

Spreading the Gospel of Life

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“Promoting Respect for Life from the Womb to the Tomb”

Objective

To set out what the Church can and should do to live the *Gospel of Life*, in order to inspire and guide society to reverse the wanton disregard for the sacredness and value of human life.

1. Introduction

“Every five years the diocesan Bishop is bound to submit to the Supreme Pontiff a report on the state of the diocese entrusted to him, in the form and at the time determined by the Apostolic See”¹

“Unless the Holy See decides otherwise in the year in which he is bound to submit his report to the Supreme Pontiff, the diocesan Bishop is to go to Rome to venerate the tombs of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and to present himself to the Roman Pontiff”.² The Bishop is to satisfy this obligation personally, unless he is lawfully impeded.³

Commonly called the visit *Ad Limina Apostolorum* – The Visit to the Thresholds of the Apostles – this visit to the Headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, includes –

- a) a spiritual visit to the Basilicas of St Peter, St Paul outside the walls, St John Lateran and St Mary Major;
- b) a papal audience during which the Pope and the Bishop discuss the state of his Diocese focussing on significant events and developments in the period under review;
- c) meetings with the heads of the departments of the Vatican to discuss with them matters falling under their jurisdiction that had been raised in the Bishop’s five-yearly report.

1 Canon 399 # 1

2 Canon 400 # 1

3 Canon 400 # 2

It is these exchanges that provide the Pope and his assistants with a comprehensive overview of the state of the Church in regard to its internal life as also its interactions with society, especially in its efforts to preach the Gospel and make its way of life a reality in the lives of all those whom the Church touches, through its various ministries.

These regular briefings by bishops from all over the world enable the Holy See to respond with understanding to the key issues affecting society in different parts of the world. From time to time the response takes the form of a pastoral letter by the Pope called an *Encyclical*.

Encyclicals are usually addressed to members of the Catholic Church. However when circumstances demand a response that goes beyond the Catholic community, the Pope invites all men and women of goodwill to join the Catholic Church in tackling that particular issue.

2. Problems affecting life

An example of an encyclical that deals with a problem requiring such a broader response is *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life). Given the nature and the depth of the problems dealt with in it, Pope John Paul II addresses not only Catholics but also all people of goodwill. Even though it was profoundly influenced by these encounters, its immediate genesis was an extraordinary meeting of Cardinals in April 1991. This was followed by a wide-ranging consultation with the Catholic Bishops in every part of the Church.

The results of the consultation confirmed that *the* major concern troubling or engaging the worldwide Church was the threat to human life. Accordingly Pope John Paul II wrote *The Gospel of Life* as a defence of human life. He points out that the threats to life are greatest at the *beginning* of life and at its *end* – precisely the times when life is most vulnerable and defenceless. It is before birth, in old age or in illness that human beings are totally dependent on the goodwill and care of others.

In his motivation for writing to the Bishops of the world, Pope John Paul draws a parallel with what his predecessor had done a hundred years before:

In the same letter, written shortly after the celebration of the centenary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, I drew everyone's attention to this striking analogy: Just as a century ago it was the working classes which were oppressed in their fundamental rights, and the Church very courageously came to their defence by proclaiming the sacrosanct rights of the worker as a person, so now, when another category of persons is

being oppressed in the fundamental right to life, the Church feels in duty bound to speak out with the same courage on behalf of those who have no voice.⁴

Evangelium Vitae describes the situation as “this disturbing state of affairs far from decreasing, is expanding: with the new prospects opened up by scientific and technological progress there arise new forms of attacks on the dignity of the human being. At the same time a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crimes against life a new and – if possible – even more sinister character, giving rise to further grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorisation by the State so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of healthcare systems”.⁵

Evangelium Vitae argues that “the end result of this is tragic: not only is the fact of the destruction of so many human lives still to be born or in their final stage extremely grave and disturbing, but no less grave and disturbing is the fact that conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the basic value of human life”.⁶

Consequently what began as a project to affirm the freedom and autonomy of man, ended up taking the direction of minimising and eventually excluding God and his Law from human affairs. The eclipse of the sense of God and of man leads to a practical materialism, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism⁷. Applied to family planning or more accurately contraception this philosophy makes the individual the sole arbiter in deciding when and how to use the sexual faculties, whether to have children or not. With the passage of time man has moved to aggressively promoting anti-life policies and practices such as sterilisation, abortion and euthanasia. The endresult is that this spirit of secularism, hedonism and materialism has wittingly or unwittingly condemned modern man to living under a *Culture of Death*. It is what this *Culture of Death* is doing to human society today that leaves the Church with no choice but to defend life with the utmost vigour and forthrightness.

