

Pro-life Basics

**Dear Judie,
A friend is arguing that the Catholic Church is unclear on when a person gets their soul and this vagueness possibly allows justifiable reason for artificial contraception and/or abortion early in pregnancy.**

—MCM

By arguing about when a human being actually receives his soul from God, attention is diverted from the scientific fact that a human being exists from the beginning, regardless of the method of reproduction.

Below are excerpts from Catholic Church documents that provide valid theological explanations of this subject.

- The present Declaration deliberately leaves untouched the question of ... when the spiritual soul is infused. The tradition is not unanimous in its answer... the very existence of an immortal soul is not a subject for scientific inquiry; the question is a philosophical one. For two reasons the moral position taken here on abortion does not depend on the answer to that question: 1) even if it is assumed that animation comes at a later point, the life of the fetus is nonetheless incipiently human (as the biological sciences make clear); it prepares the way for and requires the infusion of the soul, which will complete the nature received from the parents; 2) if the infusion of the soul at the very first moment is at least probable (and the contrary will in fact never be established with certainty), then to take the life of the fetus is at least to run the

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risk of killing a human being who is not merely awaiting but is already in possession of a human soul. (*Vatican Declaration on Procured Abortion, Footnote 19, 1974*)

- The mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolutely clear prohibition of any intervention aimed at killing a human embryo. Precisely for this reason... the Church has always taught and continues to teach that the result of human procreation, from the first moment of its existence, must be guaranteed that unconditional respect which is morally due to the human being in his or her totality and unity as body and spirit. (*The Gospel of Life* papal encyclical, Section 60, 1995)

- The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the “form” of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather

their union forms a single nature. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, Section 365, 1993*)

—Judie Brown

Judie Brown is president of American Life League and a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life. Ask Judie questions at her www.ALL.org blog.

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