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A Catholic Abortion

*A documentary relating how
an ecumenical, national campaign to uphold
the dignity of human life was about to be born,
and how the pregnancy was terminated by
the national bureaucracy of the Catholic Church.*

It is mid-autumn, 1970. The Society for the Christian Commonwealth has determined to take the initiative in launching a broadly-based, national program to fight abortion and other attacks on human life. The SCC has limited resources, it cannot by itself wage a national campaign. But the abortion mania is sweeping the country; thousands of innocents are being slaughtered daily, and the rate is

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rapidly increasing. Can the SCC at least provide a forum for forging a united national resistance?

The decision is made to sponsor a National Right to Life Congress, to be held in Washington, D.C. in the early spring. The Congress will, in convention, devise and organize an effective national program. Every group, every individual prominently involved in the right-to-life struggle will be invited. Every promising source of financial support will be solicited.

Beginning in late November, the organization of the Congress is confided to a distinguished Steering Committee consisting of Professors James B. T. Chu of Yale, Germain Grisez of Georgetown, Will Herberg of Drew and Charles Rice of Notre Dame; Mr. Jay Parker of the Foundation for Theological Education; Mrs. Patricia Bozell of TRIUMPH and Dr. Herbert Ratner of Child and Family. Professor Rice, the Steering Committee's director, furnishes the addresses of local right-to-life groups presented to him at a meeting of representatives of such groups the previous August. In January, Miss Loretta Young agrees to serve as the Congress's Honorary Chairman. The individual invitations to the Congress are now prepared on special NRLC stationery and mailed:

● February 5, 1971

Dear Friend of Life:

THE TIME HAS COME TO ACT. While the anti-life forces are gaining strength and moving from victory to victory, local right to life groups, hindered by the lack of effective national coordination, have been staging an admirable—but too often a losing—struggle. The situation cries for action on a national scale.

The strategy for this action will be mapped at the NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE CONGRESS, to be held in Washington, D.C., April 6-8 at the Sheraton-Park Hotel. Over 50 organizations as well as hundreds of individuals are being invited to insure that this new campaign will be launched from the widest possible base of experience, wisdom, and dedication. I have the honor of inviting you to attend the Congress, and of assuring you that your personal participation is most urgently needed.

The program will include no debate over the right to life—that right will be assumed—but will be given over to planning the most effective strategies for safeguarding the right to life. On hand will be the foremost authorities in the pro-life cause to aid you and the other delegates in developing and putting into action a national program. A registration fee of \$25 per delegate will cover the cost of the banquet dinner and luncheon, a special information kit designed as background for strategy development, and will entitle you to admission to all general sessions, addresses, and workshops. Each delegate will provide his own transportation and accommodations, but the sponsors of the Congress, on your request, will assist you in making your Washington arrangements.

Please fill out and send us the enclosed form as early as possible to assure reservations and accommodations.

The NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE CONGRESS is the op-

portunity to let America know that the cause of protecting innocent life has not been beaten. I earnestly urge you to be with us.

Sincerely,
CHARLES E. RICE
For the Steering Committee

Catholic participation was indispensable. Since April 1970 it had been clear that the Catholic Church would not, itself, undertake to mobilize a national opposition to abortion. The American bishops had issued a collective statement that month in San Francisco asserting that killing unborn children violated the U.S. Constitution and a UN declaration; but at a press conference they had explicitly rejected the idea of mounting a pro-life campaign at the national level. There would be no organization of voter blocs, no attempt to arouse the country through vigorous use of the media, no "political" confrontation with the Nixon Administration which had placed itself high among the anti-life forces. "We have no desire to effect a legislative program," the bishops' spokesman told the press. The Church's role in the life controversy would continue to be left to the devices of local ordinaries.

Some of the bishops had favored a bolder approach, but were unable to change the soft line laid down by the Church's national bureaucracy. By their November meeting, however, all of the bishops agreed to call abortion "murder." Would they now agree to support a lay initiative to prevent murder?

February 5, 1971

Your Excellency:

At the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' meeting in Washington last November, you joined your fellow bishops in denouncing abortion as "murder." As laymen, we have long felt the need for a broadly-based, coordinated effort to oppose this "horrible crime," as Vatican II called it. Local, and specifically Catholic resistance—however vigorous—has too often proved ineffective.

