

The defence of life as condition of legitimacy of a democracy

1. The ethical emergency

What does “ethical emergency” mean? There are aspects concerning conscience and personal behaviours. Not anyone may be able to embody the worth he sees or may find it difficult to see that worth. There is a weakness of will or a darkening of the understanding. However – in my opinion – the ethical emergency has a more dramatic aspect as it becomes a political emergency. I use this word “political” in its true meaning, that is to say in a noble way: politics as reflection and action concerning the order, the structure and the finalism of the “polis”.

The question we have to answer today is “May politics is neutral about the worth of a human life?” Corrupted politics answer “yes”. However, as the sense of politics is to serve the man (this is its specific ethic meaning), it is understood that politics not interested in the worth of human life, which is to say in its own bases, shows that the ethical emergency is a political emergency too.

The neutrality of politics concerning the rising life now constitutes a thesis lucidly expressed by many parts, with many face tings. This neutrality is due to the most deep-rooted claims of the pro-choice culture, which only apparently aims to the decriminalization of abortion. Its true purpose is the ethical demolition of every judgment about the choices concerning the rising life. The language is evocative. Who is not able to scan deeply may find it made of values. But the point is that the “choice” is itself proposed as a value, while it supposes values regarding which it is instrumental. However, is it possible to equalize values as life and its suppression? No, it is impossible. That’s why the “choice” is culturally transformed from instrument into aim. It is the value itself, not its instrument. But this deceiving operation implies the neutrality towards the value of life.

In this perspective we should read the firm refusal of the “look”, which is typical of the pro-choice mentality and custom. Vice versa, it is from the “look” to the not been born child that the culture of life can be born.

It is necessary not to look to be neutral. We need to look to commit ourselves. Our look is different from the animal one because ours is rational. Men can see with their rationality too. Rationality is typically human skill to see beyond what is visible. That’s where the topic of the being born life reveals further unexpected depths.

It essentially concerns the look. It does not even need to deal with the not been born child, not even indirectly. The offer of alternatives and debate are absolutely not to be considered prevention instruments as they somehow deal with the baby, who will live or not depending on the choice. The only possible prevention, in this cultural context, remains to avoid the conception. Therefore, the emphasis on contraception, save the sceptic and tolerant concession of our request concerning “natural methods” and the use of such a language as “responsible procreation”.

If we do need to deal with “debate” and “offer of alternative choices”, at least don’t refer them to prevention, which is to say don’t consider them instruments to avoid the abortion, but instruments to let women make their choice in a more conscious way. This is the culture we have to face.

This is the culture of the not-to-look, to which we object with the one of the look. If my evaluation is correct, the prevention of abortion is founded on the look. This is already true, but it will become truer in the next future, when chemicals and pills will play a great role in the abortive processes, when the external public control will be harder and the being born human life will be once more committed to the human skill to look and love, which is to say that it will be committed to rationality and heart.

But what we are dealing with is not only preventing the voluntary forms of abortion.

In fact, we can imagine the renunciation to the penal sanction prevailing on life, we can try to give the word “self-determination” a less negative meaning as a mother’s skill to choose life for her son, but one condition is essential:

The State's neutrality about life must be wiped out.

This is the great immorality. The State cannot be neutral about living and being killed. The easiest and softest way out from this unacceptable neutrality is the education to respect life. An educating State has to say that a conceived baby is a human being and deserves respect, and that it's a civil duty, although not legal, to welcome and protect life.

However, don't deceive ourselves: the aim is not that easy. Therefore, the difficulties we may find are huge. We may need wisdom, forbearance, an open heart, cleverness, a deeper knowledge, endless ability in dialogue. But we'll never accept the value of life to be banned and labelled as "partial".

2. The right to life as foundation of the human rights

The topic of the right to life is the one all the other topics are based on and I believe it is the foundation of democracy too.

In nowadays, this right is often denied by a certain absolutist and fundamentalist laxism that considering it a kind of Christian "obsession" allowing people to believe but on condition to do so in the secret rooms of convents. Who supports this idea, intending to preserve the so-called "laic state", actually forgets that a "laic state" has its foundation in democratic values rising from the human rights and the first is properly the right to live. So the state is supposed to protect the right to life.

