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Declaration on Procured Abortion

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

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DECLARATION
ON PROCURED ABORTION

I

INTRODUCTION

1. The problem of procured abortion and of its possible legal liberalization has become more or less everywhere the subject of impassioned discussions. These debates would be less grave were it not a question of human life, a primordial value, which must be protected and promoted. Everyone understands this, although many look for reasons, even against all evidence, to promote the use of abortion. One cannot but be astonished to see a simultaneous increase of unqualified protests against the death penalty and every form of war and the vindication of the liberalization of abortion, either in its entirety or in ever broader indications. The Church is fully conscious of the fact that it belongs to her vocation to defend man against everything that could disintegrate or lessen his dignity to remain silent on such a topic. Because the Son of God became man, there is no man who is not his brother in humanity and who is not called to become a Christian in order to receive salvation from him.

2. In many countries the public authorities which resist the liberalization of abortion laws are the object of powerful pressures aimed at leading them to this goal. This, it is said, would violate no one's conscience, for each individual would be left free to follow his own opinion, while nobody would be allowed to impose his own on others. Ethical pluralism is claimed to be a natural consequence of ideological pluralism. There is, however, a great difference between the one and the

other, for action effects the interests of others more quickly than does mere opinion. Moreover, one can never claim freedom of opinion as a pretext for attacking the rights of others, most especially the right to life.

3. Numerous Christian lay people, especially doctors, but also parents' associations, statesmen, or leading figures in posts of responsibility have vigorously reacted against this propaganda campaign. Above all, many episcopal conferences and many bishops acting in their own name have judged it opportune to remind the faithful without ambiguity of the traditional doctrine of the Church¹. With a striking convergence these documents admirably emphasize an attitude of respect for life which is at the same time human and Christian. Nevertheless it has happened that several of these documents here or there have encountered reservation or even opposition.

4. Charged with the promotion and the defence of faith and morals in the universal Church², the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith proposes to recall this teaching in its essential aspects to all the faithful. Thus, in showing the unity of the Church, it will confirm by the authority proper to the Holy See what the bishops have opportunely undertaken. It hopes that all the faithful, including those who might have been unsettled by the controversies and new opinions, will understand that it is not a question of opposing one opinion to another, but of transmitting to the faithful a constant teaching of the supreme Magisterium, which teaches moral norms in the light of faith³. It is therefore clear that this Declaration necessarily entails a grave obligation for the consciences of the faithful⁴. May God deign to enlighten also all men who strive with their whole heart to "act in truth" (Jn 3:21).

¹ A certain number of bishops' documents are to be found in G. Caprile, *Non Uccidere. Il Magistero della Chiesa sull'aborto*, Part II, pp. 47-300, Rome 1973.

² *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, III 1, 29. Cf. *ibid.*, 31 (AAS 59 [1967], p. 897). "On the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith depend all the questions which are related to faith and morals or which are bound up with the faith".

³ *Lumen Gentium*, 12 (AAS 57 [1965], pp. 16-17). The present Declaration does not envisage all the questions which can arise in connection with abortion: it is for theologians to examine and discuss them. Only certain basic principles are here recalled which must be for the theologians themselves a guide and a rule, and a confirmation of fundamental certainties of Catholic doctrine for all Christians.

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 25 (AAS 57 [1965], pp. 29-31).

