

From the Pastor

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Stand Up for Life

“Wake Up America!”

These words were spoken by Fr. John Corapi in the days leading up to the 2004 presidential elections. In the particular talk in which he spoke these words, he issued a challenge to Americans regarding the sin so many participate in – the sin of abortion. His call was directed at Americans who would soon be entering the voting booth and his point was that Americans should take greater care when choosing who will lead the country. In this regard, to those who have worldly power and influence, moral responsibility is expected. Those granted worldly power should always be clear minded with respect to what constitutes the Good. And those who support them in the voting booth must keep in mind that they are participants in the laws and decisions that person enacts. While Fr. Corapi challenged Americans in general, he particularly directed his comments to Catholics whose vote should make a difference in eliminating the widespread availability of abortion but rarely does.

The Catholic Church has consistently taught that abortion is an intrinsic evil which means that every instance is a gravely sinful act. In fact, this sin is listed among the sins that “cry out to heaven for vengeance.” With regard to this evil, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph 2271) states, “Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law.” In the following paragraph, the *Catechism* continues by teaching that abortion is an intrinsic evil, that is, one in which *no circumstance or intention* can justify it. In fact, the *Catechism* reminds the faithful that the most serious Church penalty is attached to this particular sin. It states, “Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the

canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life.” From this quote, it is clear that this particular moral evil must never be taken lightly and people of good conscience must do all in their power to eliminate it from their midst.

Keeping this in context, we must also recall what the *Catechism* teaches on the reality of sin (cf. paragraph numbers 1846-1869). Yes, we know that sin is a violation of the objective order and thus an offense against God. Yes, we know that sin is a personal act. Yes, we are aware that sin can be venial or mortal and it is particularly committing the latter that should be of concern to everyone. But few, in this relativistic age in which we live, realize that we do have “responsibility for the sins committed by others when *we cooperate in them*.” It is on this particular point that there has been a serious breakdown in recent years. The key connection to the teaching on abortion for all concerned is the Principle of Cooperation.

The sin of abortion is rampant in our country and, even though there are many who may have never been in or near an abortion clinic, they may well *have cooperated in that sin*. What we often forget is that the Principle of Cooperation has two types – material and formal cooperation. With regard to this principle, we are talking about an individual who is not the principle agent in the immoral act committed but has in some way cooperated in its accomplishment. Those who give support to a system that permits abortion and offers reasons why it should remain available are cooperating in the evil formally. Thus, a person who votes for a politician because that politician favors abortion is a formal cooperator in any abortions that result from legislation enacted by that politician.

In the context of the teaching on sin, as the *Catechism* notes, “sin creates a proclivity to sin.” In other words, as fallen creatures we tend toward acts that are sinful and, if we are not careful, may fall into sin. Repentance should follow such falls because to leave it unchecked will tend toward further sin. It is the responsibility of every person to work at controlling that tendency in order to break the cycle of sin. Each person is responsible to properly form his or her conscience so that he or she is able to recognize which acts are good and which are sinful. The well formed conscience seeks God’s Grace in order to will acts that are good and avoid acts that are sinful. In this way, the person with a well-formed conscience recognizes what is truly good and seeks to establish an habitual disposition to do the good. In traditional terms, the well formed

person seeks to grow in virtue. The hinge in the discussion at hand is the proper formation of one's conscience.

Those with a poorly formed conscience often fail to recognize the good and may establish an habitual disposition to certain sins. The more one sins without repentance, and continues to sin, the more one is likely to repeat the same sin. The cycle of sin begins under such conditions and it is for this reason the Catechism teaches that "sin creates a proclivity to sin." This process is confirmed in Psalm 36 which reads, "Sin speaks to the sinner in the depths of his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes. He so flatters himself in his mind that he knows not his guilt." It should be made clear that such muting of the conscience does not change the offense in the objective order. Falling into the cycle of sin places the individual soul in a precarious state in which it knows not its guilt but guilt is imparted nonetheless. Great care must always be taken by the individual to gain self-possession and self-control. The well-formed individual is driven to will only good acts and is fully capable of preventing the self from willing acts that are sinful.