Debating on science and technology does not gain the right meaning if we don't point our attention on the man, the human being in his weaker and more vulnerable condition when the attacks of a blind, utilitarian and ideological technology are stronger: I'm thinking of the dawn and the sunset of life. The ethical problem and the right to life need to be approached with clearness and lucidity. Sometimes, I have felt a kind of inferiority complex among the Catholics. Sometimes, it seems to me that the accuses of us being "obscurantist, medieval, Taliban" to intimidate us when we speak in favour of the right to life worked. When we are accused of being anti-democratic as we would impose our morals to a laic state, we must have the courage to answer that the right to life doesn't have and must have neither a religious nor a political colour: the conceived child is not a political fact, it's not a catholic invention: we are talking about a child, a son! The youngest, the weaker, the more vulnerable son of the human community.

Human rights and civil rights

There is a substantial difference between human and civil rights. The cultural smuggling we are facing is to have considered human rights that are only civil, rights many battles have been fought for. Life is the first human rights. Dignity, identity personal integrity, intellectual and religious freedom are human rights. A Catholic considers this as natural law, God's law, but it's still the human law, which deals with the man and cannot be changed or touched by any majority. A majority can change civil rights, human rights cannot. This is the foundation of all the minorities, which cannot be democratically cancelled. No majority has ever legitimated genocide.

We need courage as without courage our apostolic duty is over before we start it. The apostles were twelve, but not many more were the first feminists at the beginning. They fought their battles and we all know where the radical and individualist thought is now. So, even though we were just twelve, the real matter would be to start yesterday instead of today.

3. Objective, biological and anthropologic foundation of the defence of human life beginning from the conceiving.

Educating to life is, first of all, to authentically purpose the real meaning of human life in a society which is affected by a positivistic vision and often forgets that life is something real to welcome as a gift of both human and divine love.

Who is everyday in touch with the tragic denial of this gift knows that not to accept life not only doesn't enrich but impoverish the whole society too. It impoverishes that mother, that father, that family, that school, that society.

Everyone becomes poorer when life is not welcome.

Today the difficulty of having children depends on the fear of the future, and more than this on the fact that people are not able to consider life a gift they receive any more.

Dealing with the defence of life, we cannot forget the dominant culture and the prevailing ethical relativism, especially about human sexuality. "Giving sexuality a banal meaning is one of the main causes of the contempt of the being born life" [Evangelium vitae, n. 97].

It isn't hard to notice that we're now living in a philosophically divided society, in which the different anthropological visions are so often in conflict and this causes difficulties for both the growing up ones and their parents and educators. In pedagogic terms, any kind of education is supposed to base on a certain vision of man, history and culture; so we can find out many different ways to face the problem of the education to sexuality.

So I find necessary to try to separate and distinguish the different anthropological streams a certain vision of sexuality is based on in the contemporary culture. In fact, there are many and different opinions we can shortly summarize.

A first anthropological vision is based on "scientific" and "neutral" factors, without referring to ethical values, which, they say, are beyond science and concern the individual choices of the person.

This kind of vision aims to ensure information about the anatomic physiologic processes for a healthy use of the sexual function to avoid dangerous infections and the "risk" of pregnancies.

But the ethical aspects of sexuality are not to be disregarded; a human being is not a mechanical process that needs to work as good as possible; a human being is a person, spirit incarnate, endowed with dignity, freedom, responsibility and cleverness and any of his actions is a mark of this being a person.

A second anthropological vision asserts that it is necessary to get rid of any sexual taboo, considered as fruit of the Christian tradition; these taboos are supposed not to let the fruition of sexuality and, first of all, of its pleasure. This pleasure is not compatible with any kind of "inhibition", neither moral nor social. In this logic anything is allowed, everything is normal, even deviances and perversions and society is supposed to ensure to everyone the freedom of choosing the best way to achieve sexual pleasure, this considered as a civil right.

Thus it seems so clear that the person becomes enslaved and tends to enslave others in interpersonal relationships.

A third vision considers sexuality just as social and cultural expression, subject to historical changes, and thus declares that there are no everlasting and immutable moral rules as they're mutable and related to the evolution of customs.

But a man, his dignity, his essential value don't change with the changing society. Moral laws referring to human beings don't change as the cultural and moral context changes: what is good will remain good and what is bad for the human being will remain bad forever.

So, what is the anthropological vision of sexuality, we want to refer to?

