

Evangelium vitae - "The Gospel of Life" John Paul II, March 25, 1995  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html)

- The Second Vatican Council, in a passage which retains all its relevance today, forcefully condemned a number of crimes and attacks against human life. Thirty years later, taking up the words of the Council and with the same forcefulness I repeat that condemnation in the name of the whole Church, certain that I am interpreting the genuine sentiment of every upright conscience: "Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator".<sup>5</sup> (Section 3)

- At the other end of life's spectrum, men and women find themselves facing the mystery of death. Today, as a result of advances in medicine and in a cultural context frequently closed to the transcendent, the experience of dying is marked by new features. When the prevailing tendency is to value life only to the extent that it brings pleasure and well-being, suffering seems like an unbearable setback, something from which one must be freed at all costs. Death is considered "senseless" if it suddenly interrupts a life still open to a future of new and interesting experiences. But it becomes a "rightful liberation" once life is held to be no longer meaningful because it is filled with pain and inexorably doomed to even greater suffering. (Section 63)

- . . . human life, as a gift of God, is sacred and inviolable. For this reason procured abortion and euthanasia are absolutely unacceptable. Not only must human life not be taken, but it must be protected with loving concern. The meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love, and in this light human sexuality and procreation reach their true and full significance. Love also gives meaning to suffering and death; despite the mystery which surrounds them, they can become saving events. Respect for life requires that science and technology should always be at the service of man and his integral development. Society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person's life. (Section 81)

- 99. In transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a "new feminism" which rejects the temptation of imitating models of "male domination", in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.

## Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics

<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/gospel.shtml>

- The nature and urgency of this threat should not be misunderstood. Respect for the dignity of the human person demands a commitment to human rights across a broad spectrum: "Both as Americans and as followers of Christ, American Catholics must be committed to the defense of life in all its stages and in every condition."<sup>4</sup> The culture of death extends beyond our shores: famine and starvation, denial of health care and development around the world, the deadly violence of armed conflict and the scandalous arms trade that spawns such conflict. Our nation is witness to domestic violence, the spread of drugs, sexual activity which poses a threat to lives, and a reckless tampering with the world's ecological balance. Respect for human life calls us to defend life from these and other threats. It calls us as well to enhance the conditions for human living by helping to provide food, shelter and meaningful employment, beginning with those who are most in need. We live the Gospel of Life when we live in solidarity with the poor of the world, standing up for their lives and dignity. Yet abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others. They are committed against those who are weakest and most defenseless, those who are genuinely "the poorest of the poor." They are endorsed increasingly without the veil of euphemism, as supporters of abortion and euthanasia freely concede these are killing even as they promote them. Sadly, they are practiced in those communities which ordinarily provide a safe haven for the weak -- the family and the healing professions. Such direct attacks on human life, once crimes, are today legitimized by governments sworn to protect the weak and marginalized.

- Pope John Paul II elaborates on this responsibility in his 1988 apostolic exhortation, *The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici)*: "The inviolability of the person, which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the inviolability of human life. Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights -- for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture -- is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition of all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination . . . The human being is entitled to such rights in every phase of development, from conception until natural death, whether healthy or sick, whole or handicapped, rich or poor . . . [Moreover, if,] indeed, everyone has the mission and responsibility of acknowledging the personal dignity of every human being and of defending the right to life, some lay faithful are given particular title to this task: such as *parents, teachers, healthworkers and the many who hold economic and political power*" (38).

## Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship U.S. Bishops, Nov. 2007

<http://www.usccb.org/bishops/FCStatement.pdf>

Our conference supports laws and policies to protect human life to the maximum degree possible, including constitutional protection for the unborn and legislative efforts to end abortion and euthanasia. We also promote a culture of life by supporting laws and programs that encourage childbirth and adoption over abortion and by addressing poverty, providing health care and offering other assistance to pregnant women, children and families.

66. The USCCB calls for greater assistance for those who are sick and dying through health care for all and effective and compassionate palliative care. We recognize that addressing this complex issue effectively will require collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors and across party lines.

Policies and decisions regarding biotechnology and human experimentation should respect the inherent dignity of human life from its very beginning, regardless of the circumstances of its origin. Respect for human life and dignity is also the foundation for essential efforts to address and overcome the hunger, disease, poverty and violence that take the lives of so many innocent people.

67. Catholics must also work to avoid war and to promote peace. Nations should protect the dignity of the human person and the right to life by finding more effective ways to prevent conflicts, to resolve them by peaceful means, and to promote reconstruction and reconciliation in the wake of conflicts. Nations have a right and obligation to defend human life and the common good against terrorism, aggression and similar threats.

This duty demands effective responses to terror, moral assessment of and restraint in the means used, respect for ethical limits on the use of force, a focus on the roots of terror and fair distribution of the burdens of responding to terror. The church has raised fundamental moral concerns about preventive use of military force.<sup>8</sup>

Our church honors the commitment and sacrifice of those who serve in our nation's armed forces and also recognizes the moral right to conscientious objection to war in general, a particular war or a military procedure.

68. Even when military force can be justified as a last resort, it should not be indiscriminate or disproportionate. Direct and intentional attacks on noncombatants in war and terrorist acts are never morally acceptable. The use of weapons of mass destruction or other means of warfare that do not distinguish between civilians and soldiers is fundamentally immoral.

The United States has a responsibility to work to reverse the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and to reduce its own reliance on weapons of mass destruction by pursuing progressive nuclear disarmament. It also must end its use of anti-personnel land mines and reduce its predominant role in the global arms trade.

The war in Iraq confronts us with urgent moral choices. We support a "responsible transition" that ends the war in a way that recognizes the continuing threat of fanatical extremism and global terror, minimizes the loss of life and addresses the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, the refugee crisis in the region and the need to protect human rights, especially religious freedom. This transition should reallocate resources from war to the urgent needs of the poor.

69. Society has a duty to defend life against violence and to reach out to victims of crime. Yet our nation's continued reliance on the death penalty cannot be justified. Because we have other ways to protect society that are more respectful of human life, the USCCB supports efforts to end the use of the death penalty and in the meantime to restrain its use through broader use of DNA evidence, access to effective counsel and efforts to address unfairness and injustice related to application of the death penalty.

**A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American-Catholic- Dialogue**  
**Gannon Lecture, Fordham University** Joseph Cardinal Bernardin  
December 6, 1983

<http://www.priestsforlife.org/magisterium/berardingannon.html>

- Asking these questions along the spectrum of life from womb to tomb creates the need for a consistent ethic of life. For the spectrum of life cuts across the issues of genetics, abortion, capital punishment, modern warfare and the care of the terminally ill. These are all distinct problems, enormously complicated, and deserving individual treatment. No single answer and no simple responses will solve them. My purpose, however, is to highlight the way in which we face new technological challenges in each one of these areas; this combination of challenges is what cries out for a consistent ethic of life.
- If one contends, as we do, that the right of every fetus to be born should be protected by civil law and supported by civil consensus, then our moral, political and economic responsibilities do not stop at the moment of birth. Those who defend the right to life of the weakest among us must be equally visible in support of the quality of life of the powerless among us: the old and the young, the hungry and the homeless, the undocumented immigrant and the unemployed worker. Such a quality of life posture translates into specific political and economic positions on tax policy, employment generation, welfare policy, nutrition and feeding programs, and health care. Consistency means we cannot have it both ways. We cannot urge a compassionate society and vigorous public policy to protect the rights of the unborn and then argue that compassion and significant public programs on behalf of the needy undermine the moral fiber of the society or are beyond the proper scope of governmental responsibility.