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# *Evangelium Vitae: Some Highlights*

by

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William Butler Yeats' poem "The Second Coming" was on the syllabus of many a high school and college English literature course. The student, though perhaps not quite entirely sure of its meaning due to youth and insecure grasp of history, nonetheless sensed its ominous profundity and maybe even found his blood chilling a bit as he read the verse:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer.  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.  
The best lack of all conviction while the worst are full of  
passionate intensity.

The title "The Second Coming" suggests the final return of Christ at the end of time, but the events described are the penultimate events depicted in the Book of the Apocalypse, that is, the coming of the anti-Christ and evil's final campaign to wrest creation from the Creator. The poem written in 1923 shortly after the First World War and the Russian Revolution describes the brave new atheistic or secular age. "The falcon cannot hear the falconer. Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." If God or Christ is the falconer, the falcon or modern man, no longer hearing his voice, loses his bearings, his anchoring in the universe. "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed time is loosed." The words seem to prophesy the carnage of the great World Wars and the Dachaus and Gulags of our century. Whether man chooses not to hear God's voice or cannot hear it due to other sounds drowning it out, like the falcon he loses all orientation. He turns on his fellow men and on himself. "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," the poet writes. Why "mere"? Several decades later, Hannah Arendt in her book on Adolf Eichmann will coin the phrase "banality of evil." For all the misery it causes, anarchy or moral disorder is "mere," a non-value. Evil is ultimately emptiness, and the evil-doer, someone mediocre and wretched. On the

contrary, by implication, moral order and the good are to be measured on an all together different scale.

In our own decade of the nineties, Leonard Cohen who gained fame as a troubadour of the sixties, wrote and performed a song called "The Future" which accompanied the final credits of Oliver Stone's movie "Natural Born Killers."<sup>1</sup> I am not concerned with Stone's film which is likely more part of the problem of violence that confronts us rather than the solution, but Cohen's lyrics are worth pondering. Less classical in expression than Yeat's, Cohen's verses are very similar in theme.<sup>2</sup> Yeats speaks of things falling apart, the center not holding, and mere anarchy being loosed upon the world. Cohen's vision of the future is characterized by "(t)hings sliding in all directions" and the "overturning of the order of the soul." Another stanza speaks of the "breaking of the ancient western code" and piles up grotesque image after image like the following:

There'll be phantoms  
there'll be fires on the road  
and the white man dancing  
You'll see the woman hanging upside down  
Her features covered by her fallen gown  
and all the lousy little poets coming round  
trying to sound like Charlie Manson.

In gravely tones, Cohen then wails out the last verse: "Destroy another fetus now / We don't like children anyhow / I've seen the future, baby: it is murder."

It is unlikely that Pope John Paul II has read William Butler Yeat's poem, nor even heard of Leonard Cohen or listened to his song "The Future." Yet the Pontiff uses language which complements the portentous imagery of the poets. He speaks of "culture of death," "eclipse of the value of life," "crisis of culture," "conspiracy against life," "state of barbarism," "eclipse of a sense of God and man," "Promethean attitude" . . . and so on.

The Polish Pope has experienced first-hand the cataclysmic happenings of this century. His is a spiritual insight that transcends the intuition of the poet, an insight rooted in faith. Having shared the struggles and sufferings of our century, he cannot help but see the historic import of events. In his eleventh encyclical "Evangelium vitae" or "The Gospel of Life," the Holy Father warns of contemporary threats to human dignity, especially abortion and euthanasia, which in some respects are more subtle antagonists than war and tyranny. Not only are the casualties of the same or of a greater magnitude, the peril goes in many quarters unnoticed since the victims are unable to speak for themselves. Moreover, the decision to allow nascent or aged life to be taken is made democratically and executed routinely as another medical service. Can something be evil which your health insurance or credit card can pay for?