It's the one based on ethics considering man beyond history and culture, free and able to make choices in his life, finding the reason of his existence and final aim in God.

4. An international view of the laws which legalized abortion and their effects

“Everyone has the right to life [...]” - Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 3. This principle was developed by the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in 1959, which asserting “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth”. This same Declaration was to be incorporated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. This is to be considered the fundamental principle of the system of international protection of the human rights, as it is surely incorporate in the common conscience of the international community.

The international law, thus confirms a roman-canonical juridical principle, according to which the individual exists as a person.

The rights of the unborn child and his personality were formulated in ancient times by Ulpian, Justinian, Gratian and many other “juris prudentes”. This vision is common to the Judaic, Christian and Muslim cultures.

However, any normative attempt to force the law to abortion or others forms of negation of the human life of the unborn child, clashes with the international law. This law grants “the right to life to unborn children”, protects “babies, especially females, from infanticide”, ensures “invalids the development of their possibilities and the due attention to the sick and the old.

Coherently with this juridical vision, we declare that:

- Since the very first moment of his existence, through the fecundation of the ovule, the human being gains his particular dignity as a person and the rights that are up to him according to his development;
- Since the beginning of his pre-birth existence, the human being has the right to life and to the security for his person;
- Since the very first moment of his existence, the human being ha the right to the recognition of his juridical personality, with all the coming out consequences;
- The unborn child has the right to a law granting his survival and development;
- The politics and the concrete means of demographic planning including an attempt to the unborn child’s survival or health are to be considered against the right to life and the human dignity;
- The unborn child has the right to be legally preserved from any experimentation involving his person or from medical cures not aiming directly to his protection or to his health; the human clonation and any other treatment attempting to unborn child’s dignity must be prohibited: “life cannot ever be considered like an object”.

5. The Italian experience of a thirty-year-lasting law about abortion: evidence of a failure

The law aimed to cancel therapeutic abortions, to reduce the spontaneous ones and to support the clandestine ones. Moreover, it aimed to support the conscious procreation, to support maternity and to defend the human life from its beginning. Concretely, since 1978, facts proved the opposite.

“Therapeutic” abortions are over three million and five hundred thousand, with an average a bit below two hundred thousand a year and an annual ratio of an abortion each three or four child born alive.

The average profile of the aborting woman deals with a twenty-five-to-thirty-four-year-old pregnant woman, mostly married, neither separated nor divorced, sufficiently educated, with one or two children, so in optimal conditions to welcome the unborn child.

Law 194 failed in the struggle against clandestine abortions too, as, according to ministerial valuations, this kind of abortion would count now fifty thousand to sixty thousand unities each year.

The recidivism area among the ones who voluntary abort is 30% higher than those who have aborted at least once yet.

The final opinion on law 194/78 is still extremely negative. After this statement, there is not doubt the preventive part of law 194 has not been applied at all, generating a progressive banalization of abortion.

In spite of the total hypocrisy this law brings, by reading carefully articles 1 and 2 there is a preference for the birth emerging that the State and its social-sanitary structures should follow. Art. One provides all the actions necessary to avoid abortion to be used to limit the number of births to be put in practice. The first question has how voluntary service been turned to better account and what result has been reached, and what has been locally done.

Articles 2 and 5 refer to the duty to help a woman removing the causes which make her abort and to put in practice special intervention when pregnancy or maternity generate problems that cannot be solved with the normal ones. Particularly, art. 2 (paragraph d) finds the support to a difficult maternity in the possibility to involve voluntary service associations. This is provided to be put in practice referring to appropriate regulations and conventions.

Standing to our experience, only a minimal percentage (4.8% in 2004) of the women who go to a CAV has been pointed out to us by public consulting rooms, and today only about twenty public consulting rooms have accepted to stipulate a convention with the local CAV.

If we take a look at the CAV coordination centre's data at our disposal and at the ones from the latest Ministry of Health's relation about law 194, we'll find out that:

- There is no will from the majority of public consulting rooms to involve the local associations (law 194 not applie concerning prevention);
- The main causes in the request for abortion (41,4%) results to be economic (law 194 not applied concerning causes and their removal);

6. Pope John Paul II's call to the "New Feminism": woman allied to life

To be honest, I've never really liked the word "feminism", maybe because, in spite of some undeniable positive results, I experimented the strumentalization of this movement by a certain cultural area which, intending to speak in the name of all the women, changed it into an ideological flag to propagandize the image of a woman as an enemy of life, which is really far from the truth.