4 E V 5

5 E V 4

6 E V 4

7 E V 23

Given that the threat to life is both serious and urgent, the Church's defence of life cannot be restricted to statements of protest or even protest actions. Much more is demanded. In fact the defence of life demanded of the Church needs to take the form of a vigorous and sustained campaign not so much against individual anti-life actions but rather against the basic philosophy that underpins the *Culture of Death*. The major thrust of the Church's campaign will have to be to work out, cultivate and promote a *Gospel of Life*, which would eventually develop into the recognition of the sacredness of life and the observance of real respect for it, truly a *Culture of Life*.

"We need to bring the *Gospel of Life* to the heart of every man and woman and make it penetrate every part of society".⁸

3. The Gospel of Life

What is the Gospel of Life?

"The *Gospel of Life* is not simply a reflection, however new and profound on human life. Nor is it merely a commandment aimed at raising awareness and bringing about significant changes in society. Still less is it an illusory promise of a better future. It is something concrete and personal for it consists in the proclamation of the very person of Jesus Christ (who) made himself known ... with these words: 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (Jn14:6)".⁹

In other words the *Gospel of Life* is all that mankind needs to develop and cultivate human relations that lead to the justice and peace, the brotherly love and harmony, which God our Creator willed when he created and gave his laws of living to us. The first among these requirements was that every man and woman should strive to discover a clear and sound understanding of the meaning of life, in particular the things that give it its value, its meaning and its purpose.

"Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of the supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence."¹⁰

Since the purpose of the *Gospel of Life* is to arrive at such understanding of life it is most definitely not a quick-fix solution for this or that particular

8 E V 80

9 E V 29

10 E V 2

social or moral problem. Quite the contrary, it is a philosophy of life, or better still, a theology of life that looks at life from the point of view of both human reason and divine revelation, in order to reflect, with the insight of reason and in the light of revelation, on the value of life, and so give it its proper place on the scale of human values and rights. Its ultimate aim is to create and inculcate a *Culture of Life* that takes its imperative from the foundational truth of divine revelation ‘that God is the author of life’, and because human life was created by him, it has the distinctive character of being *sacred*. “God proclaims that he is absolute Lord of the life of man, who is formed in his image and likeness (cf. Gen. 1:26-28). Human life is thus given a sacred and inviolable character, which reflects the inviolability of the Creator himself”.¹¹

3.1 God's will for man

For the believing person nothing happens by chance, i.e. without God willing it. Therefore, even this gathering, called to reflect on and respond to issues of human life in our country, has been possible only because God has willed it. Is he not doing this to compel us to take stock of the wanton disregard for the value and preciousness of life, which is an overbearing feature of today's culture?

As believers we also have to believe that God's reason for assembling us here, is that he has chosen and called us to defend life by proclaiming to the wide range of people who are deeply disturbed by what is happening, his clear instruction that human life has inalienable value. Many people are eagerly waiting to be shown the way out of the moral morass in which we are mired and at risk of being dragged back down into the law of the jungle.

As leaders in our communities, we have been chosen and commissioned to map out and lead the implementation of the way to a new moral and spiritual lifestyle. In the light of the present culture of violence against the human person in general and innocent life in particular, the implementation of that new moral and spiritual lifestyle demands that we reaffirm the sacredness and value of life.

For a start we have to work out how to restore human life to its rightful position as *the* primeval value, and respect for life as *the* behaviour which defines our very humanity.

