

ABORTION AND CATHOLIC FAITH

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AT FIVE IN the afternoon of 10 May, 1968, the tenth International Colloquium on Sexology convened under the sponsorship of the Cardinal Suenens International Center at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. Over one-hundred-fifty registered participants came—theologians, biologists, physicians, lawyers, philosophers, sociologists, journalists, educators, pastors, and psychologists. More than half of them from Belgium itself, but the list also included almost thirty from France, about ten from the U.S., seven from England, five from Canada, four each from Eire and the Netherlands, three from Italy, and one or two from each of eight other countries. The flags of the nations of participants were snapping in the wind outside the meeting hall, a contemporary building located in a new part of Louvain's campus. Representing only themselves, the participants gathered for scientific discussions rather than for practical deliberation.

The common interest which brought together this diverse group was abortion. For that was the theme of the conference, a grey area that matched the drabness of the Belgian sky. And the focus within the tangled area of abortion was the especially grey area of legally authorized abortion—a medical procedure that many of the medical men may be asked to perform and that many of the theologians and others may be asked to advise about.

Beginning with discussions of love and self-control in 1959, the annual Colloquium at Louvain had advanced to an examination of birth-regulation in 1965, and now in its tenth year the group was ready to discuss the

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difficult problems of abortion—a topic which goes beyond the medico-moral issues of sex to involve the medico-moral and legal issues of killing.

As the subject matter of the Colloquium has evolved over the years, so has its format. In earlier meetings, participation was limited to a select group which met in a private home. But for the meeting on abortion, invitations to participate were extended much more widely, and the sessions were held in a modern lecture hall. The hall, with tiered seating, four aisles, shadowless lighting, excellent acoustics, and the most modern electronic equipment, was an ideal setting for such a conference.

As participants gathered, we found every provision had been made for our convenience and comfort. The hotel, Hof Terbank, provided excellent service and very good (if minimum) accommodations for \$4.10 per day, tax and tip included. The languages of the Colloquium were French and English, but simultaneous translation service—similar to that at the United Nations—was provided, with a headset at every place.

American delegates were asked to convey the thanks of the Cardinal Suenens Center to Dr. Mary S. Calderone for the simultaneous translation facility. (Mrs. Calderone edited the volume, *Abortion in the U.S.*, from the 1955 conference sponsored by the Planned Parenthood Federation; precisely what fund she drew upon to provide translation service at Louvain was not announced, but the facilities were very good, and the donor certainly deserves the thanks of all participants who made use of them.)

The fee for registration at the Colloquium was only \$5.00, an amount that would hardly have covered more than the preliminary correspondence and preparations. At the meeting each participant received a prepared dossier of summaries of papers and other useful information, all enclosed in a plastic folder with an individual plastic name tab.

The participants were given, without additional charge, six excellent meals with wine at the lunches and dinners. Although an occasional nostalgic remark about the old days when the Colloquium was more personal indicated that participants of former years felt something important had been lost in the process of moving into the big-time, new participants (like myself) felt the meeting was very well produced and managed.

The program of the Colloquium consisted of invited papers (longer papers, specifically arranged for by the organizers), contributed papers or communications (shorter papers, volunteered by participants and accepted by the organizers), and discussions (rather brief and formal periods of comment both by those on the program and by other participants). The group remained together during all the formal sessions; no sectional meetings or small discussion groups were allowed for in the program.

The rather full program ran from late Friday afternoon until late Sunday afternoon. Meals provided some opportunity for informal discussion, although the noise in the dining hall prevented more than half-a-dozen persons from engaging in a single conversation. Much of the informal discussion took place after dinner and extended late into the night. At any Colloquium or Conference, such informal contacts are quite important. But since each participant has a different group of such experiences, each one's general impression of the whole meeting will be unique.

In this report I will be concerned only with the content of the public sessions (at which at least one working journalist also was present). My report is based on the pre-printed summaries and on my notes, which depended upon the translation service for material delivered orally in French. Therefore, while I have made every effort to be accurate, there is a certain possibility of misinterpretation. In analyzing the vast bulk of the material in order to note the more interesting points, various individuals who spoke in diverse contexts sometimes are grouped together. In these cases, it is important to realize that frequently those who agree upon one point may disagree quite radically on another.

