

Life Matters - Part 1

To explore the serious topic of how abortion fits in to Catholic social teaching, we will take a look at information published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). To address this topic fully will take two parts because of space constraints. This month, we present Part 1. Be sure to stay tuned for Part 2 next month.

The 2004 Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church specifically and forthrightly condemns abortion in the context of human rights. Often, however, abortion is seen as falling outside Catholic Social Doctrine. In part, this stems from the relatively recent advent of legal abortion and the alarming increase in the number of abortions in the past four decades.

The first mention of abortion in a social encyclical appears in 1971 in Pope Paul VI's Octogesima Adveniens. It was Pope Saint John Paul II, however, who turned the tide, forcefully introducing abortion into Catholic social teaching. In his 1995 encyclical Evangelium Vitae, he addressed the issue at great length in the context of social justice. Pope John Paul saw that abortion deserved central attention in Catholic social thought.

Here are six characteristics to illustrate the uniqueness of abortion as a matter of social justice:



1. Abortion deals specifically with the destruction of innocent life. Though all life is precious, moral theology has always differentiated the destruction of "innocent life" as particularly heinous and always and everywhere worthy of condemnation.

2. The sheer magnitude of the problem: an estimated 40 to 50 million abortions worldwide each year make it a social problem of staggering proportions.

3. Abortion's legal status sets it apart. Unlike other instances of massive killing of human life, like terrorism or serial killing, abortion enjoys legal sanction.

To be continued...

Next month in Part 2, we will explore the other three reasons and conclude with a simple example of how we can address prioritizing Life as a social justice issue.

Susan O, Pro-Life Ministry