Without the strong sense of the value of life and especially without the corresponding respect for life arising from its sacredness, it is difficult to

11 EV 53

see our country doing anything but struggle at best to put right the more urgent or serious social, ethical and moral ills afflicting us, not least the extremely high murder rate as well as violence against the human person.

At worst as a nation we will fail utterly in any attempt to strengthen the moral fibre and raise the standard of the moral behaviour of our people. The dismal failure of the *Moral Regeneration Movement* is clear evidence that much more is needed than animated speeches or over-optimistic plans.

4. Foundations for respect for life

But, why should we regard life as sacred and why should we accord it the highest respect?

In attempting to answer these questions the author will speak very much as a Catholic and present the basic moral teaching of the Catholic Church.

The moral teaching of the Catholic Church recognises two sources for the moral imperative that accords supreme value to human life. Those sources are: a) Natural Law, and b) Divine Revelation.

4.1. Natural moral law

For the purposes of this presentation the Natural Law (which is sometimes called *natural revelation*) is taken to be: The maker's instructions in as far as God, the Creator of man has endowed (i) the human intellect with the ability to discover the laws of nature governing human behaviour, (ii) the human reason with the ability to work out the implications of those laws and (iii) the human will with the ability to commit the person to observing them.

In other words, Natural Law is the instinct or awareness that God has planted in the human heart to enable it to discern the *good* that must be done, the *evil* that must be eschewed; the *truth* that must be accepted and believed and the *lie* that must be refuted and cast aside.

“The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie: The natural law is written and engraved in the soul of each and every man, because it is human reason ordaining him to do good and forbidding him to sin... But this command of human reason would not have the force of law if it were not the voice and interpreter of a higher reason to which our spirit and our freedom must be submitted”.¹²

12 C of CC # 1954

To the question whether the natural law is not in itself able to guide human beings in their relations and relationships, we must sadly answer that history is full of reminders that even the best constitutions and systems of social organisation or governance formulated by human reason according to the natural law, cannot guarantee that man will recognise and follow it in all circumstances.

The main obstacle is original sin. Original sin is the state of being deprived of original holiness and justice in which all human beings are born. So it is because of original sin that man does not always perceive or recognise the natural law with clarity and immediacy.

It is because of original sin that all human beings have a deep-seated inclination to evil. And it is because of original sin, that evil intervenes to spoil even the noblest human efforts. This happens especially when human beings, relying over much on their own wisdom and insights, their own wits and resources, draw up laws and constitutions to answer particular situations and needs.

Sin and human weakness

To illustrate this point we examine the South African Constitution since it is often held up as a model of what is best in constitution making. This is because the SA Constitution has clear principles and a most comprehensive Bill of Rights. It is, or at least it should be, the surest guarantee against all kinds of abuses in social and civic living. Unfortunately, it has major built-in flaws.

“The precepts of natural law are not perceived by everyone clearly and immediately. In the present situation sinful man needs grace and revelation so moral and religious truths may be known ‘by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error.’ The natural law provides revealed law and grace with a foundation prepared by God and in accordance with the work of the Spirit. The precepts of natural law are not perceived by everyone clearly and immediately. In the present situation sinful man needs grace and revelation so moral and religious truths may be known ‘by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error.’ The natural law provides revealed law and grace with a foundation prepared by God and in accordance with the work of the Spirit”¹³.

13 C of CC # 1960

The first is that, in spite of its excellence humanly speaking *it is the product of sinful human minds and hearts*. As a result it has serious weaknesses not only as to its composition and formulation, but also as to its interpretation and application.

One of its greatest weaknesses is the fact that it can be changed to accommodate the will of the majority, which might well have self-interest rather than the common good as its objective in reshaping the Constitution at a particular time or in particular circumstances.

Some might argue that because of its strong *rights* bias the South African Constitution is quite capable of protecting its primary beneficiaries from the effects of these flaws by virtue of the admirable Clause 36. This clause was specially designed to control the limitations that can be placed on any basic right granted under the Constitution. The intention was beyond reproach, but the fact is that Clause 36 can itself be amended by parliament. And of course there is no need to recall that parliaments are notorious for their short-sightedness, in all probability due to the fact that political parties find it easier to put self-interest above the common good than the other way round.

