

**ADDRESS TO ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF SPUC
(SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF UNBORN CHILDREN)**

ADELAIDE'S HALL, BATH STREET, GLASGOW

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Introduction:

On one hand I am very happy to be here with you this morning at the Annual Conference of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC). I know that I am here with many like-minded people, who have given a very great proportion of their time to work for the protection of unborn children.

On the other hand, I am not happy in that this Society still has to exist. One might hope that in the not-too-distant future we would have a country where there was respect for all human life, born or unborn; where there was respect for unborn children in the womb; and consequently where there was no need for a society such as SPUC.

However, we have not reached that day, as yet, and consequently we gather together to strengthen the resolve of all of the members of SPUC – and, hopefully, to present a strong and every greater outreach into the society in which we live.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

I am speaking to you in this year when we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At the end of the Second World War the nations of the world came together to create a framework for maintaining peace around the world. The foundational values that would make such a peace possible were elaborated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It represented a vision of the fundamental rights that people from around the world, across cultures and from diverse faiths shared in respect of the human person and human society: a distillation of the core values and inherent dignity which every human person possesses.

In Europe we have a regional system inspired by the Universal system, which is represented through the European Convention on Human Rights.

We have therefore a structure of human rights protections of which at one level we may be proud. Human Rights has become a booming area of law in its own right as nations increasingly become more sensitised to not just refraining from violating the rights of its citizens but to ensuring that the rights of citizens are realised and protected.

Failure – with regard to the Right to Life:

We gather at this conference today, in commemoration of that important 60th anniversary but ironically and more importantly we gather in memory of the hundreds of millions of lives around the world that give mute testimony to the fact that **this elaborate system of human rights law has failed most miserably in defending the most basic of all of these rights: the right to life.**

The harsh reality is that the noble words of so many high blown declarations have been matched with **a barbaric indifference to the rights of the unborn.**

SPUC has worked tirelessly in Scotland and the UK to fight the evil of abortion for almost 40 years but we must recognise that what really can be described as the forces of darkness have distorted the laws and consciences in our nation and that our situation is now worse than ever. We have only to read some horrible headlines in our national newspapers which have confronted us over the past few months – headlines such as: ‘A deadly week for the unborn’; ‘Outrage over Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill’s content’; ‘Faithful urged to fight on after HFE vote’; and ‘State is immoral for failing to protect the unborn’.

And in what I have described as ‘a time of uncertainty, a time of great moral challenges and a time of confusion over the most basic questions about our society and the values we hold dear’, we have also been told through the media that: ‘Abortions in Scotland soar to record high with 38 performed every day’; while the article goes on to say that there were 13,703 abortions carried out last year in Scotland, compared to 13,163 the previous year.

As you know, there was a surprise decision from the Government to delay the crucial vote on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill from before the summer until the autumn – indeed that crucial vote did take place this past week on Wednesday 22 October 2008.

While leading our annual Archdiocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes in France, I indicated then the following: “I have already written to all our Members of Parliament about this Bill, particularly regarding the use of their consciences, and now again I call on them in this special way to consider the great importance of their decisions. As I have already said earlier, this Bill is a monstrous attack on human rights, human dignity and human life”.

And I indicated that the delay over the summer holidays would give our MPs time – and I urged them all to use that time wisely to reflect on the consequences of their actions and their decisions. I also indicated that we are facing a crisis in society and we must ask ourselves “Is human life important to us or is it not?”.

I called on our Members of Parliament to search their hearts and their consciences over the summer months to decide whether or not the value of human life really matters or is it simply one more commodity to be cast aside in our throw-away society.

We now know that final votes on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill were taken last Wednesday. While the question of abortion was not debated or voted on – which in itself may be considered a small mercy – the reality remains that the vote was a tragedy for our country. I received a press release which indicated the following under the headline: ‘House of Commons approves radical Embryology Bill’:

'By a margin of nearly 3-to-1, the British House of Commons has approved the controversial Human Fertilisation and Embryology (HFE) Bill, which will allow much broader legal experimentation with human embryos. The measure passed despite the defection of 16 Labour Party lawmakers. Among the most heavily disputed provisions of the HFE Bill are those allowing for the creation of 'hybrid' human/animal embryos and opening artificial-fertilisation procedures to lesbian couples. The legislation came to a vote under procedural rules but did not allow for amendments broadening access to abortion: a possibility that had further worried pro-life activists. The Bill now goes to the House of Lords and could become law before the end of the year.'

As a direct consequence of this legislation the value of human life will be eroded even further in the United Kingdom.

Society supports abortion:

However, in the face of all I have said and you know, I ask you to realise that **we cannot rely on the law to save us from our troubles**. The problem is more profound than that. We live now under the shadow of a problem, which is to a great extent spiritual. The descent of our society into the culture of death has come as we've increasingly pushed God to the periphery of our lives and the collective consciousness of our nations.

We can of course rail against the failures of our parliamentarians, in Europe, in London or in Edinburgh. We can apportion blame and lament inaction BUT we must also recognise that those elected by us, in our name, **for the most part reflect the society from which they come, they support abortion because society supports abortion**, they support embryo experiments because society supports embryo experiments and they support the genetic testing and potential discarding of the unborn because society does. Our fight, our battle – **your quarrel should not therefore be solely with the elected but with the electorate!**

We cannot and MUST not turn the fight for life into a struggle for perpetual parliamentary preferment or precedence. To do so would be to place MP's at the centre of society's moral compass, setting them as the ethical arbiters of all that we do. **This is a distortion**. Those elected to represent us should **reflect** us not **direct** us. Good laws come from good societies. We cannot legislate for a just and ethical moral climate in the land. But if we work with our fellow citizens one by one and lead by example in all that we do we can create a "good society" a "Culture of Life", regardless of what laws exist on the statute book.

