

## The Year of the Child Rights of the Unborn

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In my last Pastoral Letter on the “International Year of the Child”, I quoted the teaching of Christ: “Let the little children alone, and do not stop them coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs”. (Mt. 19:14)

I then outlined our responsibilities to children at parish, family and school level, and showed concern for the work being done for children, with special emphasis on their formative years within the family circle. I stressed the important role of good Christian families and the responsibilities and privileges of parents as heads of the family.

Now I propose that we ask ourselves if we have given enough care and attention to children at every stage of their development, both before as well as after birth. Let us bear in mind the message of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you.” (Jer. 1:5)

These are questions I would like to address not just to the Catholics of our diocese, but to all men and women of goodwill in Hong Kong who have at heart the interests of children and of the community. Without ignoring other areas of urgent concern, I would like to refer in particular to the issue of abortion. I wish to stress that this is not a Catholic issue only, it is not even a specifically religious issue. It is a human issue, one which poses problems affecting all of us as human beings; it is an issue about which every member of the community is legitimately concerned.

The Catholic Church takes a firm stand against grave social and moral evils of the day. It is opposed to abortion precisely because the Church is for life for every man and woman. It is for life for every child from the first moment of his or her existence. The Church is for life through every phase of man's development right up to death and beyond.

It is necessary to recognise abortion for what it is: it is anti-life, it is the destruction of human life. However, it is not enough to condemn it. We must intensify our efforts to educate ourselves and others towards a deeper understanding of the issues involved; we need a fuller appreciation of the meaning and value of respect for

human life; we need to adopt a more positive attitude to the importance of responsible parenthood.

The Church must also intensify her pastoral efforts to show compassion and give practical help and counsel to expectant mothers in difficulties so that they, as well as their unborn children, will receive the love and care needed. Such supportive help should not stop at birth. To this end the Diocese will strive to marshal its resources and, in various ways and through various channels, make available financial assistance, counselling, pre-natal and post-natal care, adoption referral, job placement and other services to expectant mothers who without such services would encounter extreme hardship in having their babies. Limited though our resources are, we pledge our help to the utmost of our ability, and as a step towards fulfilling this pledge the Diocese is establishing a “Pro-life Fund”, and we are allocating a substantial sum as an initial contribution to this Fund. We shall continue to explore ways and means of giving practical expression of our concern in this important issue and shall increase our contribution to the Fund, as our resources grow, to meet the challenge.

Let us pray that, by God's merciful help and our own devoted efforts, no expectant mother faced with

distressing problems will feel constrained to destroy the human life growing within her. We hope that in its search for human solutions society will be mindful of its solemn duty to promote the utmost respect for human life and human dignity. We trust that society will not seek to reduce or withdraw the legal and other protection that is due to the unborn child but that it will, instead, direct its resources and energies towards a positive and sustained effort to tackle the underlying social and other problems.

May Our Lord and Saviour, to whom none of us is “unwanted”, give to all, especially those of you who selflessly work for the welfare of all children born and unborn, a special blessing!

**+ John Baptist Wu**

**The Bishop of Hong Kong**

**Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady 1979**