



The human embryo and its right to live: a contribution to the sociology of death

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INTRODUCTION

Despite regular yearly reports on the constant increase in the human population on Earth, more and more voices are heard, especially from church domains, that members of the western European Christian civilisation are creating and living »the culture of dying«, or »the culture of death«. The reasons for more discussion about the everyday promotion of such »culture of living« in western European society today can be found in the fact that between physicians, theologians, philosophers, ethicists and sociologists and others there is still no agreement on when human life truly begins. Actually, there is no unanimous opinion on whether human life begins with conception, or in some other phase of embryo development during pregnancy, or at birth. Because of this in different countries of the world different legal regulations exist on protection of human life, more specifically, in different countries different regulations exist on what timeframe is allowed for ending pregnancy without legal consequences.

In such vague situations it is logical to ask: Who has the right, or, in what way does someone have the right to make a decision on when human life starts? Or even more precise: who did so and when, in a human community such as for example the Republic of Croatia, obtain the right to pass a decision (and keep it enforced) that human life should be protected with the 10th week of pregnancy and that very same life is worthless up to then, and that it can be destroyed without any legal consequences?

To acquire even some basic answers to such direct questions, in this article I will devote myself to studying two rival points of view on the start of human life, the dignity of the human embryo, and while doing that I will disclose the views of those in favor and those against the theory that human life starts with conception, and with that about the dignity of human person.

In the second part of this paper I would like to express the views of the current situation in Croatian society and state and highlight at least some controversy in the relationship between society and the embryo. In the Republic of Croatia, in which according to the latest census, almost 90% of citizens declared themselves Catholics, it is a legal right (by a decision of parliament representatives, mostly Catholic) to have an abortion, even though the opinion of the Rimocatholic Church on the subject of the beginning of human life and its violent end (abortion) is crystal clear and states: human life begins with the act of conception and its violent termination (abortion) is a sin and a crime (*1*) Therefore it is completely logical to ask: why in the Republic of Croatia are Catho-

lic priests and their flock supporting the governing political party (HDZ) which does not abolish the legal possibility of abortion?

Therefore the question: what status does the human embryo have in Croatian society and is the legalisation of abortion in perinatal age (i.e. if ultrasound determines that the baby will be born with imperfections a start in legalisation of euthanasia in the Republic of Croatia?

In the third part I would like to lay down basic settings for the foundations of sociology of death on Croatian universities and based on those settings to check if supporting the *Law on health measures for accomplishing the rights for free decision making on childbirth* from 1978, a truly visible and real contribution by today's Croatian Parliament to the culture of death, and in our case a contribution to the sociology of death.

I. WHEN DOES HUMAN LIFE BEGIN?

Do human embryos have moral status? Do they have the dignity of a human being which should protect them or is it possible to use them as very lucrative merchandise? If embryos have the dignity of a human being, or if they have moral status, on what then is that status based? When the Lower House of the British Parliament reached a decision that it is »allowed to clone human embryos in therapeutical purposes«, intense debates flared up across Europe between those in favor and those against the cloning of human embryos. All those debates were centered round the basic question: when does human life begin?

There are several divisions which are used to reach a proper answer. One of these is offered by a philosopher, Anton Leist (2) who differentiates five facts which are taken into consideration when making a decision on does life start with conception or later, on the basis of which it is possible to decide on the banning of abortion.

His division of facts is as follows:

1. Fact of autonomy
2. Fact of species
3. Fact of identity
4. Fact of potential
5. Fact of interest

Leist considers that with the fact of autonomy (the woman's right to her own body: this body is mine) the debate about the moral status of the fetus is not deep enough and any responsibility for its existence is not discussed, and therefore/consequently the responsibility for life that could develop from it. All of that of course is valid up to a certain time limit when it is necessary to make a decision on responsibility. However Leist states that the next three facts: *fact of species*, *fact of identity* and *fact of potential* wish to rationally set foundations for the embryos fundamental rights, and that is a right to be protected. Those arguments attempt to rationally justify the claim that each embryo, since its beginning, is equal to a full grown human, and therefore requires protection. On the other hand, those who argue the fact of interest be-

lieve that the statement which says that the moral relevance of the human embryo starts when cells merge is unacceptable, because the start of life can be discussed only from the moment when the fetus/newborn shows the will to live (34).

