

Anti-Life, Anti-Catholic

By K. D. Whitehead

If there are still any Catholics around today who imagine that their faith and their Church are going to be the beneficiaries of tolerance and respect, these Catholics have evidently not been paying very close attention to the kind of world it is that has been emerging out there in recent years. The kind of world that has been emerging is a world that is willing, and believes itself able, to go it alone, without God. God is not supposed to count any longer-or even necessarily to be mentioned-in the brave new world of today.

“Religion,” especially Christianity (and Judaism too), are objected to today, and officially placed outside what is permissible in public discourse, because they claim to be able to pronounce moral standards for the regulation of people’s moral conduct, i.e., the Ten Commandments; that is, they claim to expound God’s standards for human moral conduct.

But today such standards can no longer be admitted, and precisely because they are religious. Certainly they can in no way be “imposed” on anybody. The law itself no longer presumes to say that people must keep their marriage vows, for example-thus making marriage the one “contract” that is no longer legally enforceable in our country!

In many instances, the law no longer attempts to require people to exercise any control over their sexual impulses; certainly, educators who have brought such things as today’s brand of sex education to our schools no longer believe that anybody can exercise any control over sexual impulses; and “society” has today more or less ratified that viewpoint for the moment.

Meanwhile, of course, both society and the law can and do continue to come down hard on those who violate certain purely

human and secular contemporary standards, such as smoking in specified public situations, for example, or violating certain environmental laws and regulations. Neither society nor the law hesitates to “legislate” or “impose” morality in these cases. The principal rules that have been thrown out are the religious and moral rules, particularly those related to sexuality.

In this sort of new moral and legal climate, an institution as visible as the Catholic Church, with views as definite as the Church’s on what is right and wrong, is virtually bound to run into trouble. The Church cannot escape being resented today, precisely because she continues to insist that there is a God, and that He has issued a law which is actually supposed to be followed.

From the modern point of view, the Church also has another annoying habit of descending into considerable detail in specifying certain things as right and wrong; and thus today, the Church is often found declaring to be wrong the very things that society has decided are good or, at least, optional.

Those who like and accept the way things are going in America today cannot but see Catholics and the Church as the “enemy.” To be anti-life- as our world definitely is anti-life today-is necessarily and inevitably to be anti-Catholic as well. It has now become clear that this is an unmistakable and unavoidable fact.

And, in fact, the world that we see out there today is anti-Catholic. We need to recognize this, even if we do not necessarily have to like it; we need to recognize it, if only in order to understand that we cannot avoid having to deal with it, indeed combat it.

Given what our world has unfortunately now become, though-Pope John Paul II’s “culture of death”-we Catholics should

also be proud, we should also be glad, to be on the receiving end of what this world, of all worlds, has to dish out; what we have to deal with out there today is surely an authentic case of what Our Lord, Jesus Christ, Himself described when He said: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely, on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5:11).

Yes: in the anti-life world of today, we Catholics are called to be "prophets" by virtue of the truth that has been given to us.

An example of how today's prevailing anti-life mentality quickly becomes transformed into sharp anti-Catholic bias is provided by the issuance of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, "The Gospel of Life," itself.

This encyclical has already been the subject of considerable public attention, and we need not summarize its contents at any length. While not neglecting to condemn in fairly strong terms the deadly effects of war, the arms race, economic injustice, pollution of the environment, and capital punishment, the Pope's emphasis in the document is clearly on abortion and euthanasia (or assisted suicide): that is, the emphasis is on intentional, legalized killing at the beginning and at the end of the human life cycle.

The Pope also focuses strongly on some other evils he sees as inseparably related to legalized abortion and euthanasia, namely, contraception, artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, and experimentation on human embryos and fetuses. All these things are gravely wrong, inadmissible, according to the Holy Father.

An unusual feature of this encyclical is that the Pope explicitly invokes his full authority as the successor of

Peter and Vicar of Christ in condemning abortion and euthanasia, and, indeed, the killing of the innocent generally. These teachings are not new, of course; the Church has never ceased to condemn them; but in this document the Pope has reiterated this condemnation in a solemn way calculated to attract maximum attention.

