

Abortion

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January, 1974
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In the past year abortion was made legal in the United States by decision of the Supreme Court. The legalization of abortion has taken place or is about to take place in many other formerly Christian countries. By this action the civil laws protecting the lives of unborn children have been removed. The right or wrong of abortion is left to the conscience of the expectant mothers, or to their whims, if they have not a conscience.

The conscience of those of the Church on such a matter must be formed from the teachings of the Word of the Lord, and with us this means, in the first place, from the teachings of the Third Testament. Because this subject has not been publicly considered in the Church, the teachings of the Word that have relation to it are not widely known within the Church. Under the present circumstances it is needful that they be brought to the attention of all in the Church.

The Third Testament does not speak directly of abortion, but it does speak of the life of the embryo in the womb, and the teachings on this subject must be considered by those in the Church.

In the Arcana Coelestia 3570:4 it is said: "It is known that the soul of man begins in the ovum of the mother, and is perfected next in her womb, and there is given round with a tender body, and indeed with such that the soul through it can act suitably in the world into which it is to be born." This does not mean that the soul is from the mother. The general teaching of the Word is that the soul is from the father. But the soul which is present in the seed of the father is not the soul of a man until it is conjoined with the ovum of the mother. The beginning of the soul of an individual man is when the soul in the seed from the father is conjoined with the ovum of the mother.

In the work entitled "The Divine Wisdom", (generally to be found at the end of the sixth volume of the Apocalypse Explained,) in the second chapter, it is said that the Lord has created with man, and afterwards forms with him, a receptacle of love, which is the will, and adjoins to this a receptacle of wisdom, which is his understanding. And further on in the beginning of that chapter it is said: "1. That these forms, which are the receptacles of love and wisdom, first exist with man conceived and being born in the womb."

In the "Divine Wisdom", chapter III, the summary of the contents of the chapter reads as follows: "1. That the Lord conjoins Himself to man in the womb of the mother from first conception, and forms him. 2. That He conjoins Himself in those two receptacles, in one through love, in the other through wisdom. 3. That love and wisdom simultaneously and unanimously form all and single things, but still distinguish themselves in them. 4. That the receptacles are distinguished into three degrees with man, one with another, and that the two superior degrees are the dwelling-places of the Lord, but not the lowest. 5. That one receptacle is for the will of the future man, and the other for his understanding; and yet nothing whatever of his will and understanding is present in the formation. 6. That in the embryo before it has been born there is life, but that the embryo is not conscious of it."

Further on in that third chapter, in treating of the first of the above listed subjects, it is said: "All this work of preparation of Himself the Lord does in the womb." And further in the same section, "While man is in the womb he is in a state of innocence; thence his first state after birth is a state of innocence; and the Lord does not dwell with man unless in his innocence, wherefore especially then when he is as if innocence. Likewise man then is in a state of peace." And under the

sixth subject of this chapter it is said: "That the life out of which the embryo lives in the womb is not his, but the Lord's alone, Who alone is Life."

Consider all the things said in the second and third chapters of the above quoted Work. Consider also what is said at the end of the Divine Love and Wisdom, number 432, concerning the quality of the initiament of man from conception.

From these teachings it must be clear to all that the embryo in the womb, in its conception and in its formation, is called a man, and has working within it the life that is of the Lord. Nothing on earth can be compared to the wonders that are taking place within it, except the miracle of regeneration by the Lord, through which a man receives the Lord's life as the life of Heaven within him. Abortion, which is the killing of such a being, cannot be taken lightly, as now it is in the world. Any in the Church who consider themselves to be faced with the question of abortion cannot but regard it as an evil, only to be excused if some worse evil might result without it, such as the death of the mother and the child. And the judgment as to what is a worse evil is a most grievous one, requiring the best available knowledge from the Church and from the doctors.

It is taught in the "Divine Wisdom" chapter 3, section 5, that the embryo has no proper life of its own until the lungs are opened. This teaching has generally been understood to mean that an embryo has no eternal life until it has drawn the first breath at birth, although some students of this subject in the New Church believe that this is not involved in that teaching, and that every embryo has eternal life from its conception. From the idea that an embryo has no eternal life until its first breath at birth, some have argued that the killing of an embryo is in no sense a form of murder. But even if we were to take it for certain that an embryo has no eternal life until its birth, what does this really have to do with the question as to the degree of the evil of abortion? Must we not still face the question as to which is the greater crime, to kill a man after he has been born, and has an eternal existence before him, or to kill that which has been prepared for an eternal existence and which could have an eternal existence, if it were to live?

Some also argue that the killing of an embryo is no worse than the prevention of the conception of an embryo, whether this is done by abstention or by the employment of other means of birth control. The fallacy in this argument appears to me to be that while the male sperm is a potential human soul, it is not in fact the soul of a man until conjoined with the ovum of the mother. A male sperm is not by itself a human life begun. It cannot by itself ever become an eternal being. An embryo is the beginning of a human life, and it can become an eternal being.

There are many human problems which force those who have to face them to consider the possibility of abortion. There is sometimes the danger or even the certainty that a mother will die if a pregnancy is continued: there is the shame of a woman who must bear an illegitimate child: there is the fear of giving birth to a deformed or hopelessly retarded child due to disease or to the influence of drugs: there is the problem of what should be done in the unlikely event of conception following rape; there is the problem of what must be done if a pregnancy would bring about the mental breakdown of a mother. These are heart-rending problems. We do not propose to enter into all these problems in this short paper, but we ask that you consider them and consult with your pastors about them, and with your doctors. Let your conscience be formed from the Word and from the best enlightened knowledge you can obtain from the world. Do this while you are under no pressure from any such problem. Most of you will never have to face any of these problems. But it is best to have your thought, your conscience, formed clearly about them, rather than to face them in a panic, in that unlikely event that you are forced to do so.

It may be said that the Church needs much more light to face such a moral problem as abortion, and that we here are facing it only out of an external understanding, from the sense of the letter of the Third Testament. To this we must reply that

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the Church and every one in it must face such problems in such light from the Word as we now have. The giving of any more interior light in the Word depends on our living what we see to be true in the sense of its letter. Certainly we need more light, more Love, more Mercy. But if we do nothing with that which He has given us, how can we by Him be prepared to receive more?

If you wish to see what is represented in the Word by an embryo, consider what is said in the Apocalypse Explained, number 710: "'And havingⁱⁿ the womb.' That it signifies nascent doctrine out of the good of love celestial is evident out of the signification of to have in the womb when concerning the Church which is signified by the woman, that it is the nascent doctrine of the true out of the good of love celestial. By the womb is signified inmost love conjugal, and thence love celestial in the whole complex. And by the embryo who is in the womb, the true of doctrine out of the good of love celestial; for by him is signified a like thing as by the male son whom she brought forth, concerning whom in the fifth verse following, through whom the doctrine of the true out of the good of love is signified; with the difference that the embryo, because still in the womb, draws more from the good of innocence than after he has been born."

It is to be feared that the present acceptance of abortion, and the inhuman lack of feeling with regard to it, is an ultimate of the hatred of the hells against all innocence, against the nascent Doctrine of the Church. That cold, cruel hatred works its way into the minds of ignorant men, resting in men besotted with the superficial reasonings of the loves of self, of the world, and of pleasures.

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