The feminism I have been in contact with while voting law 194/78, that legalized abortion in Italy, was yelling its continuous slogans with the aggressivity and intolerance proper of those people who are not seriously looking for solutions, but just want to impose their opinion. Twenty-five years later, a veterofeminism each day more unclericalized is still yelling the same slogans with the same intolerance of those people who are not seriously looking for solutions, but just keep on imposing their cultural model. In the meanwhile, the Italian Movement for Life has been growing with thousands of volunteers, women for the main part. So, which one is the real feminism? On one side, the cold and systematic attempt to break the deep alliance between the woman and life, with a deep break in her psyche, that spreads its effects on the heart, sometimes irremediably, and surely impoverish the whole humankind, as it always happens when a child is not given the chance to be born. Today in Italy: more than 4 million children who have never been given this chance and hundreds of thousands women deceived, offended in their dignity.

On the other side, the choice to support woman and life, together, betting on the inexhaustible resources that deep alliance brings. Today in Italy: seventy thousand children have been helped to be born and tens thousand women welcome and respected in their dignity.

I believe that feminism, concerning maternity, is choosing to support woman and life, together, betting on the inexhaustible resources that deep alliance brings and drawing society's attention on taking the responsibility the social protection of maternity implies.

I am aware that feminism does not involve only maternity, but unfortunately it's true that this is the aspect the most of the attacks are directed by those who think they have the exclusive representation of it. Certainly, the protection of the right to life is a command to all of us, men and women, but as the debate on this topic is mainly conducted by that veterofeminism I spoke about, the rise of a new feminism becomes necessary. A feminism able to express a submerged culture, strongly present, but with no voice. While writing the new feminism Manifesto, I have been thinking of them: the brave women who chose to face a difficult maternity and the ones who supported them.

We started collecting adhesions to the Manifesto in a meeting promoted by the Movement on May 20th 2003 in Rome, by the Chamber of Deputies in the Conference Hall, crowded with women.

We started on four ways: opinion leader women in the cultural and show business area, women involved institutionally, from any political party, women from the academic and journalistic world and all the women who recognise themselves in the Manifesto.

John Paul II wrote: "at the turning point in favour of life, women have a determinant role: it is their duty to promote a "new feminism" able to recognize and express the true feminine genius in any manifestation of a civil society, against any kind of discrimination, violence and exploitation, without resorting to sexist models" (Evangelium vitae, n. 99).

On May 22nd 2003, for the sad 25th law 194/78 anniversary, John Paul II spoke again about this topic: "I renew my invitation to defend the alliance between woman and life and to promote a new feminism especially to you, women" and so on: "there can't be <<real peace>> - the Pope says - without <<respect for life>>, especially if <<innocent and unprotected>> like the unborn children's one is."

So come on, we can and we must use any resource, not only charitable but also even cultural. In addition, change the course!

SACRALITY OF LIFE

Life is sacred (this means that its value is best understood in a religious dimension) but this "sacredness" is perceptible by anybody. Laics and Catholics. There is no contradiction.

It's all about developing the typically human skill to suppose the Transcendent and then try to speak to it. "Sacredness of life" means to suppose that our life has a transcendent sense, related to mystery of the whole creation.

Revealed religions offer answers that are more precise. But this fundamental intuition of the Transcendent, denying the banal and absurd parts of the human existence, is a typical expression of mankind. Recognising the value of human life is that minimum of natural religiosity a man cannot live without unless in desperation and in the most solitary and painful egoism.

The culture of life is the culture of love. The greatness of human life deserves its origin to be related to love. It's not easy: sometimes we feel like little white drops in a huge black ocean. However, this must not discourage us. We must feel, as the Saint Father defines us, the "people of life".

I would like to end my reflection with an appeal coming from the Pope of life. From Evangelium vitae (n. 95): "we are in need of a general mobilization of the consciences and of a common ethical effort to put in action great strategy in favour of life. We must build a new culture of life that confronts today's problems affecting life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper and more dynamic conviction by all Christians; new, because it will be capable of bringing about a serious and courageous cultural dialogue among all parties".

OLIMPIA TARZIA

Presidente Comitato Donne e Vita
(Italia)