For this reason the Society for the Christian Commonwealth is sponsoring a NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE CONGRESS, to be held in Washington, D.C., April 6-8. The purpose of the Congress is to bring together leaders and experts in every field—regardless of religious affiliation—who are concerned with the mounting attack on the sanctity of human life. The goal of the Congress is to launch an effective national program to save lives.

Invitations are being sent to every "right to life" organization and other concerned groups in America, as well as to hundreds of individuals. Our main difficulty, as you might imagine, is locating sufficient funds to defray the cost of such a large undertaking. Because of the nature of our task, I cannot hesitate to ask your help in this particular.

We are therefore asking each diocese in the United States for a contribution of \$300, hoping that the larger dioceses will be able to contribute \$500. I recognize that many heavy demands are being made today on the Church's resources, but I am also confi-

dent that you will regard a donation of this size as modest in comparison with the Church's obligation and concern for the helpless unborn.

We are also asking each diocese to send a delegate to the Congress, both to advise as to local problems and conditions, and to consult in the development of the national pro-life campaign.

We ask your Excellency's blessing on this undertaking in these difficult times, and hopefully await your assistance.

Faithfully in Christ,
CHARLES RICE

On February 16, at 10 AM, Congressman Lawrence Hogan (R., Md.) held a private meeting at the Capitol to which he had invited several persons in the Washington area identified with the pro-life struggle. Mr. Hogan had testified the week before in Annapolis against the Maryland abortion-on-demand bill, and had come away indignant at the desultory, poorly-organized opposition to the bill. America can wait no longer, he announced at the beginning of the meeting, for a well-financed, well-coordinated national campaign to save innocent life. When representatives of the SCC explained the plans for the National Congress, Mr. Hogan and all of the others who had not known of them responded enthusiastically.

The reaction of one of the participants, however, was considerably cooler. Father James McHugh, who had been invited to the meeting as director of the Family Life Division of the U.S. Catholic Conference, did not take kindly to Hogan's criticism, which he correctly understood to be leveled at the operation he headed. His office, Fr. McHugh said, maintained relations with various right-to-life groups around the country through a "National Right to Life Committee" which he now disclosed to be a subsidiary of his division of the Church's national bureaucracy. This Committee provided local groups with legal counsel; it also participated in diocesan efforts to "educate our own people in faith and morals." But the Church could not "get into politics," Fr. McHugh said; nor could abortion be opposed "from the pulpit" or by passing the collection plate. Still, if the SCC wished to pursue a different approach, he would not stand in the way and would wish the Congress well.

Mr. Hogan professed to be appalled at what he called Fr. McHugh's "apathy." The representatives of the SCC were not. They were familiar with his role in formulating the national bureaucracy's soft line on abortion, with his previous efforts to discredit opposition to SIECUS-type sex education (TRIUMPH, July '69), with his reluctance to oppose life prevention legislation—the previous summer the national bureaucracy, under SCC pressure, had to summon Fr. McHugh from Canada to put in the only official Catholic appearance at congressional hearings on the now-enacted federal birth control law. If Fr. McHugh's lukewarm support of the Congress was regrettable, it was hardly surprising.

Support? At 11:30 AM, February 16, Michael Lawrence, editor of TRIUMPH, received a phone call from Professor Rice with the stunning news that

a week before Fr. McHugh had dispatched a letter to all of the bishops seeking to discredit the Congress and discourage support. A copy of this secret letter had just come into Rice's hands:

CONFIDENTIAL ADVISORY
February 9, 1971

Your Excellency:

A small group of people are planning a *National Right to Life Congress* in Washington, D.C. for April 6-8, 1971. Sponsored by the Society for the Christian Commonwealth, the Congress is publicized as a new call to action for interested citizens.

This is to advise that this Congress is neither sponsored by nor supported by the USCC or any of its offices. Nor is it supported by the National Right to Life Committee, a subsidiary of the Family Life Division.

As we have indicated in previous correspondence, we now have Right to Life contacts in almost every state. In addition, a number of independent groups have also formed, with the purpose of opposing liberal abortion laws. From a political standpoint, the more activity—the better it is.

However, since many of the groups are closely allied with the Church, we must also exercise considerable prudence in the strategies followed. Since at least some of the supporters of the *National Right to Life Congress* have already urged violence and a tougher stand, we must withhold support. And since the most important efforts at present are those in the states that are directed toward the individual state legislatures, a priority decision calls for a greater investment of energy and money at the local level.

