

Excerpts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church on Life, Abortion, and Euthanasia (#2258-2262; 2268- 2279)

Article 5

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

CONTENTS

Fifth Commandment

Respect for Human Life
The Witness of Sacred History
Intentional Homicide
Abortion
Euthanasia
Notes

You shall not kill. (54)

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill: and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement. (55)

2258 *'Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever 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 himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.' (56)

1. Respect for Human Life

The witness of sacred history

2259 In the account of Abel's murder by his brother Cain, (57) Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from the beginning of human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man. God declares the wickedness of this fratricide: 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.' (58)

2260 The covenant between God and mankind is interwoven with reminders of God's gift of human life and man's murderous violence:

For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning... Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. (59)

The Old Testament always considered blood a sacred sign of life. (60) This teaching remains necessary for all time.

2261 Scripture specifies the prohibition contained in the fifth commandment: 'Do not slay the innocent and the righteous.' (61) The deliberate murder of an innocent person is gravely contrary to the dignity of the human being, to the golden rule and to the holiness of the Creator. The law forbidding it is universally valid: it obliges each and everyone, always and everywhere.

2262 In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord recalls the commandment, 'You shall not kill' (62) and adds to it the proscription of anger, hatred and vengeance. Going further, Christ asks his disciples to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies. (63) He did not defend himself and told Peter to leave his sword in its sheath.(64)

Intentional homicide

2268 The fifth commandment forbids direct and intentional killing as gravely sinful. The murderer and those who co-operate voluntarily in murder commit a sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance. (68)

Infanticide, (69) fratricide, parricide and the murder of a spouse are especially grave crimes by reason of the natural bonds which they break. Concern for eugenics or public health cannot justify any murder, even if commanded by public authority.

2269 The fifth commandment forbids doing anything with the intention of indirectly bringing about a person's death. The moral law prohibits exposing someone to mortal danger without grave reason, as well as refusing assistance to a person in danger.

The acceptance by human society of murderous famines, without efforts to remedy them, is a scandalous injustice and a grave offence. Those whose usurious and avaricious dealings lead to the hunger and death of their brethren in the human family indirectly commit homicide, which is imputable to them .(70)

Unintentional killing is not morally imputable. But one is not exonerated from grave offence if, without proportionate reasons, one has acted in a way that brings about someone's death, even without the intention to do so.

Abortion

2270 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 recognized as having the rights of a person -- among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.(71)

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you. (72)

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth .(73)

2271 Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law:

You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish .(74)

God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.(75)

2272 Formal co-operation in an abortion constitutes a grave offence. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life. 'A person who procures a completed abortion incurs excommunication *latae sententiae*' (76) 'by the very commission of the offence', (77) and subject to the conditions provided by Canon Law. (78) The Church does not thereby intend to restrict the scope of mercy. Rather, she makes clear the gravity of the crime committed, the irreparable harm done to the innocent who is put to death, as well as to the parents and the whole of society.

2273 The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation:

'The inalienable rights of the person must be recognized and respected by civil society and the political authority. These human rights depend neither on single individuals nor on parents; nor do they represent a concession made by society and the state; they belong to human nature and are inherent in the person by virtue of the creative act from which the person took his origin. Among such fundamental rights one should mention in this regard every human being's right to life and physical integrity from the moment of conception until death.'(79)

'The moment a positive law deprives a category of human beings of the protection which civil legislation ought to accord them, the state is denying the equality of all before the law. When the state does not place its power at the service of the

rights of each citizen, and in particular of the more vulnerable, the very foundations of a state based on law are undermined. . . As a consequence of the respect and protection which must be ensured for the unborn child from the moment of conception, the law must provide appropriate penal sanctions for every deliberate violation of the child's rights.' (80)

2274 Since it must be treated from conception as a person, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed, as far as possible, like any other human being.

Prenatal diagnosis is morally licit, 'if it respects the life and integrity of the embryo and the human foetus and is directed toward its safeguarding or healing as an individual... It is gravely opposed to the moral law when this is done with the thought of possibly inducing an abortion, depending upon the results: a diagnosis must not be the equivalent of a death sentence.' (81)

2275 'One must hold as licit procedures carried out on the human embryo which respect the life and integrity of the embryo and do not involve disproportionate risks for it, but are directed toward its healing, the improvement of its condition of health, or its individual survival.' (82)

'It is immoral to produce human embryos intended for exploitation as disposable biological material.' (83)

'Certain attempts to *influence chromosomal or genetic inheritance* are not therapeutic but are aimed at producing human beings selected according to sex or other predetermined qualities. Such manipulations are contrary to the personal dignity of the human being and his integrity and identity' (84) which are unique and unrepeatable.

Euthanasia

2276 Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible.

2277 Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable.

Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded.

2278 Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of 'over-zealous' treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those

legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected.

2279 Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable. Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.

NOTES

54. Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17.

55. Mt 5:21-22.

56. CDF, Instruction Donum vitae, intro. 5.

57. Cf. Gen 4:8-12.

58. Gen 4:10-11.

59. Gen 9:5-6.

60. Cf. Lev 17:14.

61. Ex.23:7.

62. Mt 5:21.

63. Cf Mt 5:22-39, 44.

64. Cf. Mt 26:52

68. Cf Gen 4:10.

69. Cf. GS 51 § 3.

70. Cf. Am 8:4-10.

71. Cf CDF, Donum vitae I,1.

72. Jer 1:5; cf Job 10:8-12; Ps 22:10-1 1.

73. Ps. 139:15.

74. Didache 2, 2: SCh 248, 148; cf Ep.Barnabae 19, 5: PG 2, 777; Ad Diognetum 5, 6: PG 2, 1173; Tertullian, Apol. 9: PL 1,371.

75. GS 51 § 3.

76. CIC, can. 1398.

77. CIC, can. 1314.

78. Cf. CIC, cann. 1323-1324.

79. CDF, Donum vitae III.

80. CDF, Donum vitae III.

81. CDF, Donum vitae I,2.

82. CDF, Donum vitae I,3.

83. CDF, Donum vitae I,5.

84. CDF, Donum vitae I,6.