

Why does the Catholic Church teach abortion is wrong in all circumstances?

By Graham Osborne

Abortion is one of the most controversial topics out there today. But for a Catholic, Jesus' teaching on this matter through Sacred Scripture and his Church is crystal clear. In every situation, abortion is always gravely sinful and never permissible. It never comes down to a question of, "it's my body", or, "it's just a lump of tissue or a fetus". Human life and personhood – an infant with a soul and an absolutely unique complement of DNA – begins at conception. It is *never* permissible to take an innocent life, for any reason, and God is the sole author, giver and taker of life. No one else on earth has the authority to change or supersede that.

But given the current cultural climate, some might conclude, "this is a hard teaching, who can accept it?" And within this climate, we must always be careful to proclaim God's truths in charity. But proclaim it we absolutely must!

But in case you happen to doubt what I have said, let us turn to some more authoritative sources, so that there can be absolutely no doubt in the mind of any Catholic anywhere that abortion is always wrong and never an option. This is *not* a question of personal opinion, or even "choice", but moral certainty based on God's commandments written on our hearts, and proclaimed unequivocally by His Church.

Let's turn first to the Catechism's Section 2271: "Since the first century, the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion... is gravely contrary to the moral law". Section 2258 then affirms that, "*Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God... God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being."

Sections 2322-2323 continue this theme: "From its conception, the child has the right to life. Direct abortion... is a "criminal" practice, gravely contrary to the moral law. The Church imposes the canonical penalty of excommunication [there are conditions for this] for this crime against human life. Because it should be treated as a person from conception, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed like every other human being." Can it get much clearer?

And contraception is a related issue, which I addressed in an earlier column. But it bears repeating that several forms of contraception like the Pill, IUD's, and other "emergency" forms of contraception often work by triggering an early term abortion. This, and other serious considerations, form part of the Church's foundation for rejecting any form of artificial contraception.

Similarly, in vitro fertilization is not permissible either, and for several reasons. But primary amongst them is that this process usually produces several fertilized eggs – each one a tiny human person, body and soul. And often, "extra embryos" are tragically destroyed.

I could add much more, but let me summarize all this with a powerful, unambiguous quote from St. John Paul II's encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*: "from the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun that is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather, the life of a new human being with his own growth."

He then goes on to authoritatively declare that the Church's teaching on abortion "is unchanged and unchangeable. Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his successors... I declare that direct abortion... always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate

killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by the Church's tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal magisterium. No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church".

If you think that, somehow, you are wiser than God's Church, I beg you, think again. This is the Church that Jesus founded upon rock – upon Peter and the Apostles – the Church he left his truths and teachings to, and then sent the Holy Spirit to guide, guard and protect from error. When it speaks officially on faith and morals, clearly defining the matter to be believed by all the faithful, as St John Paul II just did, it can never be wrong. It can *never teach error*.

This, simply put, is the dogma of infallibility, and it is at the heart of the Church's teaching authority, given to it by Jesus himself. Every Catholic must humbly submit their intellect and will to this teaching authority of the Church. Can we struggle and wrestle with such teachings? Yes. But can we reject them? Not without crossing into spiritual, mortal danger...

And this is why the Church emphasizes the right to life as the most foundational issue to consider when voting for elected officials. All other issues are really dependant on governments first protecting life. If this fundamental right is endangered at any level of society, no other considerations really matter. No other issue is more important – not the economy, immigration, climate change – nothing. So always vote prolife when it is an option.

But let us also consider the clear testimony from Sacred Scripture on this matter as well. Exodus 20:13, Deut 5:17, and Mt 5:21-22 all command: thou shalt not kill or take innocent life. This commandment is plain enough. But the question often asked is whether the developing infant in the womb is truly a human person.

The prophet Jeremiah answers this for us beautifully: "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you*" [Jeremiah 1:5]. Did you catch that? "*Before I formed you*". Not at 4 days, 4 weeks, or 40 weeks. But right from the moment God infuses your soul – *before* he forms you. This is the moment of the beginning of human life. And at that very moment, He knows "*you*". Not just a lump of tissue, but *you* – a distinct person!