We are recommending meetings of our contact people at the state or regional level, and are actively setting up such meetings on a periodic basis over the next six months. We recommend that the Bishops do not fund or support other meetings, but direct all support toward the local groups, and toward those agencies that are directly helping our people.

Sincerely in Christ,
(REV.) JAMES T. McHUGH
Director

Subsequent phone checks on February 16 and 17 revealed that Fr. McHugh's office had sent similar communications to right-to-life groups throughout the country. Professor Rice wrote two letters of protest:

February 18, 1971

Dear Father McHugh:

I have seen a copy of your letter of February 9 to the American bishops urging them to withhold support for the forthcoming National Right to Life Congress. As director of the Congress' Steering Committee, I wish to record my profound shock that a man in your position should have written such a letter—and especially that he should have done so without any previous consultation with me or any other person responsible for the organization of the Congress.

As you know—having received a special invitation to participate actively in our April proceedings—the

Congress is an attempt to expand existing right-to-life activities, which are now local and largely Catholic-sponsored, into a broadly-based national campaign. "The purpose of the Congress," as I said in my February 5 letter to the bishops requesting their financial assistance, "is to bring together leaders and experts in every field—regardless of religious affiliation—who are concerned with the mounting attack on the sanctity of human life. The goal of the Congress is to launch an effective national program to save lives."

That the officer chiefly responsible for directing the Catholic Church's role in this area should attempt to discredit and discourage Catholic participation in an ecumenical effort to save lives is simply beyond my comprehension.

There are two statements in your letter to the bishops which are particularly offensive. The first is the gratuitous denial that the Congress is sponsored or supported by the United States Catholic Conference, its offices or subsidiaries. The implication here is that the organizers of the Congress have made some claim to the contrary, and thus somehow proceeded under false pretenses. The truth—as you know from the whole conception of the Congress and from every representation made about it—is that the Congress's organizers have not wished it to be, in fact or in reputation, an official Church undertaking.

The second reason you give for opposing our efforts is that "at least some of the supporters of the National Right to Life Congress have already urged violence and a tougher stand." The remark about violence is, on the face of it, an innuendo which impugns the character and good faith of everyone connected with the Congress, including myself, on the strength of opinions which some unnamed—and as far as I am concerned unknown—"supporters" of the Congress are supposed to have. It is impossible to reply to such an implication since it is a venture in guilt-by-association without foundation in the positions of the Steering Committee of the Congress or of the Society for the Christian Commonwealth, the organization which sponsors the Congress.

My purpose in this letter, however, is not merely to complain, but to insist upon an appropriate revision of your February 9th communication to the bishops. I can think of no other way to undo the enormous damage which you, in the name of the Church's Family Life Division, may have done to the now desperate struggle to uphold the sanctity of human life.

Sincerely,
CHARLES E. RICE

The second letter was sent to all of the bishops:

February 18, 1971

Your Excellency:

I refer you to my letter of February 5 setting forth the plans for the National Right to Life Congress, scheduled to be held in Washington, D.C., April 6-8, and requesting your support for this effort to give the struggle for life new impetus through a broadly-based, national program. It was my conviction that you, and the Catholic Church in general, would unhesitatingly

welcome this initiative by laymen of all faiths to organize a coordinated national campaign to defend the sanctity of human life and above all to stem the mounting slaughter of unborn children.

My optimism has just been severely jolted. I have seen a copy of a letter dated February 9 to all of the American bishops from Father James McHugh, head of the USCC Family Life Division, which seeks to discredit the Congress and urges the bishops to withhold support. I have also learned that Father McHugh has written the local Right to Life groups around the country that had received an invitation to the Congress to discourage their participation.

I enclose a copy of a letter I have sent today to Father McHugh, expressing my reaction to his incredible letter to you. I say incredible because I have never before imagined that a responsible officer of the Church could dispatch an official communication to the bishops of this nature, without having made the slightest effort to consult with those whom he attacks and who, for their part, had attempted to enlist his cooperation.

I write you now to learn if Father McHugh's counsel is to be heeded. It is clear that if the Catholic boycott of the Congress, which Father McHugh is attempting to arrange, does in fact take place—there can be no Congress. There can hardly be an effective national effort to stop abortion and other attacks on life, with participation limited to Protestants and Jews. I must therefore ask you, on behalf of the Congress' sponsors, if they can look forward to your support for their efforts to mobilize a national pro-life campaign.