A very interesting presentation early in the program was that of Mme. Dr. Geneviève Abiven, a psychiatrist from Paris. She pointed out that abortion for the sake of the mother's mental health is almost totally without scientific foundation. In reality, such abortion is a method of disposing of pregnancies that women, and perhaps also society at large, simply do not wish to accept. One of the most telling points in this analysis was that the use of such a specious excuse certainly indicates that something important is not being faced honestly. Mme. Abiven returned to this point in later discussions, noting that the tendency of both physicians and moralists to let the other group decide revealed some unadmitted need for evasion.

In general, however, the biological, medical, and psychiatric papers were not impressive. Dr. H. van den Berghé of Louvain presented an invited paper on eugenic indications for abortion. One familiar with the subject could follow the paper and recognize all the familiar, horrible examples. Those unfamiliar with the material may have been impressed by the examples, but they had difficulty following the exposition, which was not reduced to non-technical language.

In another long and not especially interesting invited paper, Dr. M. Chartier of Paris presented a technical statement of various methods of abortion and their medical uses and limitations. Dr. A. Hustinx of The Hague read a very long contributed paper describing the procedure for sorting applications for abortion at the hospital in Leiden. He stressed the long discussion that precedes any approval.

One tendency in the more biological-medical part of the conference was toward agreement that from a scientific point of view there is no particular stage at which one can draw a sharp line in the continuous process of human development. Thus it seems one cannot say scientifically that prior to a certain point the developing individual is not human (and may be killed). Dr. M. Renaer of Louvain, who chaired one of the discussions, observed this tendency toward consensus, but also argued that this did not settle the matter for practical purposes.

Yet the issue has to be settled precisely for practical purposes. Father Arthur McCormack, a member of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, urged in a discussion that some definite conclusion be sought concerning whether life is human and inviolable from conception. If it is, he argued, then several current methods of birth control, including intra-uterine devices, would be abortifacient.

This argument, together with almost everything said at the Colloquium, implicitly assumed that contraception is morally unobjectionable, and that there is no point in even discussing this. Paul VI has not yet spoken, but few at the Colloquium seemed to be waiting to hear from him.

M. René Simon, a philosopher-theologian from Paris, made one attempt to answer the question Father McCormack was concerned about. In a contributed paper, M. Simon, combining Aristotelian philosophy with modern science, argued that the early embryo is not yet capable of fully

human life. Dr. J. Ferin of Louvain cited the figures of Hertig which suggest a high rate of loss of life very early in pregnancy; although Dr. Ferin did not assert that these showed anything, these data often are used to argue that the developing individual cannot be regarded as human from conception.

Another contributed paper, by Professor J. Liefoghe and M. Gaudefroy of Lille, attempted to settle the question by some rather arbitrary definitions. According to them, abortion is impossible until after implantation—that is, around the time of the first missed period after conception. (There are about two weeks between conception and the first missed period.) The colleagues diverged rather sharply in the discussion, for Dr. Liefoghe wanted to define specifically human life by a characteristic pattern of brain waves, which does not appear until rather late in pregnancy, while Dr. Gaudefroy held that life is human from conception and that killing it at any stage would be wrong.

Monsignor Victor Heylen, a moral theologian at Louvain, presented some history of discussions about when the developing individual receives a human soul. Theologians in different eras have held various views. But Monsignor Heylen also speculated in the direction of regarding the truly personal as socio-cultural rather than biological. At the same time, with some confusion, he hoped that the scientists would solve the problem, and pending a definitive answer he speculated on the possibility of sacrificing the questionably human lives of the unborn for the certainly human lives of those already living.

In subsequent discussion, a number of other suggestions were made in the general direction of putting the inviolability of the unborn in question. Monsignor Heylen mentioned that Canon Law does not invoke canonical penalties against abortion unless something is expelled. (This of course does not touch the moral issue, but merely the question of whether those guilty are excommunicated or not.)

Dr. Liefoghe argued that the person is a collection, similar to a heap of wheat, and that at some point of smallness the embryo could not be regarded as a person, just as at some point in taking grains away from a heap, it would no longer be a heap.

Father Marc Oraison observed that one does not have funerals for three-month old fetuses as one has for infants.

Professor Louis Dupré, a philosopher at Georgetown University in Washington, wished to distinguish between life and human life. He held that human life is defined by something transcending the material. The argument about when the soul is inserted is irrelevant, and it depends on primitive notions of soul and body. Better to admit that life begins at conception, but that there are degrees of humanity. Thus the life is more or less human in a continuous process of development. This suggestion, that human life and consequent inviolability is subject to degree, returned in some of the subsequent discussions. If it were accepted, abortion might be considered legitimate on the ground that the less human must give way to the more human (those already born).