5. "Death was not God's doing, he takes no pleasure in the extinction of the living" (Wis 1:13). Certainly God has created beings who have only one lifetime and physical death cannot be absent from the world of those with a bodily existence. But what is above all willed is life; everything in the visible universe has been made for man, who is the image of God and the world's crowning glory (cf. Gen 1:26-28). On the human level, "it was the devil's envy that brought death into the world" (Wis 2:24). Introduced by sin, death remains bound up with it: death is the sign and fruit of sin. But there is no triumph for death. Confirming the truth of the Resurrection, the Lord proclaims in the Gospel: "God is God, not of the dead, but of the living" (Mt 22:32). And death like sin will be definitively defeated by resurrection in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:20-27). Thus we understand that human life, even on this earth, is precious. Infused by the Creator⁵, life is again taken back by him (cf. Gen 2:7; Wis 15:11). It remains under his protection: man's blood cries out to him (cf. Gen 4:10) and he will demand an account of it, "for in the image of God man was made" (Gen 9:5-6). The commandment of God is formal: "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13). Life is at the same time a gift and a responsibility. It is received as a "talent" (cf. Mt 25:14-30); it must be put to proper use. In order that life may bring forth fruit, many tasks are offered to man in this world and he must not shirk them. More important still, the Christian knows that eternal life depends on what, with the grace of God, he has done during his life on earth.

6. The tradition of the Church has always held that human life must be protected and favoured from the beginning, just as at the

⁵ The authors of Scripture do not make any philosophical observations on when life begins but they speak of the period of life which precedes birth as being the object of God's attention: he creates and forms the human being, as it were moulding him with his hand. It would seem that this theme finds expression for the first time in Jr 1:5. It appears in many other texts. Cf. Is 49:13; 46:3; Jb 10:8-12; Ps 22:10, 71:6, 139:13. In the Gospel we read in Luke 1:44: "For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy".

various stages of its development. Opposing the morals of the Greco-Roman world, the Church of the first centuries insisted on the difference that exists on this point between those morals and Christian morals. In the *Didaché* it is clearly said: "You shall not kill by abortion the fruit of the womb and you shall not murder the infant already born"⁶. Athenagoras emphasizes that Christians consider as murderers those women who take medicines to procure an abortion; he condemns the killers of children, including those still living in their mother's womb, where they are considered to be already "the object of God's care"⁷. Tertullian does not always perhaps write consistently on this matter; he nevertheless clearly affirms this essential principle: "To prevent birth is anticipated murder; it makes little difference whether one destroys a life already born or does away with it in its nascent stage. The one who will be a man is already one"⁸.

7. In the course of history, the Fathers of the Church, her Pastors and her Doctors have taught the same doctrine—the various opinions on the infusion of the spiritual soul did not introduce any doubt about the illicitness of abortion. It is true that in the Middle Ages, when the opinion was generally held that the spiritual soul was not present until after the first few weeks, a distinction was made in the evaluation of the sin and the gravity of penal sanctions. Excellent authors allowed for this first period more lenient case solutions, which however they rejected for the following periods of pregnancy. But it was never denied at that time that procured abortion, even during the first days, was objectively a grave fault. This condemnation was in fact unanimous. Among the many documents it is sufficient to recall certain ones. The first Council of Mainz in 847 reconsiders the penalties against abortion which had been established by preceding Councils. It decided that the most rigorous penance would be imposed on women who "kill their offspring or who procure the elimination from the womb of the fruit

⁶ *Didachè Apostolorum*, V, 2: ed. Funk, *Patres Apostolici*, I, 17; *The Epistle of Barnabas*, XIX, 5 uses the same expressions (cf. Funk, *o. c.*, I, 91-93).

⁷ Athenagoras, *A Plea on behalf of Christians*, 35 (PG 6, 970: *S. C.* 3, pp. 166-167). One may also consult the *Epistle to Diognetus*, V, 6 (Funk, *o. c.*, I, 399: *S. C.* 33, 63), where it says of Christians: "They procreate children, but they do not reject the foetus".

