

ARTICLE 97

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

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The Truth will set you Free

Filial Correction

I begin writing this article having just read the "Filial Correction of Pope Francis For the Propagation of Heresies" which has been signed by 62 Catholic academics and pastors from 20 countries. The document begins "With profound grief, but moved by fidelity to our Lord Jesus Christ, by love for the Church..." These words "with profound grief" caused me to reflect on something I noticed some time ago.

I have developed a custom whereby after attending Holy Mass in the parish church in Knock I go first to pray to St Joseph at his altar on the left of the main altar and then I go to pray to Our Lady at her altar which is on the right of the main altar. I have been doing this for years, but it was only recently that I noticed the expression on the face of Our Lady as depicted by the sculptor. She has an expression of profound sadness. A deep sorrow. To me this is obviously Our Lady of Sorrows and this is reinforced for me because I have also been practising the devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows for several years and have produced a little booklet on this devotion.

What Causes Our Lady Sorrow?

Lately I have been pondering on what causes Our Lady such deep sorrow and in this I was reminded of the raising of St Lazarus from the dead as recounted in St John's Gospel, chapter eleven. Before Jesus decides to go up to Judea, He shows very clearly that He knows that Lazarus is dead and that He is going to raise him from the dead.

"Lazarus our friend sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep. His disciples therefore said: Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. But Jesus spoke of his death; and they thought that he spoke of the repose of sleep. Then therefore Jesus said to them plainly: Lazarus is dead. And I am glad, for your sakes, that I was not there, that you may believe: but let us go to him." (John 11:11-15)

And Jesus Wept?

What strikes me about this is that after Jesus meets Martha and Mary, we are told "and Jesus wept" (John 11:35). I don't mean to give an official interpretation of Sacred Scripture, but this has always puzzled me. Why did Jesus weep, if He knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead and in so doing, would bring immense joy and happiness to Martha and Mary which would far surpass their previous grieving? It just doesn't make sense to me that Jesus was grieving because Lazarus was dead, when He knew full well that He was going to bring Him back to life and had even told this to His disciples before going up to Judea. This was precisely His reason for going up to Judea "that I may awake him out of sleep"! So why the tears of sadness?

Of course, Jesus in His compassion and in His humanity, empathises with Martha and Mary in their loss, but I wonder if there was not a deeper sadness because Jesus also knew that many would still reject Him, and that the raising of Lazarus would prompt the chief priests to plan His death that very day. "From that day therefore, they devised to put Him to death" (John 11:53)

The Children of Fatima and the Vision of Hell

At Fatima, the three children were shown a vision of Hell. They were afraid, and Sr Lucia says in her fourth memoir.

“Terrified and as if to plead for succour, we looked up at Our Lady, who said to us kindly but so sadly:

““You have seen Hell, where poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to My Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace.”

Our Lady’s Sadness

Again, we have this sadness of Our Lady probably because she has given the remedy for the salvation of many souls, “If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved...”, but she was also aware that what she asked for would not be done. It is my belief that it is this needless loss of souls which causes Our Lady’s sadness.

Fraternal Correction can cause Grief

I too share this grief and this profound sadness for what I am about to write, because in writing it, I must criticise people whom I admire greatly for their tireless efforts on behalf of the unborn. However, in any battle we undertake on behalf of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of His Catholic Church, we must always keep in mind one of the foundational principles of moral theology, that it is never licit to do evil even though good may arise from it. We must also keep in mind the words of Christ Himself when He says “If you continue in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)

Savita Halappanavar

I am thinking of the case of Savita Halappanavar. In her case, many pro-life people put forth the argument that the principle of double effect could have been used to justify inducing her baby even though she was only seventeen weeks pregnant. To understand why this is wrong, it is necessary to introduce another moral principle, that of the moral object of an act. This can be stated simply as follows; the moral object of an act is that to which the action tends of its very nature, directly and immediately. In the case of induction, the moral object of induction is the delivery of the baby, as this is what the act tends to of its very nature both directly and immediately.

Good Intentions do not change the Moral Object of an Act

The intentions of the person acting cannot change the moral object of an act, and good intentions can never make an evil act good. In the case of Savita Halappanavar, the first moral question that needs to be asked, regardless of her medical condition is, “is it moral to induce a non-viable unborn baby?” In the case of a woman who is seventeen weeks pregnant and goes to a Marie Stopes clinic in England where her baby is induced we clearly see that this is immoral, and we call it an abortion. The question then becomes, “how can the exact same procedure, whose moral object has not changed, become ethical in a severe case of sepsis?” The answer is that it cannot!

The American Bishop’s Conference

The American bishop’s conference (USCCB) states, “Abortion (that is, the directly intended termination of pregnancy before viability or the directly intended destruction of a viable foetus) is never permitted.” (USCCB - Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services 45). Notice the words “before viability”. To directly terminate a pregnancy before viability is an abortion, regardless of the good intentions to preserve the life of the mother in the case of severe sepsis.

The USCCB also states, “Operations, treatments, and medications that have as their direct purpose the cure of a proportionately serious pathological condition of a pregnant woman are permitted when they cannot be safely postponed until the unborn child is viable, even if they will result in the death of the unborn child.” (ibid 47)

But to make sure that there is no confusion as to what constitutes medical treatment, the USCCB gives the clarifying statement, “For a proportionate reason, labour may be induced after the foetus is viable.” (ibid 49). In other words, it is immoral to induce labour where the foetus is not viable.

