

A Law Allowing Abortion?

In our class on Medical Ethics the professor brought to our attention the letter of Dr. Salvador L. Gomez, M.D. in the "We the People" section of the Manila Times, Jan. 29, 1971, issue. Dr. Gomez, a member of the Family Planning Association of the Philippines, strongly advocates the enactment of a law in favor of abortion as a legitimate means of birth control.

In said letter besides other inconsistencies Dr. Gomez stated: "It is true that the zygote or embryo is a potential living human being, but just a blueprint, in the same way that you have the blueprint of a house, the loss of which does not hurt yet your pocket all because a blueprint is not yet a house. A zygote is not yet a human being, but just a blueprint of a human being."

It was easy for us, Interns, even without the help of our professor, to see the inconsistency of Dr. Gomez' position. We were surprised how a Doctor of Medicine could make such a statement. For far from being a mere possibility, the impregnated ovum, the zygote, and with greater reason, the embryo, is already an individual set in motion towards his or her total human-development. In the *Linacre Quarterly* we read: "Genetic evidence prevents one from considering even a very early conceptus as a mere piece of tissue." (Nov., 1970, p. 287)

What shocked us most, however, is the plan proposed by Dr. Gomez in order to prevent the whole business of abortion to run out of hand. He wrote: "Now to avoid turning out abortion mills like appendectomy mills in our hospitals, we could request a panel of physicians to include a priest in deciding an abortion. This sounds rigid enough but we can begin on these things and relax them later as the idea becomes acceptable."

It is on this regard, Father, that we are inviting your comment.

X., Class President

ANSWER

1. The Doctrine of the Catholic Church.

We have to go back, of course, to the original command of God: "Thou shalt not kill." In its application to that killing called direct abortion we find the fifth commandment echoed by the Church across the centuries from the apostolic times. Just a few decades after the Ascension of our Lord, it was already written:

"You shall not kill the child in the womb of his mother; nor shall you take away the life of a newly born baby."

Didache, II, 2

The latest statement came from Vatican II which says: "For 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." (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.51)

The stand of the Catholic Church then, is clear: "Direct abortion is still and always will be murder . . . The rights of human beings are priceless as is the life that made these rights possible." Liguorian, Jan. 1971, p. 4)

Let it be noted here that this is not the stand of some other Churches which call themselves "christian". This is, indeed, unfortunate. Thus, in the fight over the Abortion Bill in England Cardinal Heenan sadly lamented over the fact that "only our Church" offered a strong opposition. (*Linacre Quarterly*, Feb., 1968, p. 40)

2. Is abortion "civilized" or "barbaric"?

In his letter, Dr. Gomez calls his proposed abortion law "the best single method of birth control today." And he claims that our present law prohibiting abortion is the result of backwardness and inferior civilization. Is the Philippines less civilized because abortion is prohibited here? Let us read Pope Paul VI's Guidelines to the Congress-

of the International Federation of Catholic Medical Association which met in Washington on October 11, 1970:

"In your discussion, therefore, never lose sight of this primary conviction: the life of each man must be unconditionally respected. Moreover, recent history teaches us this tragic lesson: respect for life becomes an illusion when it is no longer unconditional and absolute, and every serious violation of its sacred character runs the risk of leading ultimately to a veritable massacre of innocent people.

"The same norms of good and evil apply, therefore, to euthanasia, abortion and infanticide. The influence of Christianity had little by little uprooted *these forms of barbaric behaviour; but the materialistic ideas of pagan eugenics now tend to give renewed freedom to the most abnormal practices . . .* Do not fear to go against the current of what is said and thought in a *world of paganized behaviour . . .*" (L'Osservatore Romano, Oct. 22, 1970)

The Philippines may not be as progressive as some nations on matters of technology and economics. But in the social and moral field, to which our problem pertain, the Philippines is definitely highly civilized.

3. A priest in the panel?

In the context of Catholic ethics, it is inconceivable to have a law permitting Doctors to invade the rights of God by authorising the killing of a human being in his mother's womb, be he called "zygot", "embryo" or "fetus". But the idea of including a priest in that panel is so bizarre that it was not even thought of in the allegedly "more civilized" countries where abortion laws already exist.

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