⁸ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, IX, 8 (PL I, 371-372: *Corp. Christ.* I, p. 103, l. 31-36).

conceived"⁹. The Decree of Gratian reports the following words of Pope Stephen V: "That person is a murderer who causes to perish by abortion what has been conceived"¹⁰. Saint Thomas, the Common Doctor of the Church, teaches that abortion is a grave sin against the natural law¹¹. At the time of the Renaissance Pope Sixtus V condemned abortion with the greatest severity¹². A century later Innocent XI rejected the propositions of certain lax canonists who sought to excuse an abortion procured before the moment accepted by some as the moment of the spiritual animation of the new being¹³. In our days the recent Roman Pontiffs have proclaimed the same doctrine with the greatest clarity. Pius XI explicitly answered the most serious objections¹⁴. Pius XII clearly excluded all direct abortion, that is, abortion which is either an end or a means¹⁵. John XXIII recalled the teaching of the Fathers on the sacred character of life "which from its beginning demands the action of God the Creator"¹⁶. Most recently, the Second Vatican Council, presided over by Paul VI, has most severely condemned abortion: "Life must be safeguarded

⁹ Canon 21 (Mansi, 14, p. 909). Cf. Council of Elvira, canon 63 (Mansi, 2, p. 16) and the Council of Ancyra, canon 21 (*ibid.*, 519). See also the decree of Gregory III regarding the penance to be imposed upon those who are culpable of this crime (Mansi, 12, 292, c. 17).

¹⁰ Gratian, *Concordantia Discordantium Canonum*, C. 2, q. 5, c. 20. During the Middle Ages appeal was often made to the authority of Saint Augustine who wrote as follows in regards to this matter in *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentiis*, c. 15: "Sometimes this sexually indulgent cruelty or this cruel sexual indulgence goes so far as to procure potions which produce sterility. If the desired result is not achieved, the mother terminates the life and expels the foetus which was in her womb in such a way that the child dies before having lived or, if the baby was living already in its mother's womb, it is killed before being born" (PL 44, 423-424; CSEL 42, 230. Cf. the *Decree of Gratian*, C. 32, q. 2, c. 7).

¹¹ In *IV Sententiarum*, dist. 31, exposition of the text.

¹² Constitution *Effraenatam* of 1588 (*Bullarium Romanum*, V, 1, pp. 25-27; *Fontes Iuris Canonici*, I, no. 165, pp. 308-311).

¹³ Dz.-Sch. 2134 (1184). Cf. also the Constitution *Apostolicae Sedis* of Pius IX (*Acta Pii IX*, V, 55-72; ASS 5 [1869], pp. 287-312; *Fontes Iuris Canonici*, II, n. 552, pp. 24-31).

¹⁴ Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, AAS 22 (1930), pp. 562-565; Dz.-Sch. 3719-21 (2242-2244).

¹⁵ The statements of Pius XII are explicit, precise and numerous; they would require a whole study on their own. We quote only this one from the Discourse to the Saint Luke Union of Italian Doctors of 12 November 1944: "As long as a man is not guilty, his life is untouchable, and therefore any act directly tending to destroy it is illicit, whether such destruction is intended as an end in itself or only as a means to an end, whether it is a question of life in the embryonic stage or in a stage of full development or already in its final stages" (Discourses and Radiomessages, VI, p. 191).

¹⁶ Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, AAS 53 (1961), p. 447.

with extreme care from conception; abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes”¹⁷. The same Paul VI, speaking on this subject on many occasions, has not hesitated to declare that this teaching of the Church “has not changed and is unchangeable”¹⁸.

III

IN THE ADDITIONAL LIGHT OF REASON

8. Respect for human life is not just a Christian obligation. Human reason is sufficient to impose it on the basis of the analysis of what a human person is and should be. Constituted by a rational nature, man is a personal subject, capable of reflecting on himself and of determining his acts and hence his own destiny: he is free. He is consequently master of himself, or rather, because this takes place in the course of time, he has the means of becoming so: this is his task. Created immediately by God, man’s soul is spiritual and therefore immortal. Hence man is open to God; he finds his fulfilment only in him. But man lives in the community of his equals; he is nourished by interpersonal communication with men in the indispensable social setting. In the fact of society and other men, each human person possesses himself, he possesses life and different goods; he has these as a right. It is this that strict justice demands from all in his regard.