The second division based on 4 facts was made by editors of the »Moral status of the human embryo« (Der moralische status menschlicher Embryonen), G. Damschen, scientific collaborator at the Institute of philosophy of the Martin Luther University in Halle Wittenberg and D. Schoenecker, science assistant at the same university. That specification looks something like this:

1. *Fact of species*: as members of *Homo sapiens sapiens* species embryos are humans and with that they have dignity.

2. *Fact of continuity*: embryos are, unless no morally relevant procedures are made, constantly developing into fully grown humans which have dignity.

3. *Fact of identity*: embryos are from the morally relevant point of view identical to fully grown humans who have dignity.

4. *Fact of potential*: embryos have the potential to become fully grown humans and that potential requires full protection (4).

To obtain a relevant opinion on based settings, the aforementioned division, together with the conclusion and the basic pro and contra settings, were sent to experts in different fields of study, both those who were in favor of the argument and those who were against. Papers received based on the discussion on the »4 classic facts about the human embryo« were published.

Fact of species

1) Each member of the human species has his own individual dignity.

2) Each human embryo is a part of the human species.

So: 3) Each human embryo has his own individual dignity.

From a purely biological point of view, this claim is entirely correct, because the embryo belongs to the human species (*Species Homo sapiens sapiens*). Those in favor of this fact consider that a human being should be protected in his biological attribute, no matter which one of the aforementioned attributes and capabilities he possesses. This means that if something is human, then it should be protected, and that should be the merit of all actions. Similar things can be said for the newborn, mentally ill and comatose persons, who, although i.e. they do not have cognitive abilities, deserve all the protection as adults too. In other words embryos also have human dignity and need protection. Also, Leist considers that with this fact is based on the belief that there is a general ban on killing any human being where a human being is considered that which is alive and belongs to the human species, a category in which the human embryo falls. There-

fore, the conclusion could be made that »human life starts with the fertilized egg cell« (5).

Those against state that everything which biologically belongs to the human species should not be worthy of protection merely on the basis of that fact. From the biological belonging of the embryo to the human species, a moral decision on its protection does not have to be implemented. Consequently, those against state that all beings who do not belong to the human species should be excluded from the area of protection (6). In case this fact is accepted, then Reinhard Merkel, Professor of Penal Law and Philosophy at the University of Hamburg, considers that ethics should be protected from its biologicistic degradation. If, he states, the embryo is judged on its current state, therefore by its current status quo of his ability to perceive, regardless of whether it biologically belongs to the human species, it would not be possible to determine its subjective right to live (7).

Fact of continuity

This fact, as stated by Damschen and Schoenecker, can be explained by the following conclusion:

1) Every human being that possesses some of the aforementioned attributes and abilities of the human being has dignity.

2) Every human embryo which has some of the abilities and attributes of the human being, in normal conditions will continuously develop into a human being (without morally relevant procedures).

Therefore: 3) Every human embryo has dignity (8).

The editors consider that with the act of merging the egg cell and the spermatozoid (therefore the act of conceiving) a long lasting process of producing a human being commences. Any attempt at ending the process of development would be a criminal act. Because, what would be the difference in guarding dignity, the authors ask themselves, between a newborn of a few weeks and a newborn of a few seconds, between a 9 month-old fetus still in its mother's womb and an 8-month old premature. Therefore, the human embryo should be protected from its very beginning. This point of view is also shared by L. Honnefelder, Prof. Emeritus of Philosophy at the Rheinische-Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Bonn, who states that the definition of the embryo's dignity is done by transferring the moral status of the born to the unborn human on the basis of identity and continuity of development, which leads from the unborn to the born human (9).

Critics of this fact, one of them being Matthias Kaufmann, Professor of Ethics at the Institute of Philosophy, Martin-Luther-Universität in Halle-Wittenberg, share the opinion that those in favor presume that which should be first proved (i.e. that there are no morally relevant procedures). They consider that there should be »major reasons« for morally relevant procedures and state that human development does not occur continuously but is actually discontinuous (10). Critics confirm this, i.e. they

claim that the abilities that make a being a human being are not acquired with the act of conception but are acquired later on, after a set period of time (11).

Fact of identity

The editors conclude the following:

1) Every (human) being who possesses some of the attributes and abilities of a human being has dignity.

2.1) Many adult humans who possess those abilities and attributes are identical to embryos in a morally relevant point of view.

Thus: 2.2) Embryos who are identical with them, have dignity.

2.3) If any one of the embryos has dignity, then all embryos have dignity.

Therefore: 3) All embryos have dignity (12).

