

HUMAN BEING OR HUMAN PERSON?

Some comments on Prof. Micallef's article

My friend Prof. P.J. Micallef is to be highly complemented for tackling the abortion question from a most interesting point of view, from an aspect which is, in my opinion, absolutely fundamental and most likely to lead to far-reaching conclusions.

When is the human fetus a person? There shouldn't be any doubt in anybody's mind that whatever new life results from the union of two humans must be human. But a more important question is: what does a human fetus need to be also a human person?

That the two things are not necessarily the same is, as Dr. Micallef points out, quite clear for a Christian, who believes with the absolute certainty of faith that the human nature of Christ is integrally human without being a human person. This is correct theologically. One should also develop the comparison, just mentioned by the author, with the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. Here again, as we learn from divine revelation, we have three distinct persons but only one nature. All of which proves that an intellectual nature and a person are not conceptually the same.

This leads the author to analyse the concept of personality as applied to a human being. While theologians speak in terms of animation (or infusion of the soul) when dealing with the beginning of the human person in the fetus, scientists and philosophers prefer to consider the moment at which the brain begins to function (around the eighth week) as a safe criterion for placing the beginning of the human person. This last conclusion is shared by a number of theologians who, following St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, consider the quickening signal in the womb occurring between the 6th and 8th week as the moment of animation and, therefore, of the beginning of the human person.

We know that this view is not in conformity with the official doctrine of the Magisterium and cannot therefore be followed in practice. Should it, however, later on be considered as a safe enough doctrine, it would still not follow that therefore abortion performed before the 6th week can be considered morally licit: such an abortion, in fact, if not equi-

valent to murder, is still the destruction of human life. But it could follow, as Prof. Micallef concludes, that, in case of mortal or near-mortal conflict of conscience, life should not be so absolutized as to exclude, when there is serious doubt about the presence of a human person, the possibility of other values being allowed to prevail. With this conclusion I agree.

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