'Conversion of Society':

Tangible proof of this can be seen in the work of the Cardinal Winning Pro Life Initiative here in Glasgow and similar initiatives here in Scotland and elsewhere. In the past 10 years hundreds of women have turned away from abortion even though throughout that period the Abortion Act of 1967 has remained unchallenged. Equally, the simple repeal of that Act would not in itself end the desire of many to have an abortion. As I have said already, the legislation we pass as a society reflects the views and values we share as a society. **It is the underlying values that must change first before the laws will follow**, not the other way round. Yes of course the legislative agenda is important and it cannot be neglected but neither should the very pressing social agenda.

Even where the law does not conflict with our moral views it is often the case that many individuals do. We see this in many other ways – particularly those who deliberately try to end their own lives by seeking to commit suicide under the law in other countries of Europe. Thankfully euthanasia is illegal in our own country – with the law being on our side at this present

time, yet we have seen recently cases where those in favour of euthanasia simply travel to another country to end their own life. The law in these cases is as we would like it to be, but the hearts and minds of those individuals most certainly are not!

Again I stress, we cannot instil moral values through legislation only through inculcation, implanting a sense of what is right and what is wrong in all those we meet, in the hope that they will do likewise. This is your challenge. Ultimately changing the mindset of our parliamentarians validly and crucially involves as a prerequisite, changing the mindsets of their constituents.

Call to MPs – and all people in our country:

I have mentioned my own call and the call of many individual constituents to their Members of Parliament.

However, **I now issue a call to all people of goodwill.** In Scripture, St Paul affirms the value of a clear conscience and I think we must consider ever more the role of conscience and its intrinsic link to truth. St Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy: “Night and day I thank God, keeping my conscience clear and remembering my duty to him as my ancestors did, and always I remember you in my prayers”.

The Church is a signpost for conscience, not just of those who adhere to the Catholic Faith, but to all peoples. The Christian message is a gift with which we have been entrusted, it is a message not of our own devising. I indicated when I was preaching in June in the chapel in the Crypt of the House of Commons: “To us falls the grave duty of preserving Christian memory, of handing on the teachings of Christ – but handing them on not merely as a list of prohibitions and rules. To do this would present a jaundiced and mistaken view of the Gospel. The message of the Church is one promoting the fullness of life and presenting for all people the truth of how we find fulfilment in this life and the next. We must be presenting in our lives and in our teaching something of the joy of the vocation of Christian living”. And that must be done despite the fact that each generation encounters its own difficulties in witnessing to the Gospel.

With regard to conscience, Pope Benedict XVI is very enlightening when he states: “A man of conscience is one who never acquires tolerance, well being, success, public standing and approval on the part of prevailing opinion at the expense of truth”.

Through our elaborate political and legal structures and noble declarations we have believed that we can build a society without God. For all the good intentions we see that that project has failed. We have believed that we can build a culture of life from above through words on a statute book – we cannot! Such a society comes from within each one of us from the bottom up not the top down.

I recently issued an appeal to the people in our parishes in the constituency of Glenrothes where there will be a by-election on Thursday 6 November 2008. I called to my parishioners then to “Go out and vote!”. And I reminded them that the important decisions which they have to make must always be informed ones. I encouraged them to take every opportunity to acquaint themselves with the issues concerned and the candidates putting themselves forward for election. I was encouraging them to use their properly informed consciences in exercising their right to vote.

I would hate to think that I personally was a ‘one issue’ person – I am not! I think that I have already shown in very practical ways my concern for world poverty and the right to life of each and every individual throughout the world; I have shown my concern for the right to life in not supporting the renewal of the Trident Nuclear Weapons System in our country; and I uphold the right to life of each and every unborn baby. I encourage my own parishioners and each and every

one of you to continue to examine your consciences and to try to work to rebuild our culture, to re-awaken the consciences of all, and to realise that its success will only come with our own work being more and more fully aware of the real challenges and rooting all our actions in our own spirituality and lives of prayer.

Pro-life culture:

Passing on a pro-life culture surely must begin in our families, but it must grow from there to our neighbourhoods and communities our workmates and colleagues. If those we live beside and work beside don't know we campaign in defence of life, if we don't at least attempt to persuade them of the merits of our case whenever the opportunity arises, the people we meet and greet and spend so much time with every day then what chance do we imagine we might have with a remote parliamentarian and a postcard?

Pope Benedict has written much on the importance of conscience, the need to support it from out with by the teachings of the Church but also the requirement to reflect on it within ourselves. Yet our society permits few moments of silence when we can recollect ourselves. We need to promote once again the need for interior recollection, the need for meditation and intimate prayer. This will provide the source of strength for each individual and together we can therefore transform our culture as once the early Christians did in a pagan Rome and in fact where Christianity has throughout every epoch in spite of the human frailties of many of its adherents.

Conclusion:

The world is groaning under the misery of wars and division. Our human rights campaigners are astonished that torture and oppression remain despite their protestations for a fairer world. They have lost sight of the deep root of evil that has been bedded in any system, which justifies abortions; they are unaware that its poison tarnishes all our other noble aspirations. After 60 years I urge you to continue your work to establish the fight against abortion as truly an issue of human rights. I pledge to work with you for that end in any way I can. Together with the help of God I believe it is a fight we can win.