

uvodník Foreword

Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis on Abortion

A symptom of discrimination, drastic violence and eugenics

*Ján Ďačok SJ**

The legalization of abortion in the former Soviet Union (1920), and thereafter in the former “Eastern Bloc” countries, as also its depenalization in Western societies, grew into the promotion of abortion as a woman’s “fundamental right” on a global level. In communist Czechoslovakia, the tragic abortion law (cfr. Daniška, 2017; Francis, 2023) was passed in 1957, in the name of atheist ideology, as a method of birth control. In Slovakia alone, this law has so far led to the killing of more than 1.4 million children (cfr. Daniška, 2017; Benedict XVI, 2011; Francis, 2018), who are clearly missing from the country’s demographic structure. Abortion was and is a cause of silent and hidden pain and remorse, which is not much spoken or written about.

According to the World Health Organization, about 40 million to 60 million surgical (conventional) abortions have been performed worldwide each year in recent decades. Surely, this is a terrible number! It represents a loss of human life almost as great as that caused by the entire Second World War. Its losses are estimated at about 50 million to 70 million people. Since the 1980s, approximately one billion surgical abortions have been performed worldwide over the subsequent three decades (cfr. Torielli, 2008), and yet some often boast of the “progress” and “humanity” of contemporary society!

On the other hand, the numbers of abortions caused by other means (e.g. hormonal abortive preparations, intrauterine devices) are not known because they are not statistically reported and their number cannot be unequivocally ascertained. However, it can reasonably be expected that these sad figures far exceed those associated with surgical abortion. The use of certain hormonal preparations causes “false menstruation”, i.e. the artificially induced separation of the lining of the uterus — including the embryo — when it has previously become embedded in it. These are preparations of the abortion pill RU 486. According to the decision of some European countries (e.g. Great Britain, Italy), they can also be used in the home environment, although there is an obvious risk of serious

* Prof. Th.D., MD. Ján Ďačok SJ, Ph.D., Faculty of Theology at the University of Trnava. Address: Kostolná 1, P. O. Box 173, 814 99 Bratislava, Slovakia. E-mail: dacok@jezuiti.sk

complications, such as infections, sepsis (general poisoning of the body), serious bleeding, which in several cases have already caused death. Thus, the false concern for a woman's "sexual" and "reproductive health" leaves her alone, and this only increases her suffering and its negative consequences.

The contraceptive mentality and abortion should be seen as two arms of the same connected vessel or as two sides of the same coin. The common denominator is sexual gratification, but without the undesirable consequence of conceiving a child. This is to be ensured by the widest possible range of contraceptives. When these "don't work" or fail, the "emergency brake" of abortion is "pulled". Therefore, growth in contraceptive consumption and reinforcement of the contraceptive mentality is also leading to the increased practice of abortion. It is worth pointing out the direct link between the use of the "contraceptive" pill and the intention to exclude pregnancy. *The Instruction Dignitas Personae* makes this clear: »It must be noted, however, that anyone who seeks to prevent the implantation of an embryo which may possibly have been conceived and who therefore either requests or prescribes such a pharmaceutical, generally intends abortion« (CDF, 2008, no. 23).

Gradually, abortion has come to be seen as an expression of "individual freedom", "autonomy", "a human right", "the technocratic mentality", "technomorphism" or "the euphoria to grant death to the weak". Abortion has gone from "legal — legally permitted" to "legitimate — justified" and ethically and morally indifferent. It has become an instrument of destructive eugenics. The "anti-life-mentality" relegates it more and more to a personal and private level that does not even take into account the woman's partner. Abortion is unequivocal discrimination against the weakest and most innocent of human beings and is an act of gross violence against those whom every state should protect above all else.

Every intentional abortion is a great evil and causes deep injury to the woman. However, ethical and moral responsibility for abortion is not the same. Its magnitude may be influenced by a number of factors or circumstances (external or internal) that may affect personal freedom and responsibility. Of particular importance is the attitude of the husband or partner and the closest relatives or friends. If the woman finds support and encouragement in them, the social pressure to have an abortion can be resisted. However, it often turns out that many men or partners are immature and unable or unwilling to be supportive to a woman or partner at moments when they are internally divided and exposed to a new situation. When men "put it on the shoulders" of the woman alone, her situation is very difficult. When women do not even encounter understanding from their own mothers, mothers-in-law or friends and, on the contrary, are "encouraged" to have an abortion, the fate of the child is usually sealed.