9. Nevertheless, temporal life lived in this world is not identified with the person. The person possesses as his own a level of life that is more profound and that cannot end. Bodily life is a fundamental good; here below it is the condition for all other goods. But there are higher values for which it could be legitimate or even necessary to be willing to expose oneself to the risk of losing bodily life. In a

¹⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 51. Cf. 27 (AAS 58 [1966], p. 1072; cf. 1047).

¹⁸ Address *Salutiamo con paterna effusione*, 9 December 1972, AAS 64 (1972), p. 777. Among the witnesses of this unchangeable doctrine one will recall the declaration of the Holy Office, condemning direct abortion (ASS 17 [1884], pp. 555-556; 22 [1888-1890], 748; Dz.-Sch. 3258 [1890]).

society of persons the common good is for each individual an end which he must serve and to which he must subordinate his particular interest. But it is not his last end and, from this point of view, it is society which is at the service of the person, because the person will not fulfil his destiny except in God. The person can be definitively subordinated only to God. Therefore man can never be treated simply as a means to be disposed of in order to obtain a higher end.

10. In regard to the mutual rights and duties of the person and of society, it belongs to moral teaching to enlighten consciences, it belongs to the law to specify and organize external behaviour. There is precisely a certain number of rights which society is not in a position to grant since these rights precede society; but society has the function to preserve and to enforce them. These are the greater part of those which are today called "human rights" and which our age boasts of having formulated.

11. The first right of the human person is his life. He has other goods and some are more precious, but this one is fundamental—the condition of all the others. Hence it must be protected above all others. It does not belong to society, nor does it belong to public authority in any form to recognize this right for some and not for others: all discrimination is evil, whether it be founded on race, sex, colour or religion. It is not recognition by another that constitutes this right. This right is antecedent to its recognition; it demands recognition and it is strictly unjust to refuse it.

12. Any discrimination based on the various stages of life is no more justified than any other discrimination. The right to life remains complete in an old person, even one greatly weakened, it is not lost by one who is incurably sick. The right to life is no less to be respected in the small infant just born than in the mature person. In reality, respect for human life is called for from the time that the process of generation begins. From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor of the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. He will never become human if he were not human already.

13. To this constant evidence—perfectly independent of the discussions on the moment of animation¹⁹—modern genetic science brings valuable confirmation. It has demonstrated that, from the first instant there is established the programme of what this living being will be: a man, this individual man with his characteristic aspects already well determined. Right from fertilization is begun the adventure of a human life, and each of its capacities requires time—a rather lengthy time—to find its place and to be in a position to act. The least that can be said is that present science, in its most evolved state, does not give any substantial support to those who defend abortion. Moreover, it is not up to biological sciences to make a definitive judgment on questions which are properly philosophical and moral, such as the moment when a human person is constituted or the legitimacy of abortion. From a moral point of view this is certain: even if a doubt existed concerning whether the fruit of conception is already a human person, it is objectively a grave sin to dare to risk murder. “He too is a man who will be a man”²⁰.

IV

REPLY TO SOME OBJECTIONS

14. Divine law and natural reason, therefore, exclude all right to the direct killing of an innocent man. However, if the reasons given to justify an abortion were always manifestly evil and valueless the problem would not be so dramatic. The gravity of the problem comes from the fact that in certain cases, perhaps in quite a considerable number of cases, by denying abortion one endangers important values to which it is normal to attach great value, and which may sometimes

¹⁹ This declaration expressly leaves aside the question of the moment when the spiritual soul is infused. There is not a unanimous tradition on this point and authors are as yet in disagreement. For some it dates from the first instant, for others it could not at least precede implantation. It is not within the competence of science to decide between these views, because the existence of an immortal soul is not a question in its fields. It is a philosophical problem from which our moral affirmation remains independent for two reasons: 1) supposing a belated animation, there already exists in the foetus an incipient *human* life, biologically detectable, preparing for and calling for a soul in which the nature received from the parents is completed; 2) it suffices that this presence of the soul be *probable* (and one can never prove the contrary) in order that the taking of life mean putting oneself in danger of killing a man, not only waiting for, but already in possession of his soul.