To reinforce the claims of those in favor of this conclusion the authors present the example of Truman, who is in the process of making an autobiographic movie, starting with the time he is living in now, from the day he started filming the movie, and moving backwards to the day when he was conceived. In this way he stays Truman, and it is irrelevant whether he has 50, 30, 20 or 5 years, or if he is a newborn, a 9 or 8 month-old fetus or just a conceived embryo. In any case from the point of being an embryo, up to the moment when he starts shooting the movie, he is always Truman, and therefore the embryo Truman (where it all started) should have the same dignity as the adult Truman. Therefore, Rainer Enskat, Professor of Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy, Martin-Luther-Universität in Halle-Wittenberg, in the exposition of his positive attitude towards the fact of identity, states that human embryos are human at any time (13). The philosopher Leist considers that if the fetus is identical to a fully grown human being (or if he is identical only to a human child), from which an adult human being evolves, then he should not be destroyed, and that the fetus needs protection like any adult human being, because in this case the genetic identity is worth protecting (14).

Critics of this point of view state two, for them very important, objections: first, it should be determined what »identity« is, because from the fact of identity there cannot be any obligation or standard. And second, there are multiple problems with the fact of identity. In the first 14 days after conception it is impossible to talk about development of a singular identity (one person), because in that time it is still unknown if there will be two or more units. On the other hand it is a problem of fusion (where in the early phase of embrional development there can be merging of multiple embryos into one, i.e. so-called siamese twins) and third, there is the problem of separation, meaning that the embryo is considered unique after a set period of time in comparison to the merging of male and female gametes, and when that is taken into consideration not even the early embryo (a collection of cells) is identical to the embryo in the later phase and thus neither with a living human being.

In defense of this point of view it is necessary to state the opinion of Ralf Stoecker, a private Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bielefeld, who amongst other things considers that identity is relative, that embryos are not alike adult humans and that from one embryo there can be more than one child, thus making it tragical that our existence starts so early, with conception (15).

The fact of potential

The authors present it in the following way:

- 1) Every human being, which potentially possesses the attributes and abilities of a human being, has dignity.
- 2) Every human embryo is a being which potentially possesses the attributes and abilities of a human being

It follows that:

- 3) Every human embryo has dignity (16).

The authors share the opinion that the fact of potential is one of the strongest and most influential of all four facts. The truth is also that embryos do not have all the attributes of an adult human being (ie. consciousness, feeling of pain, etc). Whereas, the same could be said about newborn or people in deep coma, or those asleep, dreaming. On the other hand, they should be treated the same, because they have the potential (possibility) for achieving all that, and with the dignity of man, as within that dignity the anchored right for protection of life rests solely on what it is morally capable of being, according to Wolfgang Wieland, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universitaet in Heidelberg (17).

The opposing faction of this and other facts, among which is Bettina Schoene-Seifert, Philosopher and physician, guest Professor at the University of Hannover, share the opinion that this cannot be accepted for several reasons. First of all, the same dignity should be given to gametes because they carry inside themselves the potential to achieve the aforementioned attributes, and also to egg cells because they can transform into embryos through the process of parthenogenesis (without sperm cells), thus achieving the abilities stated above (18). Second, they state, why would potential be morally relevant?

When the fact of interest is considered, according to the philosopher, A. Leist, it is necessary to state that 'I achieve the right to express something only when and if I show interest in it'. Therefore, the right to live, the right for others to respect my life rests on the understanding of argumentation of interest and only then when that interest for life exists. If someone does not have that interest (»preference«), then others do not have to take that into consideration (19).

Thus the fundamental question is asked: when does human life truly begin, i.e. when does a human being achieve the right not to be destroyed? But, without clear legal regulations there will always be the possibility to perform morally questionable procedures on the human embryo.

II. DOES THE EXISTING LEGAL REGULATIVE IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA PERMIT THE DESTRUCTION OF EMBRYOS?

When it is an issue of protecting human life and its dignity, in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Chapter 2. Personal and political liberties and rights, Article 21, states clearly: »Every human being has the right to live. In the Republic of Croatia there is no death penalty«. Then Article 22 states: »A person's liberty and personality are paramount. No-one's freedom can be taken away or limited, except when it is stated by law, on which the court decides«, and Article 23 states: »No-one should be subjected to any kind of abuse or, without consent, medical or scientific experimentation. Forced and obligatory labor is forbidden«.