Yet, in recent years, there have been increasingly evident and aggressive strategies by the United Nations and its institutions in favor of a "right to abortion" and for adolescents to have access to contraception, abortion, and other "reproductive health" and "sexual health" services without parental consent.

It should be said that the negative consequences of an intentional abortion, especially guilt and other symptoms of the post-abortion syndrome, can persist for years, decades or even a lifetime. They are well known to psychologists, psychiatrists and even priests. The post-abortion syndrome affects not only women who have had an abortion, but also those who have been involved in various ways in this painful process. It mainly affects those health professionals who directly carried it out.

To women who have had the moving and dramatic experience of abortion, John Paul II addresses these words: »The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life« (EV 99).

It is not necessary at this point to state the complete, clear and rejectionist positions on abortion by the successors of John Paul II. We will list only some of these positions. Benedict XVI has characterized abortion as a sign of the “eclipse of the meaning of life”, in which a special mission is assigned not only to doctors and other health professionals, but also to the whole of society: »Against a cultural background characterized by the eclipse of the sense of life, in which the common perception of the moral gravity of abortion and of other kinds of attacks on human life, special fortitude is demanded of doctors so that they may continue to assert that abortion resolves nothing but kills the child, destroys the woman and blinds the conscience of the child's father, all too often ruining family life. This duty, however, does not only concern the medical profession and health-care workers. The whole of society must defend the right to life of the child conceived and the true good of the woman who will never, in any circumstance, be able to find fulfilment in the decision of abortion« (Benedict XVI, 2011).

Pope Francis appealed to the fact that in the face of every human being, especially the most fragile and defenceless, is reflected “the face of Jesus Christ”. Related to this is the dignity of every human being, for which no one can be shredded (cfr. Pope Francis, 2013). There was a particularly strong response to his statement that those who perform abortions are essentially hired killers. On 10 October 2018, he focused his address at the General Audience on the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue and relationships with neighbours. To despise another person is essentially to kill them in a certain way: »A contradictory approach even permits the termination of human life in the maternal womb,

in the name of safeguarding other rights. But how can an action that ends an innocent and defenceless life in its blossoming stage be therapeutic, civilized or simply human? I ask you: is it right to ‘do away with’ a human life in order to solve a problem? Is it right to hire a hit man in order to solve a problem? One cannot. It is not right to ‘do away with’ a human being, however small, in order to solve a problem. It is like hiring a hit man to solve a problem« (Francis, 2018).

This harsh, but realistic, comparison has caused an extraordinary response from Italy’s health professionals and much controversy (cfr. Monaco, 2018). Several doctors who approve of abortion and practise it have criticized this attitude of the Pope. As an example, the Society of Physicians, Surgeons and Otorhinolaryngologists of the City of Turin reports that the term “hired assassins” has made their members uncomfortable. They pointed out that, as doctors, they do not evaluate the personal decisions of others, but respect them, and some of them »also make their expertise available to ensure that the decision of a woman or a couple, which is always painful, is not aggravated by the abandonment of medical assistance« (OMCEO Torino, 2018). As can be seen, the Pope’s attitude has touched their consciences, which so far are mistaken. On the other hand, 17 Italian Catholic pro-life associations expressed in a letter their sincere gratitude to the Pope for his defence of the right to life of the unborn (cfr. Anon., 2018).

Pope Francis also addressed a strong message on abortion during his recent visit to Hungary (28–30 April 2023), when he rejected a future Europe based on populism, but also on a vague and faceless community: »I think of a Europe that is not hostage to its parts, neither falling prey to self-referential forms of populism nor resorting to a fluid, if not vapid, ‘supranationalism’ that loses sight of the life of its peoples. This is the baneful path taken by those forms of ‘ideological colonization’ that would cancel differences, as in the case of the so-called gender theory, or that would place before the reality of life reductive concepts of freedom, for example by vaunting as progress a senseless ‘right to abortion’, which is always a tragic defeat« (Francis, 2023).

The logical consequence of the “abortion policy” is the relativization of the value of human life as such. This is also reflected in an insensitive and arrogant attitude towards other stages of individual life, weakened by age, illness or various forms of disability. The attitudes observed in some European countries towards assisted suicide and euthanasia are a cause for much concern.

In addition to the countries which have already had a sad experience in this respect (the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland), and where there is an effort to expand the practice of “granting death”, the gates are opening in this direction in other countries such as Italy, Germany, Great Britain, France, Sweden, Austria, Spain, Portugal. These are further steps, very relevant, by which “negative biopolitics”, “biopolitics of death” or “thanato-biopolitics” are increasingly spreading and consolidating (cfr. Ďačok, 2019).