There were some sharp replies to these arguments. Mme. Dr. Michèle Guy, a physician from Grenoble, France, argued strongly that there is continuity of development and that there is no reasonable point at which to draw a line. Moreover, against Monsignor Heylen's point that doubt of the fact might permit abortion, Dr. Guy urged that the presumption in case of doubt must be that the unborn is a person. One who kills what for all he knows is a person, is willing to kill a person.

Contrary to the widespread notion that women are more favorable to abortion than are men, the women at the Colloquium seemed to be uniformly against it. Mme. Marie-Thérèse van Lunen, a Belgian journalist, insisted that the Christian tradition did not accept the notion that the unborn might not be persons and could therefore be killed. She also pointed out that mothers who lose a baby by accident are always convinced it is happy, whether that is good theology or not.

At another point in the Colloquium, Mme. van Lunen contributed her own excellent paper highlighting the role of propaganda in the development of abortion-mindedness. Her telling comments were clear and to the point, and included a good many fresh insights. Her paper was a bit long and was cut off before its conclusion—the only paper in the Colloquium to be terminated in this way, although some of the other contributed papers also were much beyond the established limit.

Father Enda McDonagh, a moral theologian at Maynooth, Ireland, argued both in his paper and in later comments that a human individual is equally human at every stage of his life. True, at later stages of development certain functions are achieved that are not possible at earlier

stages. Still the earlier stages are fully human too, for throughout life a man is a potential and developing being. At no one moment does he have the perfection of his whole life; the total reality of human life is found only in the unity of the whole from beginning to end. No one part of a human being's life is more essential, more human, than any other part.

In my own contributed paper, I tried to clarify the problem with a couple of distinctions. We should not confuse the concept of "living human individual" with that of "person." The former concept belongs to biology, and from this point of view it is clear that each human individual comes to be at conception. The concept of "person" is ultimately a metaphysical and theological notion. Thus it is a mistake to expect science to determine whether the unborn are *persons* or not. Still, such a determination is not so central to the issues concerning the morality of abortion as might seem to be the case. For if we think the person has a reality transcending this present life, then persons *cannot* be destroyed, and neither abortion nor any other kind of homicide will be regarded as immoral because a person as such is destroyed. Rather, homicide will be thought wrong because it deprives a person of his human, bodily life—the very life we know scientifically begins at conception.

I also tried to respond to Professor Dupré's suggestion that human life might be subject to degree, to Father Oraison's remark about the lack of a funeral liturgy for the fetus, and to Dr. Liefoghe's analogy between the person and a heap of wheat. All such arguments, it seemed to me, ignored the distinction between mytho-poetic meaning and analytic meaning. In mytho-poetic meaning there is no room for definiteness; everything blends into everything else, and things come to be by gradual emergence. For such thinking it makes sense to imagine that a person comes to be by degrees. Thus the analogy to the heap of wheat, and thus the lack of a funeral rite for very early fetuses. Thus also the plausibility in the idea that some human beings—the unborn, for example, or Negroes—are less human than others.

Analytic thinking, by contrast, admits that while a given thing can be more or less in various ways, a thing cannot be more or less what it is. Thus a human being can be more or less deeply pigmented and can be more or less fully grown. But it is nonsense, from any scientific or legal point of view, to think of human beings as more or less *human*. Those who want to

rationalize any sort of attack on human beings and their rights naturally resort to mytho-poetic thinking. But analytic thinking must be employed if we wish to learn what is and what is not morally right.

Father McDonagh's paper was the main paper on the moral aspects of abortion. The paper had been invited only a few weeks before the Colloquium, but it was very well written and showed the results of a good deal of thought. The substance of this paper was a fairly clear discussion, without any definite conclusion, of ethical issues involved in abortion. But the manner in which the paper was written suggested its author's sympathy for the view that in some cases abortion is not morally wrong. This suggestion was conveyed in several ways. Father McDonagh labeled the traditional Catholic precept forbidding abortion "the present, official position," while he referred to a recent Anglican report approving abortion in certain difficult cases as a "considerable Protestant development." Recent Protestant teaching was given the honorific title "more flexible"; we were assured that this "more flexible" teaching did not mean that other Christians had "sold out."