In this regard, we can speak of a spiritual form of rationalization that our secular culture has formed in many today. Even though someone says something outwardly, inwardly he or she may entertain disordered/sinful desires and at times acts on them. Our culture is so entrenched in defending the "right" to sins of the flesh that it has established a milieu that does not hinder access to them. The problem of abortion remains unresolved because Man possesses a fallen nature and, having culturally bought into hedonism as a way of life, seeks public approval of certain immoral acts, especially those known as the sins of the flesh. To this end, there are secular forces responsible for forming ethical knowledge but these forces begin with a denial of our fallen nature and its power to lead us astray. Our culture wants abortion to remain available because our fallen nature wants no restrictions to sins of the flesh. The secular powers are offering an errant logic that has resulted in a normalization of our fallen proclivities.

The tension in our country has developed because there are those of good conscience who recognize the evil for what it is and seek to put things back in their proper order. It is within this realm that they have set themselves against the secular error and sought a reform that leads every conscience toward the Truth. If we are to stand up for life, we must first admit the root of the problem that impacts us all, that is, the current approach to the deadly sin of lust which is

promulgated today as an uncontrollable instinct. This deadly sin flows from our fallen nature and, like the others, must be kept under control, which has always been the reason parents and society shared in the proper formation of conscience.

Stand up for Life - Part II

The proper formation of conscience has always stood at the center of our moral life. For centuries, the Church, society, and families agreed on what constituted the basis for a properly formed conscience. The first part of the process was to admit that there are certain acts that ought not be done or could only be done under certain conditions. Although one may experience an impulse to act a certain way, that person was to learn how to control that impulse through self-discipline. Being able to control oneself is extremely important if one is to live a moral life. In addition, one must also subordinate his or her personal desires to the wisdom of those charged with imparting knowledge of the True Good that forms the basis for moral action. The formation of a good conscience takes this wisdom into account and strives to live in accordance with it. In order to do so, a person needs to cultivate the ability to stop himself or herself when on a certain course that will lead to an immoral act. The following example offers an insight into the process as we find it today.

Years ago while attending a commuter college I was in need of a car. Being a college student, I did not have a great deal of money and the easiest solution for someone in my position was to find a dependable used car. After a brief search, I finally found a car in my price range that was mechanically sound, although the body was not in good shape and the mileage was high. The engine ran smoothly and the transmission had been recently replaced. Within a few days it was on the road and I was off to college. The car faired very well during my first semester. It started every day and made the 20 mile round trip without a problem. By the end of the semester I was convinced that I was a wise investor and would be driving the car for years to come.

However, as the second semester began, I noticed the brakes were not functioning as well as when I first purchased the car. For the most part, I was not concerned because I was still able to control the car. With each passing day, the pedal became a bit “softer” and required additional

pressure to stop the car. By the end of the week, the pedal had to be pumped more than once to stop the car. On the way to the college one morning I nearly hit another car from behind because the brakes had practically failed.

At that point, with my heart still racing, I immediately pulled in to the next service station and asked for help. The mechanic opened the hood and checked the level of fluid in the braking system. It was practically empty so he gladly filled it for me and gave me a quart of the fluid to use until I returned to my own mechanic. He said that to lose that much fluid meant there was a leak that had to be found and repaired. Of course, being a poor college student, I was not prepared to pay the high cost of repairing the system so I decided to keep plenty of brake fluid in the car just in case. Each morning I would add some fluid and was able to make the round trip without any problem.

About one month later the car was unable to make the round trip so I began adding fluid before leaving the campus. All the while I kept applauding myself for my mechanical ingenuity. During this period, my father kept asking if I had taken the car to the local mechanic to have the problem properly addressed. Of course, I was convinced that I knew what the real problem was and he did not understand the situation from my perspective. Because my procedure was obtaining the desired results, I continued along smug in the fact that I was saving myself a good deal of money. After all, the mechanic would most likely charge me a large sum of money for work that, based on my personal experience, was unnecessary.

