

Catholic Church

-Statement on abortion

ADW 7577

Abortion - Relig

aspects

STATEMENT on ABORTION

National Conference of
Catholic Bishops

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Last year, we stated our strong opposition to ongoing efforts to strike down laws prohibiting abortion. Our defense of human life is rooted in the biblical prohibition, "thou shalt not kill." Regrettably, there has been a radical turn of events during this past year, and a new effort has been directed to the total repeal of all such laws. At the same time, an effort has been mounted in the courts to have such laws declared unconstitutional.

Therefore we speak again on this important issue of public policy, addressing ourselves to the Catholic community and to all our fellow citizens. For the question of abortion is a moral problem transcending any particular sectarian approach. Our opposition to abortion derives from our conviction that whatever is opposed to life is a violation of man's inherent rights, a position that has a strong basis in the history of American law. The U.S. Bill of Rights guarantees the right to life to every American, and the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which our nation endorses, affirms that the child, because of his dependent status, should be accorded a special protection under the law before as well as after birth. (U.N. General Assembly, November 20, 1959)

In light of the attempts to remove all prohibition of abortion from our legal system, the life of the innocent unborn child is no longer given universal protection in the laws of our land. Moreover, the absence of all legal restraint promotes the acceptance of abortion as a convenient way for a woman to terminate the life of her child and the responsibilities that she has as its mother.

The implications of this proposed change in legal philosophy are enormous. Once we allow the taking of innocent human life in the

earliest stages of its development for the sake of convenience, how can we logically protect human life at any other point, once that life becomes a burden?

The assertion is made that a woman has a right not to be forced to bear a child against her will, but when a woman is already pregnant, this right must be considered in light of the child's right to life, the woman's responsibilities as its mother, and the rights and responsibilities of the child's father. The life of the unborn child is a human life. The destruction of any human life is not a private matter, but the concern of every responsible citizen.

We remain convinced that human life is a priceless gift, and our pastoral duty prompts us to reaffirm that "God, the Lord of life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life, a ministry which must be fulfilled in a manner which is worthy of man. Therefore from the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes." (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, No. 51)

Once again, we declare our determination to seek solutions to the problems that lead some women to consider abortion. We pledge our efforts to do all that is possible to remove the social stigma that is visited on the woman who is pregnant out of wedlock, as well as on her child. We also pledge the facilities and the efforts of our Church agencies to provide counseling and understanding to the woman who faces a difficult pregnancy. At the same time, we are encouraged by the scientific advance of recent decades that has already provided us with ways to support and maintain the life and health of the mother

and the development of the child in the womb.

Finally, we are aware that the value of human life is not exclusively a Catholic concern. Many Americans agonize over the loss of life involved in modern warfare, the serious ethical questions raised by recent scientific and surgical advances, the implications of pollution on our environment and the long-range effects of drug use. But safeguarding the life of all men requires safeguarding the life of every individual, for our hold on life itself is only as strong as the weakest link in our system of law.