The encyclical is hardly a rehearsal of pet Catholic or papal peeves as some media figures have characterized it. It offers in fact 1) a penetrating analysis of the crisis of the day, 2) a renewed and comprehensive statement, a whole catechesis, of human life and dignity, and 3) a program for meeting the current trial. This program is predominantly moral and spiritual, but it would be a big mistake for this reason to think it could not be very effective. Many

commentators credit just such a moral and spiritual program furthered by Pope John Paul as having contributed decisively to the unraveling of European communism.

The initiative for the encyclical Gospel of Life came from the world's Cardinals who attended the Extraordinary Consistory in Easter week of 1991. The Cardinals asked the Holy Father to reaffirm with the authority of the Petrine Office the value of human life and its inviolability in the light of current circumstances and attacks. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in his intervention at the Consistory spoke of the need for a document which would not only consider individual morality but which would also give consideration to social and political morality.<sup>3</sup> Too often, issues like abortion, suicide, and euthanasia are relegated to the domain of personal morality, when they also involve profound issues of human rights and have tremendous consequences for civil society. In addition, Ratzinger thought that the various threats against human life could only be confronted from an analysis of various aspects of the issue: the doctrinal, the cultural, the legislative, the political, and finally, the practical.

Accepting the request of the Cardinals, the Pope wrote to all the Bishops of the world asking them to offer their cooperation in drawing up a comprehensive document which would become the 100-page encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. The Pontiff states that the document was composed "in communion with all the Bishops of the World" (EV 1 no. 5). This will have significance for the issue of the magisterial weight of the three solemn pronouncements of chapter three of the document to be discussed later on.

The Encyclical consists of four main chapters. The first is an extended interpretation of the Genesis account of Cain's slaying of Abel. Against this backdrop the Pope proceeds to outline the nature of the current crisis. The second chapter entitled "I came that they may have life" is a biblical and doctrinal exposition of Christian teaching on the dignity of human life. The third chapter "You shall not kill" expounds on the divine law and contains three solemn pronouncements on the killing of the innocent in general, abortion, and euthanasia. Finally, in the fourth chapter "You did it to me," the Holy Father charts a course for Catholics, other Christians, and all men of good will toward "a new culture of human life."

The first chapter's title is a passage from Genesis: "The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground." The Genesis account reveals that death was not intended by God from the beginning but is the result of the first sin. In the following generation, Cain kills out of envy and anger which are themselves a result of original sin. Thus the original revolt against God results in short order in the deadly combat of man against man. Every murder, says the Pope, "is a violation of the 'spiritual' kinship uniting mankind in one great family." Of course, in abortion and euthanasia the kinship of 'flesh and blood' is also violated. "At the root of every act of violence against one's neighbor there is at root a concession to the 'thinking' of the evil one," the one who in the words of John's gospel "was a murderer from the beginning" (no. 8).

Original sin, fratricide . . . Next follows the lie in the Genesis account. After the act, Cain tries to elude the Lord's question 'Where is your brother'? He does not

know where he is his response: 'Am I my brother's keeper'? The Pontiff notices a parallel to ideologies which try to cover up or justify their crimes through deceptive language. He cites the example of the euphemism "interruption of pregnancy." Actually, this tendency is not an altogether negative indication, says the Holy Father, because it indicates that the consciences of those who promote the taking of life have not been totally extinguished or else they would not need to give it another name.

The Lord's follow-up question to Cain, 'what have you done?' is also asked of the people of today. The Pope catalogues a whole series of crimes against humanity from murder, war, and genocide to drugs, the failure of rich countries to aid poorer ones, and illicit sexual activity which besides being immoral in itself puts others at risk. The Holy Father is particularly concerned, however, with the programmatic killing which goes beyond the Cains who kill the Abels (cf. no. 17). In this context, he speaks of a "conspiracy against life" aggressively pursued by governments and international institutions, the scientific and medical establishments, and the media. The Pope recognizes that abortion and euthanasia have a personal aspect such that subjective factors like fear, suffering, loneliness, etc. can cloud the judgment and mitigate individual moral culpability. "But today, he says, "the problem goes far beyond the necessary recognition of these personal situations. It is a problem which exists at the cultural, social and political level, where . . . crimes against life are heralded as legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights" (no. 18) He points to the glaring contradiction of our day when numerous enlightened charters and declarations of human rights are endorsed by governments and international bodies at the same time as whole classes of human beings are being deprived of fundamental legal protection by these same institutions.