May I respectfully request, because of the great urgency of this matter, an early reply?

Sincerely in Christ,
CHARLES E. RICE

A third letter was written that day. The author was evidently unaware that his secret interventions had been discovered:

February 18, 1971

Dear Mr. Rice:

I have read with interest your letter of invitation to participate in the National Right to Life Congress. I agree that there is no purpose in debating the right to life of the child in the womb.

The Congress proposal is interesting, but before agreeing to be a participant or allowing my name and that of the USCC to be added to the list of sponsors, I would like further information as to the long-range projection.

1. What type of organization is expected to result from the Congress, and what are its basic aims?

2. What type of strategy and tactics will be followed by the Congress participants—i.e., what amount of militancy, activism, violence?

3. What will be the relationship of the Society for a Christian Commonwealth to the new organization?

I will await some answer to these questions before making any decision as to sponsorship and/or participation.

Many thanks.

Sincerely,
(REV.) JAMES T. McHUGH
Director

was sent to the printer on our deadline, based on the information then available. We trust that a reciprocal disposition will emerge this afternoon.

In Christ,
L. BRENT BOZELL
E. MICHAEL LAWRENCE

On February 22, Professor Rice advised Michael Lawrence at TRIUMPH that Fr. McHugh had phoned South Bend over the weekend vaguely offering to make amends for his sabotage and suggesting a meeting. Whereupon Lawrence decided to kill a TRIUMPH editorial, already on the press, which would have placed Fr. McHugh's conduct, now perhaps repented, on the public record. The next day a meeting was arranged for the following afternoon between Fr. McHugh and Bishop Joseph Bernardin, General Secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference, on behalf of the national bureaucracy, and Lawrence and Brent Bozell, director of the SCC, on behalf of the National Right to Life Congress. The morning before that meeting the NRLC representatives sent a hand-delivered communication to Bishop Bernardin:

February 24, 1971

Your Excellency:

We believe it would be useful to give you a statement of our position before our meeting with you and Father McHugh this afternoon.

There are now two major obstacles to convening the National Right to Life Congress as planned on April 6-8. The first is that the Family Life Division of the USCC has recommended to parties centrally counted on for participation—the Catholic bishops and the local right to life organizations—that they withhold support from this effort to launch a broadly-based national campaign to fight abortion. The second is that the reputations of the sponsoring organization, the Society for the Christian Commonwealth, and of the distinguished members of the Congress' Steering Committee and its Honorary Chairwoman have been impugned by official communications from the Family Life Division.

We see two ways of overcoming these obstacles:

✓ The Family Life Division takes the initiative by immediately communicating to those already addressed: (1) a recommendation that this national effort to fight abortion and defend human life be supported; (2) an apology to the SCC and the members of the Congress' Steering Committee and its Honorary Chairwoman.

—The Society for the Christian Commonwealth, the sponsoring organization, takes the initiative by announcing the postponement of the Congress, the reasons therefore, and its plans for renewing the national effort. This alternative supposes that the individuals concerned will seek independent redress for the impugning of their characters.

Our preference is obviously to avoid a public split with the Family Life Division. Concrete evidence of our good faith has already been displayed by Mr. Lawrence's decision, which he communicated to you on Monday after learning of Fr. McHugh's tentative offer to make amends over the weekend, to kill a TRIUMPH editorial already in print criticizing Fr. McHugh. We enclose a copy of the editorial which

The trust was misplaced. The first moments of the meeting made clear that Fr. McHugh was adamant and would not budge unless forced to do so by his chieftains in the national bureaucracy. He would not recant his defamation of the leadership of the Congress and the SCC; he would not withdraw his opposition to the Congress unless its organization was made subject to his approval; in any event, he would continue to counsel the bishops to withhold support.

Fr. McHugh defended his interventions on the grounds that the NRLC had misappropriated a) "our" list in issuing invitations, b) "our" name. The NRLC representatives pointed out a) the list of local groups was a public list, b) the term "right-to-life" was hardly anyone's patent—did the use of the slogan, "Abortion is Murder" also require his permission? In any case, these objections were plainly a smokescreen laid down to cover the indefensibility of the very different charge he had secretly made to the bishops—that persons associated with the Congress "have already urged violence." Could Fr. McHugh furnish evidence to support that charge?

