

# **STATEMENT on ABORTION**

## **National Conference of Catholic Bishops**

**April 17, 1969**

In recent years there has been a growing concern for the dignity of human life. The crisis of conscience that has gripped the country over the war in Vietnam, the re-examination of the question of capital punishment, the ethical questions raised by newly developed skills in the transplantation of vital organs are all indications that our people continue to place a high value on human life. Moreover, our society recognizes that it must increasingly guarantee the basic rights of every person, particularly of those who are least able to defend themselves.

At the same time, we face a widespread effort to "liberalize" the present laws that generally prohibit abortion. Initial efforts to liberalize these laws focused on specific problem situations—some of which have already become less problematical due to scientific discovery and advance. During the past year the emphasis has begun to change, and we are now facing a determined effort to repeal totally all abortion laws—thereby resulting in abortion-on-demand.

In previous statements on this question we have drawn upon our Judaeo-Christian heritage of concern for the person and have stressed the intrinsic value of human life—a value that bridges the gap between man's temporal existence and his eternal destiny.

In a pastoral letter on Human Life in Our Day (November, 1968) we urged that "society always be on the side of life," that "it never dictate, directly or indirectly, recourse to the prevention of life or to its destruction in any of its phases." Our concern is heightened by the awareness that one of the dangers of a technological society is a tendency to adopt a limited view of man, to see man only for what he does or produces, and to overlook the source of man's dignity, the fact that he is made in the image of God, and that from the moment of his conception he is worthy of the full support of the human family of which he is a member.

Consequently, we have frequently affirmed as our own the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, that "whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person . . . all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, #27). At the same time, we have emphasized that society has an obligation to safeguard the life of every person from the very beginning of that life, and to perfect a legal-political system that assures protection to the individual and the well-being of the community.

We restate with strong conviction and growing concern our opposition to abortion. In so doing, we do not urge one ethical conviction as the sole basis of public policy, but we articulate the concerns that are also held by persons of other faiths and by specialists in the field of medicine, law and the social sciences.

Fully aware of problem situations that may exist at times, such as illegitimacy, great emotional stress, possible disadvantage for the child after birth, we find no evidence that easy abortion laws will solve these problems. In

fact, the termination of life in these particular situations violates our whole legal heritage, one that has always protected the right to life. Moreover, it allows for an extension of the principle that may well endanger the lives of persons who are senile, incurably ill, or unable fully to exercise all their faculties.

We strongly urge a renewed positive attitude toward life and a new commitment to its protection and support. We affirm our social responsibility, together with all society, to bring encouragement, understanding and support to the victims of rape, to intensify our scientific investigation into the causes and cures of maternal disease and fetal abnormality, and to provide to all women adequate education and material sustenance to choose motherhood responsibly and freely in accord with our basic commitment to the sanctity of life.

We are certain that respect for human dignity and the reverence for human life are such widely shared values in our society that the discussion by lawyers, doctors, ethicists, social scientists and all concerned citizens of ethical questions like abortion will lead to a deeper understanding of the eminent value and inviolability of human life.