From these completely clear constitutional principles follows the conclusion: the question of protection of human life is not a religious but an existential question of a human community, one human species which supports the dignity of a human being. This constitutional orientation is shared by three monotheistic religious traditions very close to us: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. In all of them human life is sacred, unique and unrepeatable, Man is created in the image of God, alike God (as stated in Jewish-Christian tradition) thus every human being is Allah's representative in this world and »who saves but one human life it is as if he has saved the entire world«, as stated in the Koran.

Despite such clear constitutional and religious principles, in the Republic of Croatia the Law on health measures for the realisation of the right to free decision on child birth, approved by the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Croatia was effective from 21 April 1978. From the title of the aforementioned Law it is clearly visible that it does not mention the destruction (killing) of embryos, but of the destruction (killing) of a living human being, a child. According to the same Law, Art. 15. Pg. 2, in the Republic of Croatia a woman can completely legally and without any consequence realize an abortion without the consent of a committee, if the pregnancy is under 10 weeks duration. The strength of the above stated directive is not diminished even by a decision of the Ministry of Health of 1 September 1996., in which it is stated that the termination of pregnancy can be performed in »hospital health facilities with an exclusive permit«.

The Croatian Law on abortion, as it is commonly called, does not mention something which still has no consent, it does not mention, therefore, whether the embryo is a person or not, but directly mentions living human beings, children, and in thus in a sense legalizes murder, and sometimes euthanasia. While in other democratic countries bills are passed on the protection of dignity of human embryos, and consequently the protection of newly started human life, the Republic of Croatia, thanks to the people's representatives in the Croatian Parliament, permits the completely legal killing, not only

of embryos, which are not even mentioned, but also of children, thanks to the still enforced Law on Abortion.

According to reports on pregnancy terminations in Croatian health institutions, which is published by the Croatian Institute for Public Health (20) during 1995 there were 19.950 abortions, 1996–19.634, 1997–16.400, 1998–15.292; 1999–14.700, 2000–12.814, 2002–12.002. When considering the number of abortions, 51% of them (6.191) were legally induced. Whereas it is necessary to state that of the women who wished to have an abortion, most of them were 35–39 years of age, and that the majority of women asking for an abortion, were married (66.7%). What is even more alarming is the fact that the majority of the women asking for an abortion are those who already have two children – 2.274 or 36.7% which confirms the assumption that termination of pregnancy in the Republic of Croatia is used as birth control.

From the stated data it is clear that in the Republic of Croatia destruction (killing) of embryos is permitted even in its already developed phase, up to 10 weeks of pregnancy. Therefore, it is completely justified to conclude that in such a state and society there cannot be any kind of discussion about the dignity of the human embryo. Regardless of the fact that in the Republic of Croatia 90% of the population is Catholic. However, even more depressing is the fact that the majority of the Catholic priests completely support the program of the ruling party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) which still enforces the Law on abortion of 1978. Legalisation for the killing of unborn children is given to the representatives of the Croatian Parliament from the very top of the Catholic Church, which does not dare to encourage the people to boycott HDZ and its program because of this Law. There are two reasons for this: 1) there is a fear that the people would not comply, which would clearly show that declarative Catholics do not support the doctrines of the Catholic Church and 2) Catholic priests are strongly connected with the Croatian political elite and thus do not want to disturb the »wasps nest« so as not to lose its already gained privileges in Croatian society.

III. THE LAW ON ABORTION, A GREAT ASSET TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEATH?

Death has provoked much interest in all phases of the development of human cultures and civilisations. It is the great, unknown and inexperienced OTHER PART of our lives, no matter what phase of life we are in and the psychophysical state. Death has therefore remained the hardest and completely unsolvable mystery of human life. The forms and ways of its prevailing, i.e., the forms and ways of its acceptance are very different and every individual, nation, every culture and religion approach it in a special and a unique way. Therefore, it should not be surprising that on the grounds of the concept of death and its meaning in a person's life, members of different cultures have created a special cultural, mythological, religious and legal tradition. Death has therefore found its place in religious and mythological literature, and in

philosophical, legal, economical and sociological literature, and subsequently in the literature, architecture, art and especially in everyday customs and folklore (21).