At the root of the "culture of death" is a deep cultural crisis whose chief characteristics are individualism and materialism. The former, by extolling the absolute autonomy of each individual's freedom as the only criterion for choice, results in imprisoning the individual within the narrow circle of his own interests, relativizing or eliminating his fundamental relationships. Freedom ceases to maintain a reference to goodness and truth, but is reduced to a subjective value subject to the caprice of changeable opinions and selfish interests and whims. As such it gives rise to fear, especially fear of how others will use their freedom but also fear of how one will use one's own freedom. Now since in the state some compromise will be necessary to avert a Hobbesian war of all against all, democracy comes to serve a strictly utilitarian function of formalizing what the majority may hold at the moment. But a democratic society which no longer recognizes values antecedent to itself, the right to life being the preeminent one, becomes a caricature of true legality and progressively undermines itself and the exercise of genuine freedom. "To claim the right to abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia, and to recognize that in law," the Pontiff states, "means to attribute to human freedom a perverse and evil significance: that of an absolute power over and against others" (no. 20) The democratic state ceases thereby to be the "common home where all can live together on the basis of principles of fundamental equality, but is transformed into a tyranny which arrogates to itself

the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenseless members . . . in the name of a public interest which is really nothing but the interest of one part.”

Materialism or what the Pontiff terms an eclipse of the sense of God and man constitutes the heart of the tragedy. Loss of a sense of God leads by a strict logic to the loss of a sense of man whose basic rights stem not from positive law, as the American founding documents affirm, but from the Creator. The only criterion that counts thus becomes the “quality of life,” interpreted primarily or exclusively in terms of “economic efficiency, inordinant consumerism, physical beauty and the pursuit of pleasure” (no. 23). The deeper dimensions of existence - interpersonal, spiritual and religious - go undeveloped. ‘Having’ becomes more important than ‘being’, pleasure becomes the only reasonable goal to pursue; suffering is regarded as useless and becomes the ultimate evil. “Others are considered not for what they are, but for what they have, do, and produce” (no. 23). Any sacrifice on their behalf appears incomprehensible. Man becomes alienated from himself, indeed, from his own body which is no longer perceived as something personal, “a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world.” The body “is reduced instead to pure materiality” (no. 23), useful, as long as it is in good repair. Similarly, sexuality becomes depersonalized, becoming just another object for manipulation. The eclipse of the sense of God and man leads finally to the eclipse of conscience, both individual and social, subjecting man and society to mortal danger, “that of confusion between good and evil precisely in relation to the fundamental right to life” (no. 24).

In the second chapter, Pope John Paul reviews Christian teaching on the dignity of human life. Life is at the center of the Gospel. Christ came after all that we may have life and have it to the full. The Pope’s treatment synthesizes insights from all the major branches of theology: Scripture, Christian anthropology, Christology, Sacraments, Morals, and Spirituality. Central to the chapter are the meditations on the mysteries of Creation and Redemption. Human life receives its inestimable dignity by God having made man in His image and likeness and destined him for eternal life; by God becoming man and thereby elevating all human dignity; and by the God-Man having redeemed man. It is in Jesus that we can know the complete truth concerning the value and meaning of human life. It is in his cross, that we gain the deepest insight into the redemptive mystery of suffering.

The third chapter of the encyclical entitled “You Shall Not Kill: God’s Holy Law” examines the moral obligation to revere human life. The injunction not to kill the innocent forms part of the natural law, and is thus written in the hearts of all men. Moreover, it is part of divine positive law. The commandment given by God to Moses in the Decalogue is confirmed by Christ, who, in answer to the rich young concerning what is necessary to attain eternal life, insists first of all on the commandment not to kill. The obligation not to kill is furthermore attested to in the constant tradition of the Church and teaching of the Magisterium up to and beyond the Second Vatican Council. The Holy Father reminds us that though negative in formulation, the commandment not to kill, like all the commandments, originates in God’s love for man and defines the minimum of what one must observe in order to fulfill the positive obligation to love one’s

neighbor (cf. no. 54).