²⁰ Tertullian, cf. footnote 8.

even seem to have priority. We do not deny these very great difficulties. It may be a serious question of health, sometimes of life or death, for the mother; it may be the burden represented by an additional child, especially if there are good reasons to fear that the child will be abnormal or retarded; it may be the importance attributed in different classes of society to considerations of honour or dishonour, of loss of social standing, and so forth. But it must be clearly stated that none of these reasons can ever objectively confer the right to dispose of another's life, even when that life is only beginning. With regard to the future unhappiness of the child, no one, not even the father or mother, can act as its substitute, even if it is still in the embryonic stage, to choose in the child's name death instead of life. The child itself, when grown up, will never have the right to choose suicide; no more may its parents choose death for the child while it is not of an age to decide for itself. For life is too fundamental a value to be weighed against even very serious disadvantages.²¹

15. The movement for the emancipation of women, in so far as it seeks essentially to free them from all unjust discrimination, is on perfectly sound ground²². In the different forms of cultural background there is a great deal to be done in this regard. But one cannot change nature. Nor can one exempt women, any more than men, from what nature demands of them. Furthermore, all publicly recognized freedom is always limited by the certain rights of others.

16. The same must be said of the claim to sexual freedom. If by this expression one is to understand the mastery progressively acquired by reason and by authentic love over instinctive impulse, without diminishing pleasure but keeping it in its proper place—and in this sphere this mastery is the only authentic freedom—then there is nothing to object to. But this kind of freedom will always be careful not to violate justice. If, on the contrary, one is to understand that men and women are “free” to seek sexual pleasure to the point of satiety, without taking into account any law or the essential orientation of

²¹ Cardinal Villot, Secretary of State, wrote on 10 October 1973 to Cardinal Döpfner, regarding the protection of human life: “(Die Kirche) kann jedoch zur Behebung solcher Notsituationen weder empfängnisverhütende Mittel noch erst recht nicht die Abtreibung als sittlich erlaubt erkennen” (*L'Osservatore Romano*, German edition, 26 October 1973, p. 3).

²² Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, AAS 55 (1963), n. 267 f.; Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 29; Address of Paul VI, *Salutiamo*, AAS 64 (1972), p. 779.

sexual life to its fruits of fertility²³, then this idea has nothing Christian in it. It is even unworthy of man. In any case it does not confer any right to dispose of human life—even if embryonic—or to suppress it on the pretext that it is burdensome.

17. Scientific progress is opening to technology—and will still more open—the possibility of delicate interventions, the consequences of which can be very serious, for good as well as for evil. These are achievements of the human spirit which in themselves are admirable. But technology can never be independent of the criterion of morality, since technology exists for man and must respect his finality. Just as no one has the right to use nuclear power indiscriminately for every possible purpose, so no one can legitimately manipulate human life in every possible direction; all use of technology must be at the service of man, so as better to ensure the functioning of his normal abilities, to prevent or to cure his illnesses, to contribute to his full human advancement. It is true that the evolution of technology makes early abortion more and more easy, but the moral evaluation is in no way modified because of this.

18. We know what seriousness the problem of the regulation of births can assume for some families and for some countries. That is why the last Council and subsequently the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of 25 July 1968 spoke of “responsible parenthood”²⁴. What must be said again with emphasis, as was pointed out in the conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* and in other papal documents, is that never, under any pretext, may abortion be resorted to, either by a family or by the political authority, as a legitimate means of regulating births²⁵. The damage to moral values is always a greater evil for the common good than any disadvantage in the economic or demographic order.

²³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 48: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1048-49: “Indole autem sua naturali, ipsum institutum matrimonii amorque coniugalis ad procreationem et educationem prolis ordinantur, iisque veluti suo fastigio coronantur”. Also paragraph 50: *l. c.*, p. 1070: “Matrimonium et amor coniugalis indole sua ad prolem procreandam et educandam ordinantur”.

²⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 50-51, AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1070-73; Paul VI, Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, 10 (AAS 60 [1968], p. 487). Responsible parenthood supposes the use of only morally licit methods of birth regulation. Cf. *Humanae Vitae*, 14 (*ibid.*, p. 490).

²⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* 87, AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1010-11; Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 37: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 275-6; Address to the United Nation, AAS 57 (1965), p. 883. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, AAS 53 (1961), pp. 445-448.

19. The moral discussion is being accompanied more or less everywhere by serious juridical debates. There is no country where legislation does not forbid and punish murder. Furthermore, many countries had specifically applied this condemnation and these penalties to the particular case of procured abortion. In these days a vast body of opinion petitions the liberalization of this latter prohibition. There already exists a fairly general tendency which seeks to limit as far as possible all restrictive legislation, especially when it seems to touch upon private life. The argument of pluralism is also used. Although many citizens, in particular the Catholic faithful, condemn abortion, many others hold that it is licit, at least as a lesser evil. Why must the latter be forced to follow an opinion which they do not accept, especially in a country where they are in the majority? In addition it is apparent that, where they still exist, the laws condemning abortion appear difficult to apply. The crime has become too common for it to be punished every time, and the public authorities often find that it is wiser to close their eyes to it. But the preservation of a law which is not applied is always to the detriment of authority and of all the other laws. It must be added that clandestine abortion puts women who have recourse to it in the most serious dangers for their future fertility and also often for their very lives. Even if the legislator continues to regard abortion as an evil, may he not propose to restrict its damage?

20. These arguments and others in addition that are adduced from varying quarters are not valid for the legalization of abortion. It is true that civil law cannot cover the whole field of morality or punish all evils. No one expects it to do so. It must often tolerate what is in fact a lesser evil, in order to avoid a greater one. One must, however, be attentive to what a change in legislation can represent. Many will take as authorization what is perhaps only the abstention from punishment. And, in the present case, this very renunciation seems at the very least to admit that the legislator no longer considers abortion a crime against human life, since murder is still always severely punished. It is true that it is not the task of the law to choose between points

of view or to impose one rather than another. But the life of the child takes precedence over all opinions. One cannot invoke freedom of thought to take life away from the child.

21. The role of law is not to record what is done, but to help in promoting improvement. It is at all times the task of the State to preserve each person's rights and to protect the weakest. In order to do so the State will have to right many wrongs. The law is not obliged to punish everything, but it cannot act contrary to a law which is deeper and more majestic than any human law: the natural law engraved in men's hearts by the Creator as a norm which reason clarifies and strives to formulate properly, and which one must always struggle to understand better, but which it is always wrong to contradict. Human law can abstain from punishment, but it cannot make right what would be opposed to the natural law, for this opposition suffices to give the assurance that a law is no longer a law.

22. It must in any case be clearly understood that whatever may be laid down by civil law in this matter, man can never obey a law which is in itself immoral, and such is the case of a law which would admit in principle the liceity of abortion. Nor can he take part in a propaganda campaign in favour of such a law, or vote for it. Moreover, he may not collaborate in its application. It is, for instance, inadmissible that doctors or nurses should find themselves obliged to cooperate closely in abortions and have to choose between the law of God and their professional situation.

23. On the contrary it is the task of law to pursue a reform of society and of conditions of life in all milieux, starting with the most deprived, so that always and everywhere it may be possible to give every child coming into this world a welcome worthy of a person. Subsidies for families and for unmarried mothers, grants for children, a statute for illegitimate children and reasonable arrangements for adoption—a whole positive policy must be put into force so that there will always be a concrete honourable and possible alternative to abortion.

