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Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted: Jan. 19, 2006

'Thou shalt not...': Why abortion is evil

By Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted
The Catholic Sun

Part Two in a Series

When God says, "**Thou shalt not kill**," He is commanding us to nurture life, to protect life, to celebrate life, to love life. Behind the "negative" formulation of the commandment lies a much deeper positive call to love each person to whom God gives life and to defend his or her right to life from the first moment of existence.

Of all the crimes against humanity mentioned by the Second Vatican Council, including racism and anti-Semitism, two were singled out as "unspeakable crimes": abortion and infanticide (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51). Yet, less than eight years after Vatican II ended, abortion became legal in all the United States. How could this come about? How is it possible that a nation that has protected and fostered human rights throughout the world for so many years could deny those rights to its own unborn children?

Why is abortion such an evil act?

The deliberate taking of innocent human life through abortion is always wrong. In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II explains (#58): "*The moral gravity of procured abortion is apparent in all its truth if we recognize that we are dealing with murder and, in particular, when we consider the specific elements involved. The one eliminated is a human being at the very beginning of life. No one more absolutely innocent could be imagined. In no way could this human being ever be considered an aggressor, much less an unjust aggressor! He or she is weak, defenseless, even to the point of lacking that minimal form of defense consisting in the poignant power of a newborn baby's cries and tears. The unborn child is totally entrusted to the protection and care of the woman carrying him or her in the womb. And yet sometimes it is*

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precisely the mother herself who makes the decision and asks for the child to be eliminated, and who then goes about having it done."

The late Holy Father goes on to say, *"It is true that the decision to have an abortion is often tragic and painful for the mother, insofar as the decision to rid herself of the fruit of conception is not made for purely selfish reasons or out of convenience, but out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family. Sometimes it is feared that the child to be born would live in such conditions that it would be better if the birth did not take place. Nevertheless, these reasons and others like them, however serious and tragic, can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being."*

The Sacred Scriptures and life

The Bible abounds with passages that declare the personhood and the dignity of the unborn child. Consider, for example, the witness of the Prophet Jeremiah (1:4-5), **"The word of the Lord came to me thus: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you.'**" In Psalm 138 (vs. 13-14), the psalmist says to God, **"Truly you have formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works."**

Even more significant for us Christians is the witness to unborn life found in the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. Here, two mothers with their children still in the womb, Jesus and John, rejoice at the communication of joy that takes place between their unborn sons. Elizabeth cries out with exultation (Lk 1:42f), **"Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb... For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy."**

Abortion is intrinsically evil

On the solid foundation of this biblical witness, the Christian tradition, from the beginning, has consistently and clearly taught that abortion is a serious moral disorder. And this occurred initially in the face of a Greco-Roman world where abortion and infanticide were both legal and widely practiced. On the basis of the constant, unbroken tradition, Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* (#14) declared that this sacred teaching about the intrinsic evil of abortion is "unchanged and unchangeable." And thus, John Paul II asserts in *Evangelium Vitae* (#62), *"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."*

To say that an action is intrinsically illicit is to say that, when committed, it is always evil. There

is no circumstance that could ever render the act morally good, or even morally neutral. Abortion is such an intrinsically evil act.

How abortion in America became legal

One could point to seven Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court who, in 1973, acted out of sync with nearly all previous American jurisprudence and certainly beyond the strict interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. One could speak of a newly invented "right to privacy" that entered our legal system at the time that contraception was made legal a decade before *Roe v. Wade*. One could point to the confused thinking brought about by the social upheaval of the sexual revolution of the late 1960s, accompanied by the political upheaval in the wake of the war in Vietnam. One could point to all the linguistic manipulations done by Planned Parenthood and other abortion advocates who stood to make millions of dollars on the murder of the unborn.

All of these are undoubtedly contributing factors, along with a lack of vigilance on the part of many American citizens over the legal and legislative actions of public representatives, and a failure to see the long-range consequences of a contraceptive mentality that became rampant in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Whatever the reasons may have been for the legalization of abortion in 1973, there are some different reasons for its continuance in America in 2006. We will take those up in the next part of this series.

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