The chapter culminates in solemn pronouncements which I will cite shortly. It might be recalled that in the Extraordinary Consistory of 1991, Cardinal Ratzinger believed that a solemn doctrinal affirmation of Christian teaching on the gravity of the direct killing of the innocent "could have the greatest importance at a time of widespread doctrinal confusion."<sup>4</sup> The Holy Father evidently agreed, deciding to make three pronouncements, not just one. The first reads as follows:

Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his successors, and in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church, *I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral.* This doctrine, based upon that unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15), is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal magisterium (no. 57).

With similar, if not identical preambles, the Pope later declares that "direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being" (no. 62) and that "euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person" (no. 65).

The content of the pronouncements comes as no surprise. They are noteworthy, however, for another reason internal to the Church discussion concerning the Magisterial authority of moral teachings. In marked contrast to the Church's affirmation in Vatican II of her competence to teach infallibly in the areas of faith and morals, one group of moral theologians has held that moral teaching cannot be the subject of infallible definition, as matters of faith can be, because human actions always have a contingent aspect which cannot be foreseen such that the net good or evil they accomplish cannot be ascertained in advance. According to this view, determination of the likely consequences of an action is indispensable before rendering judgment on its morality. Proportionalists deny for this reason that certain acts can be declared *a priori* always and everywhere intrinsically evil. This viewpoint was rejected by the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* for failing to take into account the object of certain acts. Certain actions like murder, rape, blasphemy, contraception, etc., once their object is identified, and regardless of contingent circumstances, always violate human dignity regardless whether they are chosen as an end or as a means to a further end.

Many proportionalists and other revisionists hold that only teaching which has been infallibly proclaimed by the Pope or an Ecumenical Council is strictly binding. While Catholics should listen attentively to the authoritative, non-infallible teaching of the Pope and Bishops, they may legitimately dissent from it. This is the view articulated by many Catholic dissenters to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile some orthodox theologians have been desiring a papal definition in morals, any definition, to prove the point that infallibility also extends to moral teaching. The risk to this approach is that it could unwittingly play into the hands of those who maintain that only infallibly proclaimed teachings are obligatory. Catholics are not simply bound to hold fast to infallibly declared teaching but all teachings of the Ordinary Magisterium according to the

emphasis the Magisterium has accorded them. That a doctrine has been infallibly declared may only indicate that the teaching has been previously contested and is now confirmed by the Magisterium; it does not necessarily indicate a higher degree of doctrinal importance or that other teachings not having the infallible stamp are lesser in significance or disputable.

What then of the status of the three solemn pronouncements of *Evangelium Vitae*? To be sure, most would agree that they are not exercises of the Pope's extraordinary Magisterium. They are not *ex cathedra* in that sense. Rather they constitute infallible teaching but of the ordinary Magisterium. In the case of each of the three doctrinal formulations, there is a significant reference in footnotes to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* in Paragraph 25 which declares that the bishops, "even though dispersed throughout the world, but preserving for all that among themselves and with Peter's successor the bond of communion," when "in their authoritative teaching concerning matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement that a particular teaching is to be held definitively, . . . proclaim infallibly the doctrine of Christ."<sup>6</sup> This means that the three teachings in discussion are already matters which the Church has infallibly taught by means of her ordinary Magisterium. The Pope solemnly confirms this due to the urgency of the day and out of concern that consciences be informed correctly. Since infallible teachings of the ordinary Magisterium are nowhere codified as conciliar and papal definitions are, but have to be argued theologically to be such, the Pope's confirmation is propitious.<sup>7</sup> He affirms that the Church has the charism to teach infallibly in the area of morals, while underscoring the authority of the Ordinary Magisterium.