Conflict of rights

The second serious flaw lies in the fact that by and large constitutions are vision documents that set out the ideals that the nation aims to achieve. This means that every Constitution has to be applied to situations and circumstances that vary and even change from time to time. This in turn means that it has to be interpreted. There are several outstanding examples of this, the most obvious being the case of a *conflict of rights*. Such conflicts, when they occur, have to be resolved by the same frail human will and judgement. And this is the second major flaw of our Constitution as well.

A topical case in this regard is the *Termination of Pregnancy* or *TOP Act*, which justifies abortion as the *right of a woman over her body* without giving due consideration to the moral consequences for society of wholesale abortions. The *TOP Act* does not consider the fact that the *right to life* is an inalienable right, which if it is violated will have far-reaching consequences for society. Because the right to life is inalienable no one has the right to deny this right to another. Nor indeed can a person be required to give it up. The only exception is when, as a consequence of a capital crime, the law demands that it be forfeit on the basis that anyone who takes an innocent life must pay for it with his own. But even this concept of capital punishment is more and more contested today, strangely on the basis that it violates the right to life.

“Preserving the common good of society requires rendering the aggressor unable to inflict harm. For this reason the traditional teaching of the Church has acknowledged as well-founded the right and duty of legitimate public authority to punish malefactors by means of penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime, not excluding, in cases of extreme gravity, the death penalty”.¹⁴

These examples show that natural law and natural justice do not form an adequate basis for the optimal system of human values and rights. Human weakness forces us to look elsewhere. And because we are believers in a God who is all-knowing, all-good and all-loving, the obvious place to look is to divine revelation. It is in divine revelation that God, the Creator and Master of all creation reveals and sets out his plan for us. That divine vision for us is accompanied by God’s instructions that we are to follow in order to accomplish his will and plan.

“By natural reason man can know God with certainty, on the basis of his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his own powers: the order of divine Revelation. Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man”.¹⁵

4.2. Divine revelation

Christians believe that *Revelation* took place in a number of stages. It involves a specific divine pedagogy: God communicates himself to man gradually, beginning with God’s revelation of himself to the very first human beings, Adam and Eve. These he invited to an intimate communion with himself; through to Abraham, our father in faith; through to the kings and the prophets to whom he made known his Word. In this way God prepared man to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation that was to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the full and definitive revelation of God’s plan and will for man.

Throughout history God has used revelation as the vehicle of communication with man and woman to tell them who they are, where they come from, why he has placed them here and what is to become of them after their time on earth has ended. For this reason revelation is reliable and sure.

14 C of CC # 2266

15 C of CC # 50

It is through revelation that we know for sure that God created all things. But in creating man and woman he did something special. When he breathed into them the breath of life, he in effect gave them a share in his very life, and in making them male and female and in his image and likeness he was making it possible for them to pass on that gift of life to the next generation. As Creator, God is above all the Lord of life. Therefore he alone gives life and he alone has the right to take it away.

Again as Lord of life, he chose to lay down laws that must be obeyed if man and woman are to fulfil their destiny. The first series of these laws governs man's relations with God, especially the calling to know, love and serve him above all else. The second series relates to man's relations with his fellowmen. This series includes the injunction prohibiting the taking of innocent life or more accurately the life of the innocent. And further this prohibition against taking the life of the innocent is binding under pain of death. All this because life is sacred, because its Creator is the all holy God. (Ex 21:12;¹⁶ 23:7;¹⁷ Num. 35:16¹⁸, 35:31¹⁹)

5. Life is sacred from conception

Although there are many passages in both the Old and the New Testaments of the Scriptures, for example, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers and Psalms from the Old Testament, the Gospels and Letters of St Paul from the New, that spell out the obligation to respect life, it is Luke's reflection on Mary's visit to Elizabeth that most eloquently pleads the case for the sacredness of life and the imperative to accord it absolute value.

"Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognised as having the rights of a person – among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life".²⁰

"Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed:

16 [Ex. 21:12] Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death.

17 [Ex. 23:7] Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty.

18 [Num. 35:16] But anyone who strikes another with an iron object, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death.