Yet my father's voice echoed in my conscience each day as I poured more fluid into the system. Why did he keep asking the question over and over? For sure, I knew the car better than he did because I drove it every day. While it was not perfect in its braking ability, the car still stopped when I pressed the pedal. Is that not the purpose of the pedal and braking system? Is not the stopping of the vehicle the desired result. So long as I stayed on top of the fluid levels I obtained results and that was all that mattered. How could anyone else know what was needed better in this situation than I?

Anyone who has owned an older car can see where this story is going. One day while returning home a car cut me off. Although I was only going about 30 MPH, I hit the brakes hard and started to veer away from the other car. In that instant, I was not thinking about fluid levels,

although they were relevant. I was not concerned with mechanical procedures, although they needed to be followed. I only wanted the car to stop as quickly as possible and I had to rely solely on the system that *I had put in place*, a system in which I did not take into account such eventualities.

The flaw in my little procedure had to do with the principles of safety, which mechanical engineers take into consideration when designing a system. The responsibility of an engineer is to design a system that works under every condition and situation. Even in their imperfect human knowledge they are wiser with regard to the system they developed than the average car owner. In this case, mechanics and engineers know that when hydraulic fluid is leaking from a closed system, it is best to address the cause of the leak because only addressing the symptoms will not solve the problem. As I now know, when the volume of fluid leaking continually increases, it means the hole is getting larger. By not addressing the cause of the problem and ignoring the advice of experts, when put in a position where there is no time to make changes, the system in place will continue along the same trajectory it is already on. In the heat of a moment, a flaw in the system is exploited and can lead to disastrous results.

Fortunately for me, when the braking system failed under pressure, the car was nearly stopped and there was no further damage. The car was towed to the repair shop and the problem, a dried out hose that finally gave way under pressure, was properly resolved. Not addressing the problem properly from the beginning, that is, replacing a \$3.00 hose, could have cost me my life. Although there were many indications and voices of reason available to me before this situation occurred, it was my own disordered obstinacy that left me vulnerable. This story is offered as an analogy of the moral situation in the world today and the impact that secular thought has had regarding the proper formation of conscience, especially with regard to the indulgence of lust and its connection to the prevalence of abortion.

Stand up for Life - Part III

The above analogy of mechanical specifications and automotive braking systems has a variety of lessons that can be learned. We know that every car manufactured requires a working set of brakes as part of its total design. For a car to be what it is, it should not only have an

engine to impel it forward, it must also be able to come to a stop as needed. Based on design specifications, every car manufacturer provides manuals for service and safety procedures that need to be followed for the car to fulfill its purpose, but responsibility for the whole is granted to the owner/driver. Under normal conditions, an owner follows the directions and is kept safe. But what if an enemy decided to alter the braking system of the car and issue a counterfeit manual filled with misinformation so as to deceive the owner into complacency regarding the progressively failing braking system? What if the braking mechanism on one wheel was disabled? The car may still be able to stop but might show signs that something is not working properly. If left alone, the owner may become accustomed to the loss of braking power and adapt his or her driving habits to accommodate the situation. In fact, with time he or she might become accepting of the situation because the counterfeit manual is indicating that all is “normal”.

But what if the braking mechanism on a second wheel were to be disabled? Clearly, the specifications given from the manufacturer have been violated and the ability to stop the vehicle impaired. The owner may become concerned because he or she suspects something is awry yet, because the desired result of stopping still occurs, he or she may grow in a false security that all is well. Although the “signs” are there that something is wrong and his or her life is in danger, the information he or she is getting from a presumed “expert” source indicates everything is operating properly. What would it take to get this person to “wake up” and acknowledge the truth regarding the brakes. Would the mechanism on a third wheel have to be disabled? Would the disabling of all the mechanisms be enough? Obviously, if all were disabled, the person would most likely not get another chance to realize that he or she had been deceived. The result of driving such a car would be disastrous and the consequences irreversible.