In the same chapter, Pope John Paul gives an extended discourse on the relationship between the moral and civil law. Although not co-extensive, civil law, charged with promoting the common good, should never contradict the moral law. "The 'natural law,'" states the Pontiff, "is the obligatory point of reference for civil law itself" (no. 70). Laws authorizing abortion cannot be just because they give to certain citizens the power of life and death over others; they are in agreement neither with the Eternal Law, nor with the natural law; nor can they be conformed to the common good. Furthermore, the Pope notes that the legal toleration of abortion or of euthanasia cannot legitimately claim to be based on respect for the conscience of others, "precisely because society has the right and the duty to protect itself against the abuses which can occur in the name of conscience and under the pretext of freedom" (no. 71). Such laws are radically opposed not only to the individual but also to the common good and as such cease to be morally binding (cf. no. 72-73). In an admonition to politicians, the Pontiff reminds them in the case of intrinsically unjust laws, it is never licit to obey them, to take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of them, or to vote for them (cf. no. 73). In a word to health care workers, the Pope reaffirms the right and duty to practice conscientious objection rather than take part in an injustice sanctioned or prescribed by law (cf. no. 73).

With respect to the problem of legislation, specifically, with the problem of what has come to be called "imperfect legislation," the encyclical deals with a



relatively new moral problem, offering a solution which marks a significant development in Church teaching.<sup>8</sup> In the commentaries, this has received surprisingly little attention. The problem can be stated this way. In the past, the Church has had to deal with the question of whether legislators may support legislation which would permit, for example, abortion where it was formerly prohibited. This is still more or less the situation today in regard to euthanasia where liberalization is just beginning. In this context, the Church has consistently held that it is immoral for a legislator to vote for legislation which is intrinsically evil. Today, the situation or context had changed at least with respect to abortion. Many American states and several formerly communist countries who have had a history of permissive abortion legislation are now introducing more restrictive measures in order to limit abortion, even if it is politically impossible to prohibit all abortions. May a Catholic or other conscientious legislator vote for a law which prohibits abortion in some cases, say, in the last two trimesters, but permits it, say, in the first? The law taken as a whole, while an improvement, continues to be unjust.

Almost a year before publication of *Evangelium Vitae*, Marie Hendrickx, an official of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Professor at the Pontificio Istituto Giovanni Paolo II, discussed three possible solutions to the question in a talk given at the Constitution of American Bishops in Rome. Of course, if the legislative proposal allows the politician to vote selectively for the several articles of the bill, no moral difficulty arises. The Legislator votes for the moral components and against the immoral ones. However, what should he do if he must vote on the bill taken as a whole? The question becomes still more onerous, Hendrickx noted, if it seems probable that, without the vote of the Catholic legislators, the more restrictive bill will not be passed.<sup>9</sup>

Not knowing what the Holy Father would later say on these matters, Hendrickx critiqued three possible solutions. According to the first, the Catholic legislator may only support a law that is just in all its parts. Some would argue that this solution does not distinguish between formal and material cooperation. Formal cooperation consists in sharing the bad intentions of the one with whom one is collaborating, e.g., prescribing an abortifacient pill. Material cooperation does not entail sharing the bad intention, e.g., selling someone a gun for a good reason. This solution does not afford the greatest possible protection to the unborn child, she notes. On the other hand, it has in its favor that it can constitute a prophetic protestation against the moral evil.

A second solution is that the legislator should support what is realistically possible given the context. But such a stance, Hendrickx argues, is close to proportionalism or consequentialism that makes the morality of an action depend uniquely on the weighing of its foreseeable positive or negative effects—a theory later rejected by John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor*.

A third solution would allow a Catholic sometimes to support a law that is not just in all parts, if he cannot vote for only certain of its elements. It could be argued that, in this case, the legislator is cooperating in a formal manner in that part of the law which just and only in a material manner in regard to its unjust parts. This cooperation would be justified by the decision to save the greatest

possible number of unborn children. It must be noted that in this scenario, a distinction is recognized between the literal meaning of the law and its real meaning. According to its literal meaning, the law allows certain abortions; according to its real meaning, it would reduce the number of abortions allowed up to that time. In such a case, the legislator would have the responsibility publicly to clarify the meaning of his vote in order not to give scandal and would be obliged to work for passage of truly just law.