Father McDonagh also pointed out that the traditional position allows the baby all the rights and no responsibilities, and he asked whether this is fair. Again, he argued that not merely the fact of life but the quality of life is the object of "Christian concern." He suggested that moral theology could not reach decisive conclusions independent of the intuitions and experience of those who might be called upon to perform abortions. And he treated the condemnation of abortion as a conditional *right*, thus indicating that the rejection of abortion is not a strict duty for all Christians and teachers of the Christian faithful.

The substance of the paper followed a pattern that has been used often in the contraception debate. First, a review of "present" Catholic and other Christian positions. Then a glance into history, which reveals that certain Catholic moralists have at times approved abortion in difficult cases. (This was during an epoch when it was believed, quite mistakenly, that science can demonstrate that the embryo is not "ensouled" during the first six or twelve weeks of life.) Next, the sound point, mentioned above, concerning the unity of human life. Father McDonagh does not propose to evade the moral issue by the easy but intellectually confused route of questioning the basic humanity of the unborn. After that, the argument

that the traditional prohibition of killing has allowed some exceptions—for example, the just war, capital punishment, and self-defense. Even in the area of abortion, killing has been permitted if it is *indirect*. By Father McDonagh's definition: "Indirect killing, where one did not will the death of another but merely permitted it, followed from an action not of itself directed to his death but to the achievement of some comparable good. His death followed as a *per accidens*, if inevitable, consequence of one's good action."

Here we must stop a moment and notice that traditional moral teaching has indeed accepted the moral legitimacy of indirect abortion, although the definition of "indirect" has usually been rather more strict than Father McDonagh suggested. The typical example of an indirect abortion would be the surgical removal of a cancerous womb, even though the developing embryo within that womb surely would die. In cases such as this, the surgical procedure has not even been regarded as abortion; from the medical point of view, the abortion was an incidental and inevitable *consequence* of a vitally necessary procedure that first of all was directed to another and legitimate goal.

Father McDonagh, however, did not stop to exemplify and limit the principle. Instead he mentioned two recent theories, one that of the Protestant theologian, Paul Ramsey, who would permit abortion when the mother's life is at stake on the ground that the unborn may then be regarded as material aggressors—as one would regard a maniac making an attempt on one's life. In such cases, self-defense is legitimate even if it means killing the attacker. The other theory, proposed by some Catholic theologians to support arguments in favor of contraception, is that the good motive alone is enough to make an act indirect, even if the surgical procedure itself is nothing but what is usually condemned. By this rule, which is very flexible indeed, all abortions become indirect if there is a good enough reason for them.

Having opened up the traditional position concerning abortion where the mother's life is at stake—without taking a definite stand on it—Father McDonagh proceeded to raise the cases of the mother's health, of pregnancy resulting from rape, and of the unborn with a probable defect. In general, he seemed unenthusiastic about the prospect of extending moral approval to abortion in all these cases, though he did not absolutely

exclude any of them. Honestly admitting that there is an inherent dynamism which tends always to enlarge the grounds on which killing is permitted, he seemed troubled by his inability to limit a process on which he took it for granted moral thought must embark.

In the final section of his paper, he suggested some of the general framework that he thinks should govern consideration of the morality of abortion. He accepts the currently popular "personalistic" view according to which morality is a function of a person's response to others in given situations. From this viewpoint, one may assume certain general values, which become determined only through personal experience in life. The ultimate standard is the well-being of the perfect human community, which for the Christian becomes identified as the worldly aspect of the Kingdom of God.

With this background, he drew his most important conclusion. He would like to turn attention away from the prohibition of abortion, for he regards negative rules as relatively unimportant. Instead, he would have us seek better solutions for the real needs of those who have abortions. Within this positive context of care for others, he would permit us to discuss the limit cases. How we are to settle them, except by a balancing of everyone's rights, he did not suggest.

This paper ought to have been subjected to immediate and thorough discussion. However, the program had been arranged to preclude immediate discussion. Two invited papers, one of them my own, concluded the long Saturday's sessions. Sunday morning began with a scientific report on current research, by Dr. Jacques Ferin of Louvain. Then an invited paper on legal aspects of abortion and three contributed papers on ethical-legal aspects. Only after all these papers, just before the mid-day meal, was time allowed for a brief discussion of moral and legal aspects, covering the eight papers beginning with Father McDonagh's. Of course, no serious exploration of the issues developed.

The invited legal paper, by Professor P.-E. Trousse of Louvain, mainly reviewed the actual state of law in various countries. However, there were some general observations. The legal concept of abortion, according to Dr. Trousse, includes deadly intervention during the entire period of pregnancy from the very beginning. The law does not recognize any distinction between life and human (personal) life. The laws against abortion were essentially Christian in their inspiration. The legal permission of abor-

tion under very wide indications, particularly at the mother's mere request, easily leads to a justification of infanticide.