Since the very beginning of Man’s existence, God has revealed the moral Truth and asked that this Truth be lived by every human being. True happiness comes from living this moral Truth. At the heart of the Church’s mission over the centuries has been the proper formation of consciences in relation to God’s moral Truth, that is, God’s salvific design. For centuries, Catholic parents and families accepted this as so and worked diligently to form the conscience of future generations in relation to the Truth. As has been repeated so often in recent decades, the family has always been and remains the domestic church and should always strive to incorporate

itself into the Universal Church. When it comes to the formation of conscience, *the parents are the primary formators*. However, for them to be true to their parenthood, they should always remember that they can only draw from and remain faithful to the font of moral Truth in the formation of their children, a font which flows from the Magisterium of the Church. For centuries, the Teaching Office of the Church has sought true wisdom and offers the fruit of that wisdom to God's faithful people. Every parent must attach himself or herself to that teaching office and embrace its wisdom in all its beauty.

A significant aspect of the proper formation of conscience is to recognize the powers that drive the individual and the unique human capacity to exercise proper control over those powers. The tension today has to do with the modern philosophical and psychological hijacking of the proper understanding of the human passions as developed in scholastic thought. A fuller treatment of this is beyond the scope of these reflections but the impact is highly relevant. Today, many "act" under the presumption that they are controlled by external forces or internal impulses and thus try to deny personal responsibility for acts committed. Yes, there are powers that impel us in particular directions but every "human act" that comes forth from an individual must be the act of a responsible and free human person. The Truth of Moral Goodness is planted in the heart of every human being but the living out of that Goodness has been corrupted by Original Sin. However, God has given human beings the power of reason, a power which no other creature possesses. This means that only those endowed with human nature can discern and come to an understanding of what is Good and what is Evil. It is through this "reasonable" process that the conscience is formed in Truth and is capable of directing the will toward to the Good alone. Just because an individual is compelled in a particular direction does not mean he or she should act on that compulsion. The *well-formed* conscience is the braking system that must always be operative in order to stop the person when passion is driving him or her into an immoral act.

However, especially during the most recent century, modern "experts" have been altering the understanding of the moral braking system that the Church has always known to be necessary in order to lead a life according to the Creator – God. These experts, while knowledgeable about certain observable aspects of the human person, begin with a fundamental error that the good can be constructed and anything that produces a desirable outcome is most likely a good that should

be promulgated. These experts have been slowly disabling the moral braking mechanism for many and have been convincing the populace that not having control is normal. They abuse words like instinct and have effectively convinced many that instinctual powers cannot be controlled. Thus, many people today give in to the heat of a moment without concern for the Truth that should be lived in Truth at that moment. These experts have reduced the conscience to relative perspectives and have sought to “empower” the individual to decide what he or she thinks is “right” or “wrong” in a variety of situations. So long as he or she feels good and another is not hurt, it is considered a good to be done. Such thinking has been the weeds that have been planted among the wheat, especially when it comes to understanding the nature of human sexuality and its inherent spousal significance for personal union and procreation.

Stand up for Life - Part IV

In examining the widespread secular error that has deteriorated the moral braking system for many today, a deterioration that has fueled the culture of death, it is clear that certain long-standing tenets of morality had to be eliminated for abortion on demand to become acceptable in the minds of so many. As an important part of this discussion, we must always keep in mind that the devil, as St. Peter tells us in his first letter, “prowls like a roaring lion” looking for souls to devour and that the only way to resist him is *by being solid in the Faith*. From the very beginning of time the “serpent” has sought to usurp God’s place and disrupt the relationship that He established with His Creation. Of all the beings created, only Man has the capacity to know and love God as well as understand the *objective order established by God* and will certain acts in accord with it. The devil *has not and can not change that order* but has repeatedly confused Man’s understanding of that order in an effort to create a rift between God and Man, a rift that is called Sin. This confusion flows out of the disordering of the passions, which ought to remain under the control of right reason and a properly formed conscience. In the moral confusion wrought by the devil with regard to God’s Truth, souls are rendered vulnerable to the wiles of the devil, who will devour the unsuspecting soul. The obfuscation of the objective order and the resultant confusion regarding the moral actions demanded by God come as a result of a diminishment of *moral vision* by those immersed in a cultural milieu filled with error.