19 [Num. 35:31] Moreover you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer who is subject to the death penalty; a murderer must be put to death.

20 C of CC # 2270

‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears the child in my womb leaped for joy’” (Lk 1: 39-44)

Application

Even if Mary had delayed her visit until just before Elizabeth gave birth, the child she was carrying would not have been more than twelve weeks old. Yet it is this twelve week-old life that Elizabeth, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares to be her *Lord!*

Elizabeth provides us with the solid foundation for the belief that from the moment of conception what is present in a woman’s womb is a human life, not a *blob of cells* or a *mass of tissues*. Elizabeth’s prophetic words embolden us to go even further to assert that from the moment of conception what is present in the womb is not simply a human life, but a person in the making who can be identified as such and even given a title or name.

We are therefore, on extremely secure grounds when we declare that conception is the start not simply of a human life but of an actual and unique person!

Here is a further point for reflection. In normal circumstances only a woman who has given birth is referred to as ‘mother’. So, why does Elizabeth call Mary *the Mother of my Lord*? Is it to challenge us to give the same value and respect to the life of the baby in the womb as to any other human life brought into this world by woman?

If the Word of God teaches us to give the same value and worth to the life of the unborn as to any other human life, how can a believer in the Word of God fail to challenge those, like ‘pro-choicers’, who argue that ‘because the baby in its mother’s womb’ is denied certain rights accorded by the Constitution, that baby is debarred from the *right to life* as well. Or their argument that ‘because a woman regards her pregnancy as unwanted’, that claim disqualifies the unborn baby in her womb from the right to protection and nurture of its nascent life!

5.2 To the tomb

A second key Scripture passage spells out what human beings have to do in order to live in union with God as willed by him:

“The young man asked: Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus looked at him, loved him and said to him: *‘Keep the com-*

mandments... Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal, etc.’”

Clearly the young man is asking Jesus as a spiritual master to direct him how to live even more strictly according to the Maker’s instructions. In answer Jesus gives him a summary of the Ten Commandments. When the young man says he is already doing so, Jesus, seeing the genuineness of the young man’s inquiry, loved him for it, and so made the fullest demand possible of a human being: “If you wish to inherit eternal life, go and sell all you have, give it to the poor, then come follow me”, in other words ‘give up your present way of living and dedicate yourself completely to working for the Kingdom’.

What most critics of the Church’s position on moral questions such as these do not know or understand is the Church’s teaching is in fact built on Scripture passages such as these. This is why the Catholic Catechism has the following teaching:

“Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end; no one can under any circumstance claim for him/herself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being”.²¹

6. The church’s role in society

When the South African government appealed to Church and Religious Leaders of the country to co-operate with it in a project aimed at the moral reconstruction of society, it was by that fact admitting that it had failed to uphold, let alone rejuvenate the nation’s morals by simply invoking the wonderful vision of the Constitution or passing laws derived it. It had become obvious even to government that something more was needed. And that something had to do with what the Church calls the *common good*. This all-embracing concept needs to be defined, promoted and put into operation at all levels of society.

What is the common good?

In Catholic Church moral teaching the *common good* is

“The sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.”

21 C of CC # 2258

It consists of three essential elements

First, it presupposes respect for the person as such. In particular, the common good resides in the conditions ... such as ‘the right to act according to a sound norm of conscience and to safeguard ... privacy, and rightful freedom also in matters of religion.’

Second, it requires the social well being and development of the group itself. Development is the epitome of all social duties. It is the proper function of authority to make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family.

Finally, the common good requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable means the security of society and its members”.²²

In the light of the above, the Church is obliged not only to point out to the government those of its policies that are contrary to the Maker’s instructions, but also to call on it to take the necessary steps to bring those policies into line with the revealed moral order that is encapsulated in the concept of the *common good*.

The basis for this intervention with government is the Church’s belief and teaching that the respect and obedience to be accorded to government are themselves solidly founded in the Scripture and in the Tradition of the Church.