Here M. Trousse spoke with considerable authority, for he was a participant at the famous Liège trial, at which a woman who had killed her baby, one deformed by thalidomide, won acquittal from a sympathetic jury. The woman's defense ultimately came to the simple statement: "After all, it was *my* child."

But instead of concluding that abortion should be legally prohibited altogether, Professor Trousse only asked that some legal conditions be established in order that it not be permitted simply at the mother's demand. He felt that a social judgment has to be made to permit abortion in difficult cases.

The presentations of Father McDonagh from a moral theological viewpoint and of Professor Trousse from a legal viewpoint paved the way for the concluding "summary" or synthesis of Monsignor Victor Heylen, Louvain moral theologian. This paper was much more than a summary of what had gone before. It was in fact an integrated argument which made use of some of the earlier presentations but which extended beyond any of them. However, the position of this paper in the program, after the last period of discussion, altogether precluded objection to it by other participants.

Monsignor Heylen's argument assumed that abortion is not intrinsically immoral. He spoke at length about the value and sacredness of life, and the general wish to reject abortion and all other activities that attack life. Still, despite this emphasis on the positive, he opened the door to the approval of abortion both by moral theology and by law. The moral theological argument rested on the supposition that the evil of abortion holds true only in general. In exceptional cases, where there is a conflict of rights, abortion may be the best possible course of action—for example, when the life of the mother is at stake. Here he disdained any attempt at analysis in terms of direct and indirect abortion, and treated the problem straightforwardly as a matter of exceptions to a rule. The rule is only generally valid; exceptions are justified in particular situations.

The theory of exceptions was supplemented by the notion that doing the lesser evil is sometimes necessary because of man's undeveloped condition.

The ideal simply is not attainable by men who are at a very imperfect state of development. Thus regrettable necessities can be morally approved.

A further step in the argument was that man must exercise a ministerial power over human life itself. God gave man responsibility over visible creation. This responsibility, though it is not absolute lordship, must be fulfilled as well as possible, even when that means the killing of human beings. Man's bodily life, after all, does not define his human personality, for man transcends the animal by his interior spirit.

But what of the strong condemnation of abortion, even from the moment of conception, issued by Vatican II? Monsignor Heylen was not in the least deterred by this condemnation. For him, it is only a statement of the general principle, which remains valid despite the exceptions to it that must be made. The fact that the Council did not specifically mention indirect abortion was assumed by him in support of his interpretation, although generally he displayed no interest in the traditional distinction between direct and indirect abortion. (It could also have been argued, if the opportunity had been permitted for argument, that Vatican II assumed the traditional distinction, which does not regard indirect abortion as a *human act* of abortion at all. Monsignor Heylen's way of proceeding, however, treats as morally acceptable acts which he admits to be abortion properly so-called.)

With regard to the laws, he stressed the distinction between morality and law, including canon law. He suggested that the past legal rejection of abortion was based upon the interests of the mother. Assuming the position that law should reflect the consensus of opinion in society, he seemed to conclude in favor of laws permitting abortion under a list of specified conditions.

Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels, concluded the conference with some "pastoral" comments. Actually the talk was rather long and rambling, and the Cardinal managed to include a great deal. He noted with satisfaction that the Colloquium had progressed over the years. He stressed strongly the positive values of life and the action that should be taken to alleviate the problems which lead to abortion.

But Cardinal Suenens also essentially subscribed to the position Monsignor Heylen had outlined. The heart of the matter was expressed briefly

in the opinion that moral theology can only give a general guide or background. Exceptional cases must be treated on a secondary plane, not by a theological casuistry. In the concrete, moral theology, conscience, and personal sensitivity must all converge toward a solution. Although the word "compromise" was not used, the idea seemed to underlie this notion of "convergence"—that a concrete moral judgment must be a compromise between principles and the necessities of each situation.

Although one American presented an invited paper and four others gave contributed papers, none of these was among the most important papers of the Colloquium.

Dr. Bernard Pisani, of St. Vincent's Hospital in New York, presented the opening, invited paper. It was concerned with medical indications for abortion. Dr. Pisani noted that such indications have shrunk almost to none and he took a firm stand against expanding legalized abortion. This presentation, like others that ran against the main current of thought at the Colloquium, was neither attacked nor commented upon. It was simply ignored.