Thus, the question remains, “How is it possible that so many today are able to justify and approve of the outright killing of millions of innocent lives in the womb?” The simple answer is that the moral braking system with regard to what God established as the *marital act* has been effectively disabled on a vast as well as individual scale. In the name of science, an errant ideology has been propagated through the education system and media that has convinced many the sexual act is about self fulfillment and personal pleasure, not spousal union and procreation. The spreading of this error has been aided by the proliferation of artificial means of contraception, which has seemingly provided a system that no longer requires brakes. Through a widespread process of social engineering, which has fueled the contraceptive mentality, there is now an indulgent generation. This has come about even though the Church has consistently pointed out the Truth of what is required to have a well-formed conscience and the responsibility all have in regard to the moral law. By not taking into account our fallen nature and the resultant human weakness, the secular powers have opened the doors to temptation and obscured the reasons for controlling the passions. In this regard, we read in *Humanae Vitae* 17:

Responsible men can become more deeply convinced of the truth of the doctrine laid down by the Church on this issue if they reflect on the consequences of methods and plans for artificial birth control. Let them first consider how easily this course of action could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards. Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings—and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation—need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law.

In the larger picture into which the problem of abortion fits, we must recognize that the *Catholic Teaching on Marriage was established by Jesus Himself* and the development of this particular doctrine *has always followed a continuity that has remained faithful to its foundation*. In short, the doctrine has consistently identified that there are three Goods of Marriage – procreation, faithfulness, and sacrament. In the objective order established by God, procreation, and the act thereof, *belongs only in Marriage*, that is, within the permanent and indissoluble *Union* between one Man and one Woman. This *Union* comes into existence through vows spoken in Truth, first verbally in church and later non-verbally through the body through consummation. The marital act itself, *in order to be true to its own nature*, must always be free, total, faithful,

and fruitful, that is, an act that is unitive and procreative. Engaging in the act in any other way is a lie, that is, a sin.

It is in this light that we see how Marriage and the marital act have been under an ideological attack for some time. Many today are convinced that the two are no longer ordered one to the other. As we see from the secular worldview inculcated through the education system and the media, the marital act is no longer considered marital; the Good of procreation has been severed from Marriage; and the act itself has been severed from its procreative end and is presented as purely existing for the purpose of personal self-fulfillment. The result is the contraceptive mentality that fuels the culture of death. Such can only be possible in an environment in which self-denial, self-giving, self-discipline, and self-control are touted as impossible. Or, as expressed in this context, the driving power generated by the passions which impels someone forward are uncontrollable and should not be frustrated by any braking system. At best, as the secular rhetoric goes, one should deal with these uncontrollable passions in a “safe” or “safer” manner. As I once convinced myself, “just add a little more brake fluid and everything will be OK.” However, we can no longer ignore the problem as the souls of too many hang in the balance.

In our culture today, many have been convinced that the traditional mores are no longer required or that the system, which has been altered, is working fine – except, of course, when there is an “accident” or “mistake”. The only way left to correct a failed attempt at avoiding conception, or a disordered use of the marital act, is to eliminate “the mistake,” that is, the human life that was conceived. If “the mistake” is not fixed, the new life conceived will alter the life and lifestyle of the conceivers, an alteration touted as unacceptable and to be avoided at all costs. Such rhetoric feeds the narcissistic egoism that flows from our *Fallen Human Nature*. We can and do know the Truth and we can and do have the capacity to act in accord with that Truth yet there is a taint within all of us that wants to circumvent that Truth. The contemporary secular rhetoric exploits the taint within us and removes incentives to keep the moral law. Of this, we have been warned by St. Paul in his second letter to Timothy:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be

persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths.

In light of this discussion, it was Mother Teresa who once said, “It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.” This is a woman who would care for any child for any reason and never count the cost. This is a woman who ministered to the weakest and the poorest in order to bring them the dignity of which society had deprived them. She did this at her own personal expense. She also once noted, “Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what it wants.” These particular quotes are very revealing because they identify the deeper constructs of the altered tenets that have led many to believe abortion is an acceptable and reasonable “choice”, that is, who follow the modern teachers who deny the Truth and have been diverted to myths.