Not surprisingly, the encyclical immediately did attract maximum attention. And although a relatively new note of perhaps grudging respect for the Pope, and for what he represents, was discernible in some of the media coverage-as in a *Newsweek* cover story on the encyclical and in a *Chicago Tribune* editorial which admitted that "it is hard to brush off the Pope's assertion that there is a growing 'culture of death' in the world"-the fact remains that plenty of the other coverage of the appearance of this major papal document was as sneering and patronizing as we have unfortunately long since come to expect as the typical public reception given to papal pronouncements.

References to the "aging" Pope at the head of his "outdated" Church were definitely not lacking in the reception accorded the encyclical, while references to how little the Pope is actually believed and heeded today, even by many Catholics, were practically universal features of the coverage about the encyclical.

The encyclical is "a political and social document that is out of step with the developed world," declared Pamela J. Maraldo, President of Planned Parenthood. This is the same "developed world," of course, which the Pope characterizes in his encyclical as determined upon perpetuating what he calls "a state of barbarism which one had hoped had been left behind forever." Pamela Maraldo, however-who, incredibly, claims to be a Catholic herself-sheds crocodile tears because, in her words, "the only source of hope" for sufferers from Parkinson's disease, "fetal tissue research...(is) condemned." But the Pope merely points out that we cannot morally use one

class of human beings, the unborn, as objects, even for the laudable goal of helping others (if it does help them).

"In the face of the AIDS epidemic," Ms. Maraldo goes on, "the encyclical bans condoms." But condoms prevent the transmission of the AIDS virus little more than fifty per cent of the time. Who would ever take an airplane, if the chances of crashing were even remotely close to that percentage?

A *Washington Post* columnist, Colman McCarthy, scored off what he called "the Vatican keepers of the truth against the ungovernable committing the unspeakable." Mr. McCarthy did not blush to ask: "Is the Pope a scold or a teacher?" His own answer was, unhappily, predictable: according to him, the Pope "scoldingly lashes out at those with whom he disagrees." Since when, it is necessary to ask, did intentional killing of the innocent become simply a matter about which people simply "disagree?" What is the truth about it? Who is right about it, the Pope or his detractors?

This sort of sneering, condescending opposition to the Pope's words proves John Paul II's thesis more dramatically than almost anything the Pope himself says: we have indeed entered into a modern culture of death; we have gotten so far into it that shallow, self-righteous commentators such as Mr. McCarthy, who think the pope is merely a "scold," no longer even notice the kind of world that we have entered into.

It was probably predictable how Massachusetts Senators John Kerrey and Edward Kennedy would react to the Pope's encyclical: they both issued statements denying that the Pope's words applied to American legislators and judges. "It would be wrong for any public official, whatever their religion," Senator Kennedy's statement said, "to attempt to legislate the law of their church"-but then the Pope's main point is that abortion and euthanasia, and the other evils he condemns, are violations of God's law, not any church law; and for that reason, the Pope logically holds, any civil law

authorizing them "ceases by that very fact to be a true, morally binding civil law."

"There is no obligation in practice to obey such laws," the Pope continues. "Instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them."

Incidentally, all of the above comments critical of the Pope's encyclical which I have cited so far come from people who apparently still consider themselves, at least in some sense, as Catholics. We must realize that we have a particularly serious problem today when we find such people so ready to rush to defend the modern world and its culture of death against the solemn words of the Vicar of Christ. How can it be that these Catholics have not noticed that the anti-life culture of today is necessarily anti-Catholic?

In the midst of all of the evils of today's culture of death, we are surely fortunate to have the voice of John Paul II. Let us try to imagine how bad things would be, if we had only the evil and immoral spectacle that our world has become, and if at the same time we did not have the Vicar of Christ, not only able to define and delineate and speak out against these evils, but, what is more, able to make himself heard! Nobody can say this Pope has not managed to make himself heard! And more than anyone today imagines at the moment, he is going to be increasingly heeded, as well as merely heard; the culture of death, as we observe it today, cannot keep going on indefinitely; it bears within itself too many of the seeds of its own destruction.

On the other hand, those who, unfortunately favor this modern culture of death cannot but see anything but an enormous obstacle in this Pope and in his Church-and, hopefully, also in all of us who will reaffirm our resolve to follow the lead of this man whom Christ has providentially given to us. To be anti-life is to be anti-Catholic, for those who have unfortunately bought into the culture of death. But their

plans are destined to fail; they have, precisely, chosen death.