

ABORTION

173. The first victim of abortion is the unborn child whose life is ended deliberately. Though it is performed with all the appearances of medical care, and surrounded by euphemisms, termination of pregnancy is the termination of a human life. Taking the life of a child in the womb is as unjust as taking the life of a new born baby. The fact that the child is totally dependent on his or her mother, and that the termination is done with the consent of the child's mother, makes it more dreadful. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, both abortion and infanticide are 'abominable crimes' (*The Church in the Modern World*, paragraph 51). For this reason, the law of the Church establishes that a person who actually procures an abortion, fully aware of what they are doing, incurs the penalty of excommunication that can only be rescinded through the Sacrament of Penance.

174. Having acknowledged the unborn child, recognition should be given to the difficult circumstances that expectant mothers sometimes find themselves in, and also to the responsibilities of others. The doctor, the father, the employer, the family, the Church and wider society are all involved directly or indirectly in different ways and each has responsibilities. There may be financial or other pressures, and those around the expectant mother may fail to give her the support she needs and deserves. A boyfriend, parent or friend may even try to push her into terminating the pregnancy. 'Sometimes the woman is subjected to such strong pressure that she feels psychologically forced to have an abortion.' (*The Gospel of Life*, paragraph 59) In such cases the woman would be much less blameworthy for her decision.

175. In a secondary sense, the woman is also a victim for she loses her child, but is unable to grieve effectively. The Church 'does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even a shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed.' (*The Gospel of Life*, paragraph 99) There are other people who share the blame for what happened, but it is the woman herself who must live with the consequences. Post-abortion trauma is common and in some cases severe, though those who feel guilt and remorse are in a healthier state than those who never allow themselves to grieve or to feel guilty. The Church welcomes women who feel remorse over an abortion and who come seeking forgiveness, reconciliation and absolution. As a result of such experiences some have been able to become 'among the most eloquent defenders' of everyone's right to life.

176. There is an important distinction to be made between abortion, in which a living human being is destroyed, and contraception, in which no human being is conceived: 'contraception and abortion are specifically different.' (*The Gospel of Life*, paragraph 13) They are, however, closely connected, 'as fruits of the same tree' There are forms of so-called contraception which work in part by preventing the embryo from implanting in the womb and which, in moral terms, are abortifacients. The 'morning after pill' relies primarily on this effect. The public should demand that pharmaceutical companies be honest and explicit in stating how their drugs can have an adverse effect on a woman's health, especially her reproductive system.

QUESTIONS

It is said that a third of women in this country may have had abortions. Experts tell

us there is long term psychological damage as a result. Discuss

Because of fairly recent revelations our society is very keen on having safeguarding procedures in every organization involving children and young people and vulnerable adults. But at the same time it is often dismissive about the destruction of life within the womb. Is there a glaring contradiction here? Discuss

Has the church done enough for people who have been through abortion or took part in the procedure or has its strict teaching on abortion put people off from seeking help? Discuss