The education and formation of children, adolescents and young people is and will be decisive in confronting a mentality that does not accept life. They must be helped in every way and patiently guided in order to avoid the risky or

tragic consequences of irresponsible behaviour. The formation of conscience, conscientious objection, a responsible approach to sexuality and respect for human life appear to be urgent and crucial challenges. The legitimate claim to the exercise of conscientious objection must be clearly strengthened and thus contribute to a change of mentality, as encouraged by John Paul II (cfr. EV 73). This area must necessarily be one of the contents of permanent formation, which must be patient, systematic and demanding, both on a personal and on a communal level. The current success of the pro-life movement in the USA suggest that it is possible to change what has until recently been seen as unrealistic.

Those who have been influenced by the “culture of death” or the “culture of waste” are invited to go in the opposite direction and contribute to the “culture of life” or the “culture of welcome and accompaniment”. This is the line of the Social Teaching of the Church, which is based on 4 universal principles: 1) the dignity of human person, 2) the common good, 3) subsidiarity and 4) solidarity. It is counterbalanced by the “structures of sin”, which includes abortion legislation. The Social Teaching of the Church can orient biopolitics in a positive direction and protect it from being transformed into thanato-biopolitics.

It is a commendable and inspiring initiative in which three academic institutions have come together: the Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies of the University in Zagreb, the Faculty of Theology of the University in Ljubljana and the Faculty of Canon Law of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Such a burning, and unfortunately still topical, issue as abortion certainly deserves this. The contribution of the International Scientific Conference: *On Abortion Interdisciplinary* of October 2022 is manifested in its interdisciplinary and interreligious character. It allows for a much broader sensitivity to the universal value of individual human life and especially that of the conceived, defenseless and yet unborn. Therefore, the following articles definitely deserve the reader’s attention. They question the issue of abortion from different perspectives and make a valuable contribution to the research of this very important topic.

Bibliography

- Anon. (2018). Aborto. Il “grazie” a papa Francesco da 17 associazioni che difendono la vita. *Avvenire* (October 10). <https://www.avvenire.it/vita/pagine/associazioni-ringraziano-papa-francesco-vita-aborto> (August 6, 2023)
- Benedict XVI (2011). Address to participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life. *Vatican.va* (February 26). https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110226_accademia-vita.html (August 6, 2023)
- CDF (2008). Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Dignitas personae* on Certain Bioethical Questions. *Vatican.va* (December 8). https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html (August 6, 2023)
- Ďačok, Ján (2019). Biopolitics and Integral Human Development: Contribution of the Social Teaching of the Church. *Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN*, 14, 151–171.

- Daniška, Patrik (2017). Sovietsi a potraty. *Konzervatívny denník Postoj* (December 19). <https://blog.postoj.sk/29241/sovieti-a-potraty> (August 6, 2023)
- EV. *Evangelium vitae* (March 25, 1995). John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*: To the bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious, lay faithful, and all people of good will on the value and inviolability of human life. *Vatican.va*. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html (August 6, 2023)
- Francis (2013). Address to Participants in the Meeting Organized by the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations. *Vatican.va* (September 20). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130920_associazioni-medici-cattolici.html (August 6, 2023)
- Francis (2018). General Audience: St Peter's Square. *Vatican.va* (October 10). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20181010_udienza-generale.html (August 6, 2023)
- Francis (2023). Meeting with the authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps: Address of His Holiness. *Vatican.va* (April 28, 2023). <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/april/documents/20230428-ungheria-autorita.html> (August 6, 2023)
- Monaco, Claudia (2018). Papa Francesco contro l'aborto: "È come affittare un sicario". *Ondanews* (October 14). <https://www.ondanews.it/papa-francesco-contro-laborto-e-come-affittare-un-sicario-il-dott-de-laurenti-isparole-offensive/> (August 6, 2023)
- OMCEO Torino (2018). Ordine dei Medici Chirurghi e degli Odontoiatri di Torino, Lettera al papa Francesco. *Ordinemedicilatina.it* (October 16). <https://www.ordinemedicilatina.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Lettera-3.pdf> (August 6, 2023)
- Tornielli, Andrea (2008). Aborto, l'anatema di Ferrara: "È l'omicidio perfetto". *Il Giornale* (January 15). <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/aborto-anatema-ferrara-l-omicidio-perfetto.html> (August 6, 2023)