

FR. CLIFF'S NOTES

Abortion: What the Catholic Church Teaches

If you asked an average group of Catholics to identify the Church's position on abortion, they might give you a one-word answer: "NO."

Our earliest teaching on contraception and abortion come from apostolic times. Circa 70 A.D. in the **Didache (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*)**, we read: "You shall not practice birth control; you shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill what is begotten."

From the **Letter/Epistle of Barnabas**, circa 90-100 A.D.: "You shall not slay the child by procuring abortion, nor shall you destroy it after it is born."

St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 75-100 A.D.) wrote: "Women who resort to some sort of deadly abortion drug kill not only the embryo, but along with it, all human kindness.."

Athenagoras of Athens (c. 178 A.D.) wrote: "And when we say that those women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder, and will have to give an account to God for the abortion, on what principle should we commit murder?"

The Church's consistent teaching on abortion begins with the belief that all human life **is** created in God's own image and likeness. As Blessed John Paul II wrote in his encyclical on human life: "All human beings, from their mother's womb, belong to God who searches them and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny shapeless embryos and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow..." (***The Gospel of Life***, #61, 1995).

Quite simply the Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred. Therefore the Church rejects all that violates this sacred gift, beginning with the direct destruction of innocent human life which is abortion.

But the Catholic Church's pro-life teachings are based not only on sacred Scripture about the divine creation and the divine destiny of human life. They are also based upon what is commonly called "natural law," the divine law written in our hearts and knowable by human reason. You might say that because of natural law, a person doesn't have to be Catholic, Christian or even overtly religious to understand that human life is special among all creation and should not be violated by abortion. It is self-evident.

Blessed John Paul II wrote: "From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth... modern genetic science offers clear confirmation. It has demonstrated that from the first instant there is established the program of what this living being will be" (***The Gospel of Life*** #60).

In the 1987 instruction by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, **Domun Vitae**, the first right that everybody has is "the inviolable right of every innocent being to life." The right to life is guaranteed in our Constitution; everyone has a right not to be killed. This is a moral principle held, if not always applied, through the ages and across the globe. When it is violated, there is almost always an outcry.

Abortion is a choice ... a very bad one.