In *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul resolution of this dilemma most resembles Hendrickx's third solution. He adds the requirement that the vote be decisive for passage of the more restrictive law (cf. 73). John Paul states that an elected official whose absolute personal opposition to abortion is well-known could support proposals aimed at limiting abortion, when it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law. This does not represent cooperation with an unjust law, he concludes, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects.

The condition of the legislator's known absolute opposition to abortion is important to avoid the risk of giving scandal and contributing to moral confusion among the people at large. In contrast to the political figure, Hendrickx holds that a Bishop or church official should refrain from endorsing imperfect legislation. She argues that the risk is too great that the Pastor's endorsement will be interpreted as a change in or accommodation of Church teaching. The Pontiff himself will say in the fourth section of the encyclical that the Bishops "are the first ones called to be untiring preachers of the Gospel of life" whose primary task it is to hand on the Gospel doctrine of life in its integrity (no. 82).

The fourth and final chapter of the encyclical entitled "You did it to me" might be called Pope John Paul's program for building "a new culture of human life." The first thing one notices about this program is that it embraces more than the political. As important as political initiatives are, and the Pontiff emphasizes their importance, they are only one line of activity which must be pursued. After all, current negative legislation and legislative proposals reflect a deeper crisis at the social, moral, and spiritual levels. First and foremost, the Holy Father calls for a renewed evangelization. "Evangelization," he writes, "is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity" (no. 78). It is in the Gospel that we find the fullest revelation of the dignity and purpose of man. Therefore, renewal of education in Christian doctrine is primary; it must begin in the seminaries, Catholic Theology faculties, and in Catholic schools and religious education programs. Such teaching should be integral, not selective; it must not separate faith from its ethical requirements. The faith needs to be recognized as a gift or treasure to be shared with others, not something hoarded for oneself (cf. no. 78).

The Pope enumerates things Christians can do in their daily lives to promote a respect for human life that are too numerous all to be mentioned here. Often, it is a question of Christians doing what they are already doing, but doing it with renewed dedication. He makes special mention of the medical profession; physicians and other health care workers are "guardians and servants of human life" (no. 89). Human life's

deepest and strongest support lies in the intrinsic and undeniable ethical dimension of the

health care profession, something already recognized by the ancient and still relevant Hippocratic oath, which requires every doctor to commit himself to absolute respect for human life and its sacredness (no. 89).

The Pope encourages those who give care to the elderly, to those giving palliative care to the dying, including AIDS patients, and to all volunteer workers who "make a valuable contribution to the service of life when they combine professional ability and generous, selfless love" (no. 90).

The Pontiff devotes particular attention to the family - he calls it the domestic church - whose role in the building up of a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable. Families must pray together, for the "mobilization of consciences" - the Pope's phrase - begins here (cf. 92-93).

We recall that in the first chapter of the encyclical the culture of death was traced to individualism and materialism, to the embrace of an exaggerated notion of personal freedom, freedom as something autonomous and indifferent. This in turn was traced back to a forgetfulness of God which by strict necessity leads to the denigration of man. In the fourth chapter, the Pope charts a course for recovery. Human solidarity, first in the family and then in the rest of society, must replace a narrow individualism. The other person is not a rival. Then spiritual values have to be appreciated over material desires; being is prior to having. Finally, human freedom must be seen again in its connection to truth. The fundamental truth is the reality of God and the creaturehood of man. From this truth reverence for life can be rekindled (cf. no. 96).

Pope John Paul underscores the particular role of women in transforming culture. It is incumbent upon them to promote what he calls a "new feminism," rejecting by implication an "old feminism" which imitates a model of male domination (cf. no. 99). We might recall Leonard Cohen's terrible image of the woman hanging upside down with her features covered. It seems to suggest both the violation of woman and the loss of the feminine in our culture - her features are hidden. Is the "white man" in the same image responsible for the degradation or simply enjoying the spectacle? In any case, he is not defending or protecting the woman.

