

SIGNS OF HOPE AND INVITATION TO COMMITMENT

FROM THE GOSPEL OF LIFE (EVANGELIUM VITAE), 27 & 28

IN VIEW OF LAWS WHICH PERMIT ABORTION AND IN VIEW OF efforts, which here and there have been successful, to legalize euthanasia, movements and initiatives to raise social awareness in defense of life have sprung up in many parts of the world. When, in accordance with their principles, such movements act resolutely, but without resorting to violence, they promote a wider and more profound consciousness of the value of life, and evoke and bring about a more determined commitment to its defense.

Furthermore, how can we fail to mention all those daily gestures of openness, sacrifice and unselfish care which countless people lovingly make in families, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly and other centers or communities which defend life? ...These deeds strengthen the bases of the “civilization of love and life,” without which the life of individuals and of society itself loses its most genuinely human quality. Even if they go unnoticed and remain hidden to most people, faith assures us that the Father “who sees in secret” (Mt 6:6) not only will reward these actions but here and now makes them produce lasting fruit for the good of all.

Among the signs of hope we should also count the spread, at many levels of public opinion, of a new sensitivity ever more opposed to war as an instrument for the resolution of conflicts between peoples, and increasingly oriented to finding effective but “non-violent” means to counter the armed aggressor. In the same perspective there is evidence of a growing public opposition to the death penalty, even when such a penalty is seen as a kind of “legitimate defense” on the part of society. Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform.

Another welcome sign is the growing attention being paid to the quality of life and to ecology, especially in more developed societies, where people’s expectations are no longer concentrated so much on problems of survival as on the search for an overall improvement of living conditions. Especially significant is the reawakening of an ethical reflection on issues affecting life. The emergence and ever more widespread development of bioethics is pro-

moting more reflection and dialogue—between believers and non-believers, as well as between followers of different religions— on ethical problems, including fundamental issues pertaining to human life.

This situation, with its lights and shadows, ought to make us all fully aware that we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the “culture of death” and the “culture of life.” We find ourselves not only “faced with” but necessarily “in the midst of” this conflict: we are all involved and we all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life.

For us too Moses’ invitation rings out loud and clear: “See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. ...therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live” (Dt 30:15, 19). This invitation is very appropriate for us who are called day by day to the duty of choosing between the “culture of life” and the “culture of death.” But the call of Deuteronomy goes even deeper...It is a question of giving our own existence a basic orientation and living the law of the Lord faithfully and consistently: “If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live...therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days” (30:16,19-20).

The unconditional choice for life reaches its full religious and moral meaning when it flows from, is formed by and nourished by faith in Christ. Nothing helps us so much to face positively the conflict between death and life in which we are engaged as faith in the Son of God who became man and dwelt among [us] so “that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10)...With the light and strength of this faith, therefore, in facing the challenges of the present situation, the Church is becoming more aware of the grace and responsibility which come to her from her Lord of proclaiming, celebrating and serving the Gospel of life. ■



Pope St. John Paul II on his Encyclical *The Gospel of Life* (1995): “...[it] is meant to be a precise and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability, and at the same time, a pressing appeal addressed to each and every person in the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!”