In this light, it is a cold and hardened heart steeped in a severe cycle of sin, not a loving heart, that could “choose” to kill a child in the womb and it is even more egregious that it is done because someone wishes to maintain his or her lifestyle. The fact of the matter is, especially in light of our fallen proclivities and the errant desire to normalize our fallen state, abortion has become the fail-safe for those steeped in the contraceptive mentality, that is, a mentality steeped in unrestrained, immediate and on demand self-pleasure and gratification – a mentality in which brakes are seen as the problem.

Stand up for Life – Part V

In continuing the discussion regarding the evil of abortion, it should be clear that the main reason so many support it is the result of powerful secular forces that have promoted an ethical system that does not teach restraint of our fallen proclivities, especially in the realm of human sexuality. The appeal of this system to the unreflective person is great — who would not like a system that allows for unbridled indulgence? At the heart of this system, according to the secular rhetoric, is that abortion is a private “choice” that should not be restricted by force of law. Have we ever stopped to ask why this is the case and why people work so hard to protect a

“choice” that is clearly an intrinsic evil? The secular reasons given for keeping abortion on demand legal, when examined in terms of their underlying themes, do appeal to the selfish and self-centered aspect of our fallen human nature. Without introducing the pitfalls that are part and parcel of our fallen nature, the appeal is great and the result has become a culture of pleasure seeking over virtue, living a lie over the Truth.

However, when it comes to objects of pleasure and the ordering of actions in relation to them, the Church has always taught that great care be taken because pleasure is not a “guide” to moral action and our will should never be under the dominion of our passions or emotions. For an action to be truly human, it must always be ordered to its proper moral end and such ordering demands reason-centered self-control. True reason, in this context, must be enlightened by Faith. The whole process of forming the conscience, a process that continues throughout life, is to learn how to properly order and discipline what in the breviary of St. Ambrose has been dubbed our “rebel passions.”

As a way of example, every parent wants his or her child to form a healthy diet. Parents know what children do not — that certain foods are important to physical health while others must be kept in moderation or avoided altogether. Thus, a parent teaches a child to *discipline* himself or herself with regard to eating sweets such as chocolate. Of course, anyone knows that if a child is left alone with a plate of vegetables and a plate of chocolate the child will *want* to eat the chocolate first. It is only through formative *discipline* and parental oversight that the child will learn to eat the vegetables first and moderate chocolate intake, consuming it only at specific times if at all.

What parent would not be concerned if the local school began teaching children that they are able to decide for themselves their own level of chocolate consumption? What if the health teacher were to say, “we know they are going to eat chocolate anyhow... We just want them to know that they can figure out the best time and amount to eat?” What if the school started handing out chocolate without parental consent? In the case of a child’s diet, I think a parent’s reaction is quite predictable. Furthermore, parents would join together and demand that such a curriculum be eliminated while issuing a call for a greater respect for their role as parents. In

fact, everyone would agree that they are completely justified in their request because parents are the primary formators of a child with regard to chocolate consumption and diet.

Whenever any topic of morality is discussed, it is the truly reasonable person who can understand the divine ordering of all things to their proper end and is capable of forming his or her actions in accord with that ordering. However, this formation cannot be accomplished in isolation — individualism and relativism do not work as a moral formation system. In this regard, everyone needs input from Wisdom in order to direct all actions to a proper moral end. The lifelong formative process ought to yield a level of *self-discipline* so that a person can control himself or herself when drawn to an inappropriate or immoral action.

At the heart of this process is God’s gift of reason, a gift that is unique to Man, through which Man is able to identify His “rebel passions” and exercise control over them. We know through the enlightenment of Faith that if someone wishes to remain in a state of Grace he or she *must* control them. The first step is that we need to understand the *properly ordered end* of an action so that the means chosen to achieve that end are morally ordered in every way. It is the “rebel passions” of fallen human nature that drives Man to use means and seek ends *that are not in accord with the divine ordering*. The key to the discussion here is that Man has been given the capacity for Freedom but that Freedom must always be used to will the Good alone.