Father James T. McHugh, Director of the U. S. Catholic Conference's Family Life Bureau, summarized developments in the United States with respect to the campaign to loosen the abortion laws. He also summarized the results of the international conference on abortion that was held in Washington last year under the joint sponsorship of the Harvard Divinity School and the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. This conference, while it did not establish a single position, brought together Catholic and non-Catholic scholars, and tended toward the same general position to which the Louvain Colloquium seemed to be directed: the moral acceptance of abortion in exceptional cases and its legalization within defined limits. However, Father McHugh did not note this coincidence. (In his remarks, Cardinal Suenens mentioned the Harvard-Kennedy conference, and noted that Sargent Shriver, who was active in arranging that meeting, had been in communication with him.)

Dr. Frank Ayd, a Baltimore psychiatrist, prepared a paper which was read for him by Mrs. Ayd. Dr. Ayd strongly attacked attempts to loosen the laws concerning abortion. For him, these attempts really aim not at a few difficult cases but at an easy solution to vast socio-economic problems

of eugenics, population, and poverty, and to the personal problem of the failure of contraception. This paper, the last before Monsignor Heylen's "summary," was completely ignored by it, though Dr. Ayd argued plausibly that seemingly moderate liberalization of the abortion laws is only one step along a path toward euthanasia and other violations of human life.

My own contributed paper was limited to the fifteen minutes the program officially allowed for such papers. Hence I made no effort to develop an argument against abortion, because to make a plausible case would take a good deal more time than that. I presented a few distinctions which I felt might help the discussion avoid confusion.

In addition to points mentioned previously, I argued that those who favor abortion must proceed with a very definite understanding of man and the meaning of human life, since otherwise they could not have the self-assurance to know that they have justification for killing. Those who oppose abortion, on the other hand, really wish to keep open the possibility of what man can be, and so they cannot tell when killing is justified. I pointed out also that one cannot take for granted the view that just law is made simply by a majority consensus, since there are rights that even the majority cannot take away.

Professor Elmer T. Gelinas, philosopher at St. Mary's College in California, argued that St. Thomas Aquinas' theory of natural law allowed exceptions to all moral norms. Hence Dr. Gelinas wished to justify abortion in some cases. Begging the question at issue, he argued: justice requires that we practice mercy rather than adhere to the strict requirement of a general norm.

In the discussion, I criticized Professor Gelinas' paper, both because I thought it inappropriate to try to settle the issue by invoking the authority of a theologian, even one of St. Thomas' stature, and because I believed the interpretation of Aquinas to be erroneous. Interestingly enough, Monsignor Philippe Delhaye, a Louvain theologian, also attacked Professor Gelinas for confusing theology and philosophy and for presenting a theory of natural law that was neither true to St. Thomas nor to any modern theory. Monsignor Delhaye was anxious to exclude any traditional solution that might involve casuistry. Thus Professor Gelinas was caught in a cross-fire. And though he wished to reply, Monsignor Heylen found

no opportunity for him to do so during the too brief discussion. In the midst of battle, there was no time to worry about the casualties!

Another American present, though not on the program, was Dr. Frank Notestein, until recently President of the Population Council. This organization has played an important role in funneling foundation and U. S. Government funds into birth control programs around the world as well as into various research projects. Dr. Notestein's presence showed the friendly interest of the Population Council in the Louvain Colloquium. He inquired when we met if I were the person who had received a grant from the Population Council to come to the Colloquium. I answered that I had not received such a grant. He explained that he thought I might be the individual, because it was someone whose name began with "G."

In general, the Colloquium pointed to the following conclusions:

- 1) Individual human life begins at conception.
- 2) Whether such life is to be regarded as personal and inviolable or not is disputed.
- 3) In general, abortion must be considered morally wrong and it should be subjected to legal restrictions.
- 4) In exceptional cases, going beyond the cases traditionally considered as indirect abortion, abortion must be considered morally licit.
- 5) Law should lay down conditions permitting abortion in difficult cases.

Of course, there was no vote on these points. And it would not even be fair to say they represented a consensus, since many present never spoke. But these seem to indicate the *main trend* of the discussion—they contain the message toward which the entire drama seemed to be directed.

Some participants remarked to me privately that they considered the invited papers non-representative. Their feeling was that opinion generally, especially in France, is much less ready to accept abortion than would have appeared from the program's presentations. My own feeling was that those managing the program were quite fair to me. My only question would concern the order of papers and discussions, which did not permit discussion of Monsignor Heylen's very arguable theses and which curtailed very severely discussion of all the ethical-legal issues. But I would rather think

this resulted from bad planning than from bad faith on the part of the Colloquium's arrangers.