The Principle of Double-Effect

The principle of double-effect asks four questions to determine the morality of certain acts. Questions 1, 2, and 4, must be answered in the affirmative and question 3, must be answered in the negative. All four questions must be answered correctly for the act in question to be considered morally licit. If even one of the questions cannot be answered correctly in a specific case, then the act is immoral. Here are the questions.

- (1) Is the act itself morally good or neutral?
- (2) Are only the good consequences of the action intended?
- (3) Is the good effect produced by means of the evil effect?
- (4) Is there some weighty reason for permitting the evil?

The Case of the Cancerous Uterus

Let us look at this principle of double-effect and examine the case of a pregnant woman with a cancerous uterus and compare it to the case of a pregnant woman with severe sepsis. In both cases the baby is not yet viable. Here is the case for treating the cancerous uterus.

- (1) Q. Is the act itself morally good or neutral?
A. Treating cancer with chemotherapy is morally good.
- 2) Q. Are only the good consequences of the action intended?
A. The killing of the cancer is intended, the death of the baby is not.
- (3) Q. Is the good effect produced by means of the evil effect?
A. The killing of the cancer is not brought about by the direct killing of the baby.
- (4) Q. Is there some weighty reason for permitting the evil?
A. The woman may die if the cancer is left untreated.

In the case of a cancerous uterus, it is moral to start a course of chemotherapy even though this may lead to the death of the baby. This is a classic case of double effect which meets the four criteria that are necessary. Now let us look at the case of induction to treat a case of severe sepsis.

The Case of Induction for Severe Sepsis

- (1) Q. Is the act itself morally good or neutral?
A. **Inducing a non-viable baby to certain death is not a morally good or neutral act.**
- (2) Q. Are only the good consequences of the action intended?
A. The removal of the infected membranes is intended the death of the baby is not.
- (3) Q. Is the good effect produced by means of the evil effect?
A. The removal of the infected membranes is brought about by delivering the baby to certain death. **The good effect is produced by means of the evil effect.**
- (4) Q. Is there some weighty reason for permitting the evil?
A. The woman may die if she is left untreated.

In the case of sepsis, only two of the criteria can be answered correctly, therefore induction is not a moral treatment for severe sepsis.

Pope Pius XII

Pope Pius XII gave us the correct way to interpret these situations in his allocution to large families of November 26, 1951.

"Never and in no case, has the Church taught that the life of the child must be preferred to that of the mother. It is erroneous to put the question with this alternative: either the life of the child or that of the mother. No, neither the life of the mother nor that of the child can be subjected to an act of direct suppression. In the one case as in the other, there can be but one obligation: to make every effort to save the lives of both, of the mother and of the child.

It is one of the finest and most noble aspirations of the medical profession to search continually for new means of ensuring the life of both mother and child. But if, notwithstanding all the progress of science, there still remain, and will remain in the future, cases in which one must reckon with the death of the mother, when the mother wills to bring to birth the life that is within her and not destroy it in violation of the command of God - Thou shalt not kill - nothing else remains for the man, who will make every effort till the very last moment to help and save, but to bow respectfully before the laws of nature and the dispositions of divine Providence." (Pius XII, Allocution to Large Families, November 26, 1951).

God is the Author of Life

When we bow respectfully before the laws of nature and the dispositions of divine Providence we are recognising that God is the author of life and that it is God who gives life and God who takes life away. We are also recognising the weakness and limitations of our own humanity. What I found to be quite amazing around the time of the Savita Halappanavar case, was that no-one ever suggested that the first correct course of action for all of the people involved was to have recourse to Christ in prayer. This is Christ who raised Lazarus from the dead, the same Christ who raised Jairus' daughter from the dead and who raised the widow's son at Naim from the dead. Christ also cured the centurion's servant. Christ has not changed, and he will still work the same miracles for us if we ask Him with faith.

The Catholic position seems to have been Abandoned

One of the problems that I perceive in our current battle to save unborn children is that we seem to have almost totally abandoned the specifically Catholic position in our public discourse. It seems to me that the larger pro-life groups in this country could be correctly classified as being primarily anti surgical abortion. They do not publicly oppose the abortifacient contraceptive pills or contraception in general. Many of those involved may be opposed to contraception in their own personal lives, but it is not an issue that they care to deal with publicly despite the fact that unborn children are killed through contraceptive use.

I believe that a great disservice is done to the Catholic Church when Catholics will only use non-religious, secular arguments to promote their cause in the public square and when they fail to publicly mention Jesus Christ. It gives credence to the lie that you cannot argue the pro-life case or the case against same-sex relationships from a specifically Catholic point of view.

We Must Remain Steadfast in the Proclamation of Christ's Truth

We will only win the pro-life war if we remain steadfast in the proclamation of Christ's Truth. In our modern day, the pro-life battle is mainly portrayed as being against abortion, and surgical abortion in particular. But this is only a part of a greater war against humanity. Abortion is a symptom of the problem, it is not the problem itself. The real war is against the Catholic family, instituted by God.

Another statistic that you rarely hear about, is that 1 million children in the United States of America will become the victims of their parent's divorce this year. This too is a pro-life issue because the main driver of abortion is pregnancy outside of sacramental wedlock. The scourge of divorce, for various reasons, increases the number of children conceived outside of marriage who are therefore in danger of being aborted. The very concept of Sacramental Marriage is being destroyed and ripped asunder by the availability of divorce and yet there is no one campaigning against divorce here in Ireland.

These issues are all in need of urgent discussion particularly because of the war that is raging within the Catholic Church in these times. If the Catholic Church loses her moral credibility in the world, particularly with regard to marriage and family life then, literally, all hell could break loose.

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