What makes this discussion so difficult is the complexity of human nature, a complexity that makes understanding the teachings of great saints like Thomas Aquinas difficult. It is this same complexity that is incorporated into Catholic Teaching, which is why *obedience* to divine authority is so important. Even the magisterium subordinates Herself to Divine Wisdom. It is in this light that we know the Church to be *Mater et Magistra* — Mother and Teacher. And it is She Who infallibly proclaimed in *Evangelium Vitae* 57:

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.

The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a

good end. It is in fact a grave act of disobedience to the moral law, and indeed to God himself, the author and guarantor of that law; it contradicts the fundamental virtues of justice and charity. “Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying. Furthermore, no one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care, nor can he or she consent to it, either explicitly or implicitly. *Nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such an action.*”

Yes, it is time to “wake up” and admit the Truth – that human life begins at conception. Once in existence, the only “choice” left is to protect and preserve that innocent life, from conception until natural death. Regardless of what “choices” were made that brings a life into existence, choices which themselves may have been sinful or disordered, *its dignity is inherent* and “as far as the right to life is concerned, *every innocent human being is absolutely equal to all others.*” Thus, there is no circumstance or intention that makes one human life expendable or would justify another to kill it.

Even though our *Mother and Teacher* has spoken clearly and consistently over the centuries on the various aspects of this topic, both in its specific dimensions as well as its larger context, there still are many Catholics who dismiss this teaching and prefer the brake-less moral system that is part of the culture of death. In this regard, recent surveys have shown that a high percentage of Catholics, albeit many non-practicing, believe abortion should remain legal in all or most cases. The disturbing part of this statistic is that this percentage includes 25 percent of the Catholics *who attend Mass weekly*. Such statistics should give us all a cause to stop and reflect for a moment. The reason that such is true may stem from the fact that Catholics are also influenced by the tenets of social engineering that have been inculcated in our country for decades. Although Catholics are called to live an *other worldly* existence, many are educated in *this worldly* institutions or have been influenced by the streams of information presented through the secular media. These powerful beacons of errant thought have inculcated the contraceptive mentality and advanced the culture of death even within our own walls.

Stand up for Life – Part VI

The issue of abortion, as we have seen, is much more complicated when examined at its root causes. At the heart of this pervasive evil is the fallen dimension of our human nature, *a dimension that must be kept under control if a person is to remain in a state of Grace*. Throughout previous centuries, men of “good will” were formed from a young age to discipline their “rebel passions” and order their lives toward the Good in order to obtain eternal life. However, the generations of the most recent century have been formed to indulge those passions. Thus, the root cause we are dealing with regarding abortion is the deadly sin of lust. It is important to keep in mind that a sin is deemed “deadly” because it engenders other sins. Clearly in this discussion, the deadly sin of lust has engendered the particular sin of contraception and the “failsafe” sin of abortion. However, no matter how hard Man has tried to justify objectively sinful acts or promote those acts as “normal” in his own mind, the offense committed will always be a sin in the mind of God. And it is the latter that is the concern of the Church Who is tasked with leading the faithful in the way of Salvation. The Church Herself knows that worldly ways, the so-called works of the flesh, are in direct opposition to Heavenly ways, the so-called works of the Spirit. As St. Paul instructs us:

Make no mistake: God is not mocked, for a person will reap only what he sows, because the one who sows for his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows for the spirit will reap eternal life from the spirit.

