



BUILDING RESPECT FOR THE FIRST OF HUMAN RIGHTS: AN INVITATION TO A NECESSARY CULTURAL RENEWAL

*Message of the Catholic Organization for Life and Family
on the occasion of the National March for Life
Ottawa, May 8, 2008*

In a message entitled “The Right to Life: a Question of Justice”, the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) last year called for the extension of the protections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to unborn Canadian children.

This year, on the occasion of the National March for Life, COLF would like to invite all Canadian citizens who respect human life to walk in support of the first of all human rights: the right to life – a right recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2008. With respect to this right, our country is in need not only of legislative reform, but also of a great cultural renewal. One aspect of this renewal is the building of a new awareness of the worth and dignity of every human life from conception to natural death.

Many Canadians are astonished to learn that today, the first human right is not protected in our country at any point throughout the nine months of pregnancy. Polls show that about two thirds of Canadians would support at least some restrictions on abortion;¹ and yet, too many of our pregnancies continue to end in abortion. Canadians abort one embryonic human being for every three live births. It is also a fact that 90% of abortions happen for non-therapeutic reasons.²

Life is the first and greatest of all our gifts. It is a miracle of creation that gives rise to all other rights. Where there is no life, there are no rights; where human life exists, its inherent dignity and worth demand unconditional respect. Respect for life, especially of the weakest among us, is also the gauge by which respect for other human rights may be measured. Where the first of all rights is not protected, is it surprising that other rights are disrespected?

THIRSTING FOR TRUTH

The necessary cultural renewal also involves a deepened understanding of the purpose and meaning of human sexuality. Now more than ever, young people need to hear the truth about the human being. Many of them manifest the despair and disillusionment that stem from a culture that promotes the trivialization of sexuality, and thus of the human being. Many of them have experienced a dependence on pornography and other traps of a culture that turns the human being into an object. Many of them have encountered the heartbreak that accompanies the end of premarital sexual relationships, the consequences of sexually transmitted diseases, or the unexpected “failures” of contraception that have led them to abortion. Many live with the secret pain of post-abortion trauma. And many of them are beginning to suspect that sexuality must have a purpose much greater than mere momentary pleasure.

Our youth are eager to know that they were created for love that is permanent, exclusive, faithful and fruitful, a love whose fullest expression can only occur in marriage between a man and a woman. They want to know the truth about contraception, which has resulted in so many effects that are the opposite of what was promised. Why has the promise of sexual liberation in fact resulted in the dehumanization of women, who are so often treated as objects for sexual gratification? Canadian teens and young adults want to know that their masculinity and femininity are not random or interchangeable, but that that man and woman are made to complement each other – physically, psychologically and spiritually – and that they are called to a lasting and joyful union that is worth preparing for with chastity.

THE VOCATION TO PARENTHOOD

As a society, we also need to rediscover the greatness of the vocation to parenthood. Young women need to hear that motherhood is an immensely important calling that is not less worthy than the career ladder of success, and that postponing or even trading a career for motherhood is an acceptable option. They want to be assured that choosing to be a wife and a mother is neither anti-woman nor anti-progress, but that it is in fact a deeply fulfilling celebration and blossoming of their unique feminine identity and nature. The workplace is also called upon to accept the challenge of accommodating the needs of parents and families.

Young men, too, need to be encouraged that fatherhood is an incredibly important calling and a profoundly rewarding responsibility, and that fathers are not replaceable or dispensable. Countless studies have confirmed that fathers play a crucial role in their children's development. When a new child is formed within the womb, the father is called to one of the most honorable, essential and exciting projects of life.

Let us develop in our youth, the leaders of tomorrow, the interior strength that will transform them into witnesses of the truth about human dignity and the unique character of the human person. Let us promote a cultural renewal that will allow us to regain the greatness and purpose of sexuality, fertility and marriage. In this way, we will also renew the respect that is due to each human life from conception to natural death.

¹ <http://www.lifecanada.org/html/resources/polling/2007PollReport.pdf>

² <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/health42a.htm>

COLF is co-sponsored by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus. It promotes respect for human Life and dignity and the essential role of the family.

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