

Pro-life Basics

Why should we not allow abortion in order to save the mother's life?

The Catholic Church has always taught that there is no justification for such an abortion. Pope Pius XII reiterated this in his 1951 address to midwives:

Every human being, even the child in the womb, has the right to life *directly* from God... Therefore, there is no man, no human authority, no science, no "indication" at all ... that may offer or give a valid judicial title for a *direct* deliberate disposal of an innocent human life, that is, a disposal which aims at its destruction, whether as an end in itself or as a means to achieve the end... Thus, for example, to save the life of the mother is a very noble act; but the direct killing of the child as a means to such an end is illicit.

This teaching remains unchanged, and its reasoning is sound, logical and consistent with respect for the dignity of the human person. When a physician intends to save both patients, but tragically, one dies as a result of his efforts, this is not an act of direct killing. Instead, the physician's action represents a lawful use of the principle of *double effect*, which, according to Father John A. Hardon, SJ's *Modern Catholic Dictionary*,

"says it is morally allowable to perform an act that has at least two effects, one good and one bad." This principle *never* allows direct killing, but, as Father Hardon explains, it may be used under these four conditions:

1. The act itself must be good or at least morally indifferent—apart from its consequences.
2. The good effect must not be obtained through the evil effect; the evil effect must be merely an unintended byproduct.
3. The evil effect must never be intended, nor must the act include any bad will.
4. There must be a grave reason for permitting the evil effect. At the least, the act's good and evil effects should be nearly equivalent.

If any of these is not met, the act is immoral. Thus, the act of intentional abortion is always intrinsically evil.

—Judie

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