As has been noted, one of the more disturbing statistics is the ever growing number of supposedly “good” Catholics who favor keeping abortion legal. Unfortunately today, many Catholic consciences are not well formed because they are steeped in the worldly, flesh driven notions regarding human sexuality. In the worldly model, the beauty of human sexuality has been reduced to base pleasures and is now understood purely as a need, like eating and drinking, that can only be controlled through satiation. Thus, rather than it being one of the highest human acts of self-giving, an act that is an exclusive and privileged dimension of the loving embrace of a husband and wife — an act understood in relation to its procreative end — sex, in the worldly mindset, is promoted as being solely for the self-satisfaction of hedonic instinctual drives. The widespread campaign of social engineering has slowly disabled the moral braking system

designed by God and has done so through the propagation of the contraceptive mentality, which is driven by the deadly sin of lust. It is unfortunate that so many today do not understand that sexual impulses can and must be restrained. This lack of understanding is what has led Man to promote the gravely sinful use of contraceptives as a good. In this light, then, an even more disturbing statistic than the number of Catholics who support abortion is the number who regularly use contraception and believe they can remain in a state of Grace.

It should be noted that, despite what one may relatively believe or has been erroneously taught, the Truth is, “The Church has always taught the *intrinsic evil* of contraception, that is, of every marital act intentionally rendered unfruitful. *This teaching is to be held as definitive and irreformable.*” Thus, contraception is *always* sinful and, if done meeting the conditions, is a mortal sin. Anyone who commits a mortal sin must refrain from receiving Holy Communion *until they repent and receive absolution* for the sin in the Sacrament of Confession. However, based on a recent study, the majority of American Catholics disregard this teaching in that more than 90 percent admit using contraception and 65 percent do not think it is *always* a sin (i.e., an intrinsic evil). Sadly, the same survey found that as many as 40 percent of American priests do not think contraception is *always* a sin. Yet regardless of one’s relative opinion, every contraceptive act is grave matter and, if done willfully, is a mortal sin.

The fact that the worldly view of human sexuality is prevalent within the Church explains why so many support abortion. At this point, it should be clear to every Catholic that the Church *has always definitively taught* that every procured abortion is the direct killing of an innocent human being, an act that is *intrinsically evil and therefore always sinful*. Yet many Catholics continue to support legalized abortion, including so-called “good” Catholics who attend Mass regularly. This growing culture of death among the ranks of Catholics predictably flows from the contraceptive mentality, which has become widespread among Catholics. However, as our Mother and Teacher has taught, any Catholic who unrepentantly engages in contraceptive acts or cooperates in the sin of abortion should not receive Holy Communion until repenting of the sin and receiving absolution.

With regard to those who give their support to these grave sins, it is important that every Catholic understand the Principle of Cooperation and the specific penalty for those who

cooperate in abortion. While many so-called “pro-choice” Catholics may never enter an abortion clinic or be part of an abortion procedure, they should understand that *their assent to the act of abortion* constitutes what the Church calls formal cooperation. While a full treatment of this principle is beyond the scope of these reflections, it is important to note that cooperation does not only mean that one has physically assisted in the sinful act of another. In the case of formal cooperation, the cooperator “assents to the evil intention of the person mainly responsible for performing the evil action.” Thus, someone who agrees with the current abortion laws and advocates in favor of such laws is said to be formally cooperating with those who are principally responsible for the intrinsic evil of the abortions committed. For those in this category, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2272) states, “Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life.”

Therefore, it is time for us to “wake up!” In this light, it is even more pressing that we Catholics “wake up” and defend innocent human life. In his remarks, Fr. Corapi noted that many who may oppose it still participate in the sin of abortion through their silence in the face of such a grave evil. However, he did not go far enough in his exhortation to explain the silence, that is, the reason why there are so many silent Catholics. In this regard, it is time we expand our efforts defending life by first proclaiming the Truth with regard to human sexuality and its lofty status in relation to *the procreative good of marriage*. This proclamation demands that every “good” Catholic begin living this Truth. What this means is that for those gripped by the deadly sin of lust, it is time to begin cultivating the virtue of chastity in every relationship. For those steeped in the contraceptive mentality, it is time to repent of the Sin and begin loving with a pure heart. For those who support the culture of death, it is time to repent and do penance for the lives lost. Ultimately, as Catholics our voices will not be heard until all of us hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and so order our lives so that we seek daily to please Him alone. It is His voice that speaks in and through our Mother and Teacher — the Church.