In Cardinal Ratzinger's intervention at the Extraordinary Consistory, he criticized a feminism based on the same utilitarian presuppositions as the "machismo" it is reacting against. When "woman denies her own body, considering it simply as an object to be used for acquiring happiness through self-achievement, she also denies her own femininity, a properly feminine gift of self and her acceptance of another, of which motherhood is the most typical sign and the most concrete realization."<sup>10</sup> Ratzinger holds that an authentic feminism would "struggle for the recognition of the human person in the dignity which is due to him or her from the sole fact of existence, of being willed and created by God, and not for his or her usefulness, power, beauty, intelligence, wealth, or health."<sup>11</sup>

In the conclusion of his encyclical, Pope John Paul offers an extended meditation on the great portent of the woman in the Book of Revelation. The "woman clothed with the sun" is first of all Mary, Virgin and Mother. "Through her acceptance and loving care of the life of the Incarnate Word, human life has

been rescued from condemnation to final and eternal death" (no. 102)

The woman clothed with the sun is also the Church, the bride and bearer of Christ. "The Church's spiritual motherhood," the Pontiff writes, "is only achieved . . . through the pangs and 'the labor' of childbirth, that is to say, in constant tension with the forces of evil" (no. 103). Mary, the Pope continues:

helps the Church to realize that life is always at the center of a great struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. The dragon wishes to devour 'the child brought forth' (cf. Rev 12:4), a figure of Christ whom Mary brought forth 'in the fullness of time' (Gal 4:4) and whom the Church must unceasingly offer to people in every age. But in a way, that child is also a figure of every person, every child, whose life is threatened, because by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person such that rejection of human life in whatever form that rejection takes, is really rejection of Christ (no. 104).

Conversely, "whoever receives one such child in my name," Christ says, "receives me" (Mt 18:5).

#### REFERENCES

1. Leonhard Cohen, *The Future*, Columbia, 1002.
2. This similarity is probably no coincidence. Cohen studied English literature at McGill and published several volumes of poetry before he began his musical career. Cf. Ruth R. Wisse, "My Life Without Leonard Cohen," *Commentary*, October 1996.
3. Cardinal Ratzinger's keynote address at the Extraordinary Consistory has been reprinted in pamphlet form by the Catholic Truth Society (London) under the title "Human Life Under Threat" (ISBN 0 85183 837 5).
4. Cardinal Ratzinger, p. 12.
5. One recalls, for example, the statement of former presidents of the Catholic Theological Society in support of Fr. Charles Curran which adopted this argument.
6. The notes in question in the encyclical are nos. 50, 73, and 82.
7. The issue of the authority of the three solemn pronouncements was the subject of an exchange between Avery Dulles, S.J. and certain readers in *First Things*. That the teachings in question are meant to be seen as infallible teachings of the Ordinary Magisterium is made clear in the Vatican's official summary of *Evangelium Vitae* which states: "Here we are speaking of doctrinal affirmations of very high magisterial authority . . . [I]n the case of each of the three doctrinal formulations there is a significant reference in a note to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which in paragraph 25 declares that the bishops, 'even though dispersed throughout the world, but preserving for all that among themselves and with Peter's successor the bond of communion,' when 'in their authoritative teaching concerning matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement that a particular teaching is to be held definitively,' 'proclaim infallibly the doctrine of Christ.'"
8. Some time before the publication of the encyclical, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith sponsored a symposium on this question which was chaired by Cardinal Ratzinger. Moral theologians from various countries, moralists from the Roman pontifical universities, and consultants of the CDF were among the participants.
9. Hendrickx's paper entitled "Abortion as a Political and Legal Problem" was distributed in manuscript form to the Bishops but was not published. I follow her thought and language closely.
10. Cardinal Ratzinger, p. 9.
11. Cardinal Ratzinger, p. 9.