom: Mosby–Wolfe, 1996), 31. For an exhaustive list of references for the finding of modern embryology that human life begins at fertilization, see <https://www.princeton.edu/~prolife/articles/embryoquotes2.html>.

² Testimony of Anthony Levatino, MD, JD before the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, “Planned Parenthood Exposed: Examining Abortion Procedures and Medical Ethics at the Nation’s Largest Abortion Provider,” October 8, 2015 (<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/JU/JU00/20151008/104048/HHRG-114-JU00-Wstate-LevatinoA-20151008.pdf>).

³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* Introductory Letter,” November 12, 2019 (<https://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/usccb-general-assembly/upload/usccb-forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship-introductory-letter-20191112.pdf>).

⁴ *Apologia*, Cap. 66: 6, 427–431.

Images: All images of interior of the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption

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