When discussing death, in almost every publication which addresses the culture, mythology and religion of certain nations, there is mention about natural death of the newborn to the elderly members of the community. In this regard the discussion concerns the relationship towards the dead and the continuation of their life after death, on which there are different points of view. Recently, there has been more and more discussion on the subject of euthanasia and its legalisation. Rarely, almost never, the destruction of embryos has been the center of attention. In actual fact the death of an embryo has no meaning in today's society, although Christian churches and other religious communities (Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and others) firmly express their points of view on the subject. Many assume that the reason for this is the fact that there is no consensus on when human life begins, i.e., there is no consensus on whether the embryo is a human being and, if it is, how science and adults should treat its violent death (abortion, euthanasia, cloning), and what does happen to it after the abortion? If the embryo is a human being and if it has human dignity as for example is shown by the teaching of the Catholic Church, then all the faithful Catholics should treat it the same way. Therefore the destruction, i.e., killing, of embryos for scientific or utilitarian purposes would be a crime. According to the same teaching such embryos have souls and the souls of those embryos are, after the latest decision of Pope Benedict XVI, in heaven, although up to then they had been in limbo (which is a topic for discussion in itself).

Many are talking today about the »suppression of death« from human surroundings, about its exclusion from modern society, while others are saying completely the opposite and that today there is more and more talk about death, pointing to newspaper advertisements about death, information on burial, memorial services, obituaries in public places, etc. Despite such completely conspicuous public talk of death, there is still no public discussions on the social meaning of death.

There are several reasons for »suppression of death« in modern society. Some of them are stated by T. Walter: 1) for a human individual to be able to function normally in the modern world, he must not and cannot think about death. The only thing he should think about is his success at work; 2) today, the people who are relevant to life and the people who are in their best years (20–60) do not die, but old people are the dying ones, therefore marginal groups in society, so in that way death itself is marginalised; 3) death does not occur in the family any more, in the immediate living surroundings, but instead in hospitals where, instead of recuperating, people are dying. Actually, dying and death in hospitals are becoming a problem for medical experts (22). Furthermore, more and more research confirms the thesis that the amount of people who attend funerals, even those of the closest relatives, is reducing.

Burials have stopped being rituals and ways of social communication, although they still remain so in village communities. There are more people every day to whom the cult of the grave, the cult of lowering the dead body into the ground, does not mean anything special. More and more are asking for cremation, and so in that way achieve relativity on the before established cult of the grave. 5) Death itself, like sexuality, has turned into a taboo. People are ashamed to talk about it as much as about sexuality, and so »pornography of death« can be said (23).

While reading books and magazines and the daily and weekly newspapers (black chronicles and obituaries), listening to everyday advertisements on Croatian radiostations, watching television and browsing the Internet, it is noticeable that dying and death are very frequent terms in the Republic of Croatia. If taken into consideration, then to the modern Croatian human death is very familiar and close, even though everything remains unknown. It could be said that in that sense death is something widely known. Whereas, in the Republic of Croatia there are no discussions about death, rarely is anyone occupied with the problem of dying and death, the problems of dying people and their loneliness, especially the social context in which everyday dying and death happens.

It is necessary to mention that in the English linguistic domain there has been an appearance of a large amount of magazines and books in the last few decades which are addressing this very subject; actually, a kind of individual, personal kind of *tanathology* (24) was formed. At the same time, but in a smaller scope, magazines and studies on the same subject are appearing in languages of western Europe. On the subject of Croatian *tanathology* hardly anything can be said!

Even though people refrain from talking about death, dying, graveyards and burials, cremation and afterlife, they are nevertheless faced with its existence. It is enough to take a look at the Croatian newspaper column »Notifications of death«, »Obituaries« and be convinced of how the words death, graveyard, burial, crematorium and afterlife are very frequent. Death on the other hand has moved from family surroundings to medical institutions. Instead of a priest and relatives, today a physician and other medical staff stand by the patient. Death has also become very lucrative for many. In our society there are numerous undertaking companies who are in the business of exclusively transporting and burying the dead. Then there are companies of city graveyards who are in charge of securing sufficient burial sites to satisfy current needs. Since death itself has become expensive in the Republic of Croatia, there are a few associations and private companies that provide safe and affordable funerals for its members. And if that is really true, the members themselves do not know, but their relatives will. Death also gives the artists, architects and construction workers the opportunity to make some truly astonishing works of art. If we take a look at how today's graveyards are created and decorated, we will see that the financial situation of the deceased or his community was always the

main factor that decided the size and value of the tombstone. Perhaps today not only in Croatia, but in the world itself, it is awkward to ask: if a human embryo has the dignity of a human person, why does it not have a name, why those embryos which are destroyed do not have tombstones, why does no-one talk about their deaths and why does their death not inspire artists to create great works of art?

