

## Say Yes to Life!

It is at the heart of life that the Spirit dwells! It is at the heart of the values we hold dear that the Gospel of Life is proclaimed. Even though the distinction between the part we play and the part played by others is often hard to make, there is always a contribution that is ours alone, that reflects our day-to-day decisions.

March 25, 2000

### SAY YES TO LIFE!

A Message by the Catholic Organization for Life and Family on the Fifth Anniversary of Evangelium Vitae, the Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II.

It is at the heart of life that the Spirit dwells! It is at the heart of the values we hold dear that the Gospel of Life--Evangelium Vitae--a clarion call by the Church to the men and women of our world to love, serve and defend human life--the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) (1) joins with Pope John Paul II in inviting you to once again Choose life with renewed conviction!

We have just come to the end of a century that appears to have been one of the most violent in human history. Aggression against human life has assumed ever more violent and devious forms: increased abortions, lobbying for legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide, and serious threats posed by the modern reproductive and genetic technologies. Furthermore, many couples, families, old people and children have been left to fend for themselves in desperate circumstances with no hope of improvement. Similarly, many members of our society struggle under economic burdens so heavy it is a challenge to choose life.

A human life is a human life. Any attack on its integrity is a direct assault on all of humanity. Decrying the many threats to human life, our Holy Father continually urges those in power to act decisively to adopt legislation, social policies and economic choices that promote and support respect for all human life. Such action is particularly urgent when life is most vulnerable, namely at the very start of life and near its end. At these moments life is most disenfranchised and most at risk.

In his encyclical Evangelium Vitae, the Pope reminds all of us that human life is sacred and that this life has been entrusted to our care as stewards and not as owners. As stewards, we are responsible for our lives and the lives of others. John Paul II invites us to bear witness to our Christian hope, to our knowledge that we are beloved of God. He urges us to inject hope into our world by developing new cultural, economic, social, political and legal initiatives that protect and promote human life and dignity.

Life is a gift beyond all measure. Each human being, created in the image of God, has incalculable worth and dignity. Life

is the most precious gift that is given to us on this earth, and it is our duty to love it, respect it and keep it from harm. The Gospel of Life enjoins us to respect life both in the thousand and one things we do each day and in important family, political and legal decisions. By the many choices we make in favour of human development, we follow John Paul II's example in promoting the fundamental right of every human being: the right to life!

Since the dawn of time, our understanding of human life, of its value and meaning, has evolved in human societies. There have been high points and low points along this road. In a world driven by economic considerations with a pluralism of values, rampant individualism, globalization, and rapid technological change, the call to live the Gospel of Life has never been more urgent. In the 21st century, our political representatives, the highest judicial authorities of the country, academics, health professionals, families, teachers, and young people are called upon to take a stand and to make a decisive choice in favour of life!

For example, voices in favour of human life need to be heard by the Supreme Court of Canada, which has agreed to hear the Latimer case, dealing with a father's decision to end the life of his severely disabled child. Voices of scientists, philosophers, ethicists, and theologians in favour of human life need to be heard by the Government of Canada, which is preparing legislation on new reproductive and genetic technologies. Voices in favour of human life need to be heard by the Canadian Senate, which is currently studying a bill on the legality of medical decisions regarding life-sustaining treatments and ways to control pain.

Many organizations in dioceses across the country are engaged in protecting and promoting human life by the services they offer, by advocacy, and by education programs that are available to young people and the general public. These initiatives are to be applauded and encouraged. More voices in favour of life are needed. Whatever the issue--abortion, child abuse, AIDS, family poverty, genetic engineering, euthanasia, assisted suicide, unemployment, or isolation of seniors--Christians must bear witness to their hope and their deep-rooted commitment to respect life and the dignity of the human person. Speaking out and acting in favour of life means coming closer to the other to live "with" him or her. Our faith in Jesus Christ calls us to act in solidarity at the heart of the world, in touch with current realities and challenges.

As Christians, we are constantly faced with life choices. We are required to take a stand without always having the time, information or expertise to assess the issues involved. How, then, should we react? What should we do? What should we think? What should we say to our children? How should we accompany those who are wrestling with a problem or with an important decision for or against life? All these questions underline the importance and need to become better informed and more involved. Resources are available to facilitate this process; one that we would recommend is described below. (2)

As people of life and for life, we need to listen to Christ's urgent call to live and fully experience life dedicated to total humanization. We must follow the pathways of love and life in a constant process of renewal. Is not the true meaning of our destiny to walk in the footsteps of Jesus to the fullness of human life in this world and to the fullness of divine life in the world to come? Two thousand years ago, he came into this world so that we could "have life, and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). We must say yes to life!

(1) The Catholic Organization for Life and Family was jointly founded by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) and the Knights of Columbus. It promotes respect for human life and dignity and the essential role of the family. Members of the Board of Directors are: Archbishop Bertrand Blanchet, Ms. Louise Couture, Archbishop Adam Exner, OMI, Ms. Dolores Fehr, Ms. Sharon Harland, Ms. Hélène Leboeuf, Mr. André Normand and Mr. Michael Sheehan.

(2) A good tool for responding to these questions is Choose Life, a booklet of workshops published by COLF on Evangelium Vitae. It is aimed at groups, young people and all individuals interested in gaining a deeper understanding of choices that promote human life. The booklet is available from the Publications Service of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, ON, K1N 7B1, telephone: 1-800-769-1147 or (613) 241-7538, fax: (613) 241-5090.