One final point. The papers and discussions included some much more extreme statements than anything I have summarized. I did not wish to emphasize these extreme remarks, for that would give an unfair impression of the general trend of discussions, which were much too extensive to summarize easily in a brief article. However, I ought to mention a few of the more extreme remarks, just to provide some example of the variety of opinions expressed.

M. André Perreault, Secretary General of the Institute of Sexology and Family Studies, Montreal, argued in a contributed paper that since procreation should be free and responsible, there was a doubt whether any child that was not freely and responsibly procreated had any right to exist. His entire paper seemed to apply to abortion the same principles most commonly applied by those who favor contraception. Yet M. Perreault concluded his paper by saying he was not urging a certain solution to the abortion question.

At least twice persons intervening in discussion from the floor suggested that since man constitutes reality by human meaning-giving, a developing individual not desired by its parents might by definition be regarded as non-human. One intervention along these lines was by no less a person than Father Pierre de Loch, a theologian and leader of the official Belgian Catholic family life movement. He suggested that unless a couple desire consciously to generate a child, any product of generation might by definition not be human.

This kind of argument arises from a simplistic use of phenomenological philosophy, according to which reality is not simply discovered by the human mind, but is constituted by the mind's operations. I do not think many phenomenologists would imagine the process of constitution of objects to be as arbitrary as Father de Loch's suggestion required! In any case, some special limits have to be recognized in the case of persons, who are more than other objects in the world. And no one can prove that each living human individual is anything less than a person from the very beginning.

Setting aside extremist arguments, I think it fair to conclude that the

general tenor of the Louvain Colloquium is pointing toward a reversal of moral judgment on the abortion issue comparable to that which many have made on the question of contraception. In fact, the justification of abortion follows remarkably similar lines, and an underlying reason for this is that the chief arguments in both cases exclude the notion that there are any acts intrinsically evil—that is, any acts so wrong that they can in no exceptional case be right.

Arguments going so far as this clearly carry a certain implausibility. Not only contraception and abortion would be sometimes justified, but no act could be absolutely wrong: not even infanticide, suicide, euthanasia, genocide, torture, terror, prostitution, slavery, or racial discrimination.

In particular, it is important to notice that once the traditional distinction between direct and indirect abortion is definitely set aside, no argument proposed in justification of abortion fails to justify infanticide as well. The only apparent exception would be attempts to draw an arbitrary line before which the developing individual is regarded as less than a person with human rights. But arguments along these lines are not a real exception, for one can as well draw that arbitrary line after birth as before. Some have actually argued that the live-born child is not automatically a person, and that he becomes so only after some learning from the surrounding society.

The traditional distinction between direct and indirect abortion clearly needs to be investigated and explained more fully. But certainly this distinction does not correspond to that between a general rule against abortion and exceptions permitting it in difficult cases. The traditional Christian ethics held that the ultimate meaning of human life transcends our understanding. Hence, we must not limit our thrust to the goods we comprehend; we must remain open beyond what we can calculate. Absolute norms prohibiting any direct attack upon innocent life are negative in their expression, but their meaning is the very positive respect Christians should have for the dignity of each life—since only God knows its ultimate meaning. Indirect abortion was not permitted as an exception to a general rule, but such procedures were recognized as cases in which the will's intention remained toward the good of life and open to its transcendent meaning, since the death of the infant was seen as an unwanted and incidental side effect of a quite distinct act.

While one can agree with Father Enda McDonagh, Monsignor Heylen, and Cardinal Suenens concerning the necessity for an affirmative respect for life and for positive efforts toward helping those who now resort to abortion, one may question whether the acceptance of abortion in exceptional cases will further these goals. More likely, a permissive attitude toward abortion will lead to its progressive increase, because the moral thrust against life in exceptional cases will carry through to the generality of cases.

Some might wonder whether these discussions concerning abortion are inaugurating a repetition of the course of events through which the Catholic Church has passed concerning contraception. Certainly there are similarities, including an essential dependence in argumentation. But the course of events cannot be the same. Too much has already happened during the past five years. If Catholics faithful to the traditional Christian precept in defense of innocent life wish to do anything, they must act quickly. This applies to Bishops and to the Holy Father himself.