Neither are we going to search for answers in this article. It is only necessary to make a note that this turn of science towards death is not some side phenomena but it is, regarding an objection made a long time ago by the French sociologist and philosopher, M. Foucault, directed at science that it is suppressing death and concerning itself only with that of this world, the inner side of life, an expression of a completely changed approach to death itself. Within sociology it is therefore starting to, as previously stated, emerge as one unique, special sociology, which is intensively and exclusively addressing death – *sociology of death* (Thanatosociology).

Recently, scientists around the world have been asking for permission and state funding for stem cell research with a fundamental explanation that it is necessary to spend the excessive amount of embryos. Namely, they would like to put to use unused, at conception unspent, embryos. Such embryos could be used for treatment of Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, and in some cases of heart failure, etc. Many state that this is inadmissible, because it violates the fundamental right of integrity of the human body, with more than a pure wish to use it in therapeutic purposes to help a third party. Adrian Holderegger, Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of Freiburg (Switzerland) considers that the »embryo becomes a foreign body« (25), and consequently it would be ethically very questionable to use intergral parts of the body to cure third parties. The »embryo is a person in the making«, states the embryologist and philosopher, Guenter Rager, Director of Anatomy at the Institute of Freiburg University (Switzerland), and the embryo has its own dignity so therefore should not be instrumentalised or used in therapeutical or research purposes (26). Namely, with therapeutical cloning embryos are created which, if fertilized, could grow into human beings. However, they are used as tools for a set purpose, mostly for curing so far incurable diseases. Consent for such research has been made in the Lower House of the English parliament, while Germany and Switzerland with their laws on embryo protection have banned such research and embryo misuse. Prof. Rager considers that for the purpose of curing one disease embryos should not be sacrificed, because an embryo is a human person in the making. He therefore considers that the order of things should be respected, and the fact is that a person in the making is more important than curing one of the many different degenerative diseases and states of individual persons. Furthermore, he considers, that respecting ethical boundaries does not mean the end of science itself.

Whereas, decision on the beginning of human life is not decided today at scientific gatherings or by religious

dogma but exclusively by legal decrees, such as in the Republic of Croatia. There is still no consent on when human life begins, and thus agreement on when a human being, respectively a human embryo, gains moral status, the status of a human being, which requires protection, and it is hard to expect changes in the current situation at this time.

Although I personally consider that human life begins with conception, that moment when the possibility that a living human being develops from an embryo as, in that sense, the existing Croatian *Law of health measures for the realisation of right to free decision on child birth* of 1978 provides a large contribution to the making of sociology of death, respectively that this law makes discussion on the topic of the social meaning of killing human embryos possible, no matter if its abortion (or euthanasia) or killing (destruction) of human embryos is for the purpose of scientific research or for therapeutical purposes (cloning).

CONCLUSION

On the grounds of the existing Law on Health Measures for accomplishing the rights for free decision making on childbirth from 1978, in Republic of Croatia abortion is allowed up to the 10th week of pregnancy. In order to find a suitable answer to the question: does modern western European culture live and promote the culture of life or the culture of death, in this article I have searched for an answer to the question: when does human life actually begin, and answer to the question who has the right to decide that life begins with conception or in some other phase of development of the human embryo.

In this respect I have shown multiple and conflicting points of view on the subject of when human life begins, listing different arguments, arguments of those who are in favor of human life beginning with conception and consequently the need to protect the dignity of the human embryo, and also arguments of those who consider that the dignity of a human person is not the same as the dignity of the human embryo and that it should not be protected in that sense.

The existence of the Law on Abortion of 1978 shows that the Croatian Parliament gives a large contribution to the thesis that modern human western European civilisation is living and legally promoting the culture of death. Supporting a law which ensures that human embryos can be destroyed without any legal consequences, i.e., a law which states that human life begins with the 10th month of pregnancy and that that very same life is worthless up that point and that it can be destroyed without any legal consequences, the Croatian Parliament, which consists mainly of members who declare themselves Catholics, provides a very good basis for the foundation of sociology of death at Croatian educational institutions, because it is given the right to the political-law elite of Croatian society to pass a decision on when human life begins.

On that basis I consider that Croatian society, despite fundamental constitutional principles, is not in any condition to protect the dignity of human embryos, thanks, amongst other things, to Catholic bishops and priests and their flock who, in contrast to basic Catholic religious principles, support the political parties who do not ban the legal possibility of abortion and consequently the destruction of human embryos.

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