CONCLUSION

24. Following one's conscience in obedience to the law of God is not always the easy way. One must not fail to recognize the weight of the sacrifices and the burdens which it can impose. Heroism is sometimes called for in order to remain faithful to the requirements of the divine law. Nevertheless, it must be clearly stated that the path of true progress of the human person passes through this constant fidelity to a conscience maintained in uprightness and truth; it is likewise necessary to exhort all those who are able to do so to lighten the burdens still crushing so many men and women, families and children, living in very difficult and almost desperate conditions.

25. A Christian's outlook cannot be limited to the horizon of life in this world. He knows that during the present life another one is being prepared, one of such importance that it is in its light that judgments must be made²⁶. From this viewpoint there is no absolute misfortune here below, not even the terrible sorrow of bringing up a handicapped child. This is the contradiction proclaimed by the Lord: "Happy those who mourn: they shall be comforted" (Mt 5:5). To measure happiness by the absence of sorrow and misery in this world is to turn one's back on the Gospel.

26. But this does not mean that one can remain indifferent to these sorrows and miseries. Every man and woman with feeling, and certainly every Christian, must be ready to do what he can to remedy them. This is the law of charity, of which the first preoccupation must always be the establishment of justice. One can never approve of abortion; but it is above all necessary to combat its causes. This includes political

²⁶ Cardinal Villot, Secretary of State, wrote to the World Congress of Catholic Doctors held in Barcelona, 26 May 1974: "Por lo que a la vida humana se refiere, esta non es ciertamente unívoca; más bien se podría decir que es un haz de vidas. No se puede reducir, sin mutilarlas gravemente, las zonas de su ser, que, en su estrecha dependencia e interacción están ordenadas las unas a las otras: zona corporal, zona afectiva, zona mental, y ese transfondo del alma donde la vida divina, recibida por la gracia, puede desplegarse mediante los dones del Espíritu Santo" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 May 1974).

action, which will be in particular the task of the law. But it is necessary at the same time to influence morality and to do everything possible to help families, mothers and children. Considerable progress in the service of life has been accomplished by medical science. One can hope that even greater progress will be made, in accordance with the vocation of doctors, which is not to suppress life but to care for it and favour it as much as possible. It is equally desirable that, in suitable institutions, or, in their absence, in the outpouring of Christian generosity and charity every form of assistance should be developed.

27. There will be no effective action on the level of morality unless at the same time an effort is made on the level of ideas. The way of thinking or, still more, the attitude of mind which considers fertility as an evil cannot be allowed to spread without contradiction. It is true that not all forms of culture are equally in favour of large families. Such families come up against much greater difficulties in an industrial and urban civilization. Thus the Church has in recent times insisted on the idea of responsible parenthood, the exercise of true human and Christian prudence. Such prudence would not be authentic if its did not include generosity. It must preserve awareness of the grandeur of the task of cooperating with the Creator in the transmission of life, which gives new members to society and new children to the Church. Christ's Church has the fundamental solicitude of protecting and favouring life. She certainly thinks before all else of the life which Christ came to bring: "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). But life at all its levels comes from God, and bodily life is for man the indispensable beginning. In this life on earth sin has introduced, multiplied and made harder to bear suffering and death. But in taking their burden upon himself Jesus Christ has transformed them: for whoever believes in him, suffering and death itself become instruments of resurrection. Hence Saint Paul can say: "I think that what we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory, as yet unrevealed, which is waiting for us" (Rom 8:18). And, if one wishes to make this comparison, one may add with him: "Yes, the troubles which are soon over, though they weigh little, train us for the carrying of a weight of eternal glory which is out of all proportion to them" (2 Cor 4:17).

The Supreme Pontiff Pope Paul VI, in an Audience granted to the undersigned Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 28 June 1974 has ratified this Declaration on Procured Abortion and has confirmed it and ordered it to be promulgated.

Given in Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 18 November, the Commemoration of the Dedication of the Basilicas of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, in the year 1974.

FRANJO Card. ŠEPER

Prefect

Jérôme Hamer

Titular Archbishop of Lorium
Secretary