While there may not be such a broad basis of popular support for a change in the traditional teaching on abortion as there is in the case of contraception, those who favor the change and who recognize the implications of their earlier positions are working very hard to find or to generate a "*sensus fidelium*" that would approve abortion in exceptional cases—exceptions which need by no means be thought of as rare occurrences.

The ethics of general rules and exceptions is what is technically called "situation ethics." Historically, this theory derives from various Protestant theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Faced with the difficulties of fundamentalist faith in the moral teaching of Sacred Scripture and with the decline of the cultural environment which had supported Christian morals with secular sanctions, Protestant theologians searched for an ethical theory compatible with Christian faith. All naturalistic and materialistic theories were obviously impossible. The moral theology of the Catholic Church seemed incompatible with their Christian understanding of salvation by faith and the grace of God alone. And so they adapted the most humane ethical theory to be found: the idealistic humanism of Kant and others in the German philosophical school.

Not that this philosophical ethics was taken directly. Thinkers as diverse

as Kierkegaard and Barth, Bonhoeffer and Tillich reacted to and adapted the philosophical ethics. But Kant himself had developed his thought by transposing Christian morality into purely human terms. The title of one of Kant's chief works was: *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. What I believe happened was that the well intentioned efforts of Protestant theologians failed to restore Christian morality in its integral form. Thus, situation ethics is a deformed, mutilated version of Christian morality, a Christian morality that has not fully recovered from the rationalism of the German idealists.

I believe that the Pope and Bishops faithful to the tradition could discern and clearly declare the incompatibility of situation ethics with Catholic faith. Yet I do not see signs indicating that any clear declaration can be expected. What should Catholics think in the event no such declaration is forthcoming, in the event abortion rapidly gains moral approval (in "exceptional" cases) while the Holy See and the bulk of the Bishops remain silent?

I think that in this event Catholics who are faithful to the traditional Catholic teaching must refuse to believe what they seem to see. For it will appear to them that the Church itself is sinking. However, believers in earlier times were subjected to similar stresses. Remember, in the first place, the dark day suffered by the earliest Christians—the day Christ lay in the tomb. And then there were the very confused decades of the great schism, decades when it appeared certain that the papal office would be subordinated to Church councils or to civil politics. Nevertheless, only after that trial did the papacy attain the place in the Catholic Church it now has. Without the effects of the schism, the Catholic Church might never have entered into modern times.

In brief, Catholics faithful to their tradition must believe that the providence of God, which sees far beyond our comprehension, is working toward the good in all our present troubles. I do not mean to suggest that the acceptance of abortion as a moral solution (in "exceptional" cases) is after all a progressive step. Personally, I cannot conceive the Catholic Church approving as Christ-like a will bent, however reluctantly, upon the slaughter of the innocent.

But if God wills the unity of believers, then he must will the removal

of obstacles to that unity. On the Catholic side are many such obstacles, not the least of which may be a kind of pride in the integrity of faith, a pride that ill becomes us who can claim no credit for what is purely a divine gift. Also, we Catholics have not always taught well and implemented with energy the great moral truths we have received so undeservedly. We have perhaps too often been satisfied to behave as the cautious steward who buried the talents he should have invested.

Still, I must say frankly that I believe the Catholic Church has had and has fulfilled the providential mission of keeping intact the whole of Christian doctrine and moral teaching. Perhaps at this moment God wills to perfect both Catholic and Protestant Christian faith. In the process, perhaps Providence finds it useful to permit many Catholics to adopt situation ethics—so many that the Church itself seems to be losing her stability, abandoning her fidelity to tradition, in effect sinking under the sea of human opinions that beat upon the damaged hull of the ship of faith.

Thus, although we must not believe it, perhaps we must experience something very like the sinking of the Catholic Church. Out of this experience alone, it may be, can come the clarity by which all Christians together will come to see that situation ethics is not a new and improved Christian morality, but is a mutilated form of Christian morality, a morality which must either recover its integrity or degenerate into a purely naturalistic ethic.

Certainly, situation ethics does tend toward naturalism. In some of its more recent developments, it is indistinguishable (except in language) from utilitarianism. On the other hand, there are a few Protestant and Catholic moralists who are already drawing back from the extreme implications of situation ethics.

If Catholics who remain faithful to the tradition of their Church must suffer the experience of water rising about their knees, they should not cease to believe for all that. We must be willing to suffer with Christ if we would hope to rise with him. Therefore, if the ship seem to sink, we should remain hopeful. After Friday and Saturday, Sunday.