As James 2:26 confirms, "the body without the spirit is dead". The soul is the source of human life, and at the moment it is given, a new human being is created, along with its totally unique, full compliment of DNA from each parent. At the moment of conception, each person is embarking on a developmental continuum that, biologically and theologically, allows for no division in terms of personhood – not at week 4, or 40, or ever!

There is simply never a moment when that fertilized egg is not a human person – body and soul. It is not just "a clump of cells" or a "fetus" [though this is an acceptable scientific term as long as it is used in a sense that does not intend to deny it's human personhood]. And it can never be trumped by the "rights of another's body". A baby in the womb has just as much right to live as his/her mother or father – or any other human being for that matter.

In Ecclesiastes 11:5, we are given a still deeper sense of this creative power of God in the formation of a child: "Just as you do not know how the life breath enters the human frame in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who is working in everything." And similarly, Psalm 139 13-15 says, "You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb... Your eyes saw me *unformed*... my days were shaped, *before one came to be*." And of course in Luke 1:41, "the *infant* [not a collection of cells] leaped in" Elizabeth's womb at Mary's greeting.

There is no question that at the moment of conception, a human person, formed by God himself, comes into being –“fearfully and wonderfully made”!

Additionally, prohibitions against “pharmakeia” (Greek) are found in Gal 5:19, Rev 9:21 and 21:8. In New Testament times, depending on context, “pharmakeia” often referred to chemical forms of birth control or abortion, but English translations rarely convey this sense. The context of all 3 passages is the condemnation of sexual immorality, with two of them condemning murder as well.

The early Church Fathers are equally adamant in condemning abortion. There are countless testimonies, but three will suffice to get the point across.

The great [St. Hippolytus testifies that](#): "Women who... take drugs to render themselves sterile, and to bind themselves tightly so as to expel what was being conceived... into what great impiety that lawless one has proceeded... adultery and murder at the same time!"

[St. John Chrysostom, one of the greatest Christian preachers the world has ever known, is equally adamant](#): “Why then do thou abuse the gift of God, and fight with his laws, and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing, and make the chamber of procreation a chamber for murder, and arm the woman that was given for childbearing unto slaughter?” And the great Biblical scholar, St Jerome: “they... use drugs to procure abortion... with the guilt... of child murder”. Abortion has been held as mortally sinful right from the early Church up until today.

And finally, Scripture sends us a sobering warning, one very applicable to today. 2 Kings 24:3-4 tells the chilling story behind God’s judgment and deportation of Judah to Babylon: “This befell Judah... for the sins Manasseh had committed... especially because of the innocent blood he shed, with which he filled Jerusalem, the LORD would not forgive”.

What was King Manasseh’s crime? Endorsing the practice of burning infants alive on a bed of coals as burnt offerings to the false god, Molek. What will God’s response be to *our* countries as we dismember and kill millions of the most innocent, helpless members of our society...

I sometimes wonder how it is that we all don’t throw ourselves against the doors of abortion facilities every day, not allowing a single person to pass through. If we knew in advance that a sniper was going to attack a local school at 8am sharp, would every one of us not rush to that school and do whatever it would take to prevent this terrible thing? Why is it that we don’t respond the same way to abortion? And I stand just as guilty of this as everyone else. How has it come to this???

But let me close with a beautiful testimony that came from a Q&A column at CatholicAnswers.com. Perhaps it will help re-orient our human way of thinking to a more Godly way:

Question: A very petite lady could only carry two of her triplets to full term without killing herself and two of them. So she chose to abort one. If she had not, there'd be only one baby with no mother. What should someone do in such a situation?

Answer by Fr. Vincent Serpa O.P.: “She had another choice, and it is the only right one: She could have chosen to not abort any and put the matter in the Lord’s hands. He is never outdone in generosity. Why is it that we always think of him last? I know of a case in which the doctors removed a cyst the size of a fist which was next to a baby in the womb. Such surgery always causes a spontaneous miscarriage. But the family prayed and put it in God’s hands. Not only was the baby not expelled from the womb, he is now the priest who is answering this question.” Amen!