“The authority of the State derives from God. It is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned and if it employs morally licit means to attain it. If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, such arrangements would not be binding in conscience.”²³

It is moral principles such as these that continue to impel the Church to challenge the government to amend or where necessary to repeal all laws and policies that not only fail to uphold the *common good*, but also undermine and in some cases even actually destroy it.

The serious consequence of government’s failure to do this, would be that the Church would have to instruct its members that such laws and policies do not bind citizens to comply with them, but rather to reject them in conscience. There are dozens of examples from the apartheid regime, while

22 C of CC # 1905 - 1909

23 C of CC # 1903

a prime example of the present government's policies that offend in this way is the *Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act*. Like the apartheid laws this ultra-liberal abortion law violates the *common good*, by arrogating to man a right that belongs to God alone, namely to give and to take life. So, no one can be bound in conscience to obey this law. Rather we are bound to oppose it at every turn.

Despite this, it is not the individual laws and policies that violate the *common good* that are cause for concern. Rather it is the philosophy that underpins them, and its negative attitude or indifference to the issue of the inalienable value of life.

7. Creating a culture of life in South Africa

The Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* goes a long way towards showing the serious consequences of such laws and policies for society. One consequence is the wanton loss of respect for life, for the integrity of the human person and ultimately for law and order, which are there precisely for the purpose of upholding these. This is why *Evangelium Vitae* is such an urgent call on the Church and all men of good will to take the necessary step to restore moral and ethical values to their proper place in our society.

Evangelium Vitae also calls on governments to acknowledge those policies that undermine the most basic moral value, namely respect for life. Without this value no lasting moral reconstruction will be possible.

“When the Church declares that unconditional respect for the right to life of every innocent person – from conception to natural death – is one of the pillars on which every civil society stands, she ‘wants simply to promote a *human State*.’ A State which recognises the defence of the fundamental rights of the human person, especially the weakest as its primary duty.”²⁴

Secondly the encyclical calls on governments to reclaim their moral authority, by acknowledging that both public and private life are subject to the principle, which eliminates corruption namely that good must be done and evil rejected.

Third, governments need to regain their credibility by dealing effectively with crime, especially violent crime against person and property by abandoning policies, which condone or even promote violence against the innocent life of the unborn.

24 E V 101

Isn't it the ultimate irony that a government which has been responsible for the most comprehensive Bill of Rights should be leading those who are determined to continue excluding from the most basic of all human rights the very members of society whom it should be doing most to protect and defend, namely unborn babies, the sick, the frail and the elderly?

8. Conclusion

At the same time that *Evangelium Vitae* calls on states and governments to take the actions needed to restore respect for the life and dignity of every human being, it calls on the Church, first of all in the person of the bishops to reaffirm the value of human life and its inviolability, and at the same to call on each and every person in God's name to respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life."²⁵

This means that the entire Church must take an unequivocal stand *for* life, by living the Gospel of life and thus creating a *Culture of Life*. It must not shirk its duty, which Pope John Paul II reaffirmed in *Evangelium Vitae* with these words:

“Therefore by the authority which Christ conferred on Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral. This doctrine, based on that unwritten law, which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. Rom. 2:14-15) is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium (Teaching Authority). “Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being whether a foetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person or one suffering from an incurable disease or person who is dying.”²⁶

In short all actions which contribute to the loss of *respect for life* are proof of the extent to which modern society is under the yoke of the *Culture of Death*. They are also evidence that modern man and woman continue to ignore or rebel against the Maker's instructions. Such ignorance and rebellion will lead to even worse disasters than those presently experienced by society in South Africa and in the world.

Allow me to conclude with another word of warning from the late Pope John Paul II:

25 E V 5

26 E V 57

“There can be no true peace without respect for life”.

The constantly deteriorating situation does not allow us to be false prophets, who tell the world what it wants to hear. Rather everyone in the Church must work harder in society to make the whole Gospel lived and taught so that it becomes the true foundation upon which our country and its people can build a bright and hopeful future.

Let us take a last piece of advice from our Lord and Master:

If you want to possess eternal life – keep the commandments ... “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness. Love your neighbour as your self ...”²⁷

Love one another as I have loved you.²⁸

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28 Jn 15:12