The priest looked at Bozell and said evenly: "Your daughter, the Sons of Thunder and you."

Bozell said evenly: "Father, may we put aside whatever criticism you might wish to make of the first two—unless you have some evidence that either my daughter or the Sons of Thunder has the slightest connection with the SCC or the Congress?"

Silence. Then the priest said: "All right, Brent, I'll be frank with you: it is you that I had in mind when I wrote that letter."

Bozell said: "I have never urged violence, Father. Do you have any evidence to the contrary?"

The priest triumphantly produced a news service report of the sentencing of Bozell for his role in an anti-abortion demonstration the previous June (TRIUMPH, July, October), and read: "Bozell told reporters after sentencing that he would not let the probation period interfere with his action for life activities." Violent activities?

Bozell said: "Do you have anything else, Father?"

The priest had nothing else. Bishop Bernardin was non-committal, but promised to communicate in writing the next day a specific response to the NRLC requests for retraction.

February 25, 1971

Dear Mr. Bozell and Mr. Lawrence:

I wish to thank you for the candid exchange we had yesterday in my office.

I have enclosed a proposal prepared by Father McHugh, with my approval, which I think will go a long way toward resolving the impasse which has arisen in regard to the National Congress on abortion.

As you can see, Father McHugh urges that a meet-

ing be held as soon as possible so that the matter can be pursued properly. Even prior to that he will be pleased, I am sure, to give you any further clarifications which might be needed.

With cordial good wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

● MOST REVEREND JOSEPH L. BERNARDIN
General Secretary

February 25, 1971

TO: Brent Bozell

Michael Lawrence

FROM: Father McHugh

RE: National Meeting on Abortion

Consistent with our discussion at the meeting in Bishop Bernardin's office, and with the previous discussion between Charles Rice and myself, I want to re-emphasize my own personal determination to work out some solution to the proposed National Congress. I also re-state my determination to avoid any publicity concerning the present disagreement.

● Since the basis of much of the present confusion results from the use of the term "National Right to Life," it seems imperative that the Congress adopt a new name. Moreover, in order to enlist the cooperation of the Board of Directors of the National Right to Life Committee, it is necessary that we have a statement of the aims of the Congress and a copy of the projected program as soon as possible.

● Thereupon, we would contact all the members of the Board of Directors of the National Right to Life Committee, and recommend that we cooperate with the sponsors of the Congress to the greatest extent possible. This presumes that the Program outlines new strategies beyond those presently being followed and not in opposition to our present policies. This does not mean that we have to agree to the feasibility of all proposed strategies, nor that we wish to determine the program. Once the Board agrees, we should advise the local Right to Life groups that the Congress has been re-scheduled, that a variety of new strategies will be discussed at the Congress, and that they may find the proposals useful or consonant with their own program, and thus find participation worthwhile.

Depending on the projected program, it may be possible to provide additional encouragement.

● This measure of cooperation does not imply endorsement or cooperation from the Family Life Division, USCC, since the stated aim of the Congress planners is to avoid a close structural link to the U.S. Catholic Conference or to any specifically Roman Catholic agency.

Quite obviously, there are a number of contingencies involved in this proposal but my intention is to move toward the greatest degree of cooperation possible and advisable for the Congress on the one hand, and the Family Life Division and National Right to Life Committee on the other. As further evidence of our determination to find a workable solution, I would urge a meeting as soon as possible involving at least some of our Board members and members of the Congress Planning Committee, including Charles Rice.

It was clear that Fr. McHugh now had his eye on the possibility of public disclosure of his intervention and was setting the scene for his appearance as the party of sweet reason. His memo included no hint of retraction or of an intention to withdraw his opposition among the bishops and demanded as the price of cooperation the satisfaction of a condition (agreement on program) that could not possibly be met until after the Congress; yet it was presented as a "solution," as a "measure of cooperation." Bishop Bernardin received an immediate reply:

February 25, 1971

Your Excellency:

We have received by hand delivery your communication dated today. We do not believe it is helpful, because it is not responsive to the existing situation.

At our meeting yesterday, you promised to communicate to us today a specific response to the requests set forth in our pre-meeting memorandum—namely that an apology and a withdrawal of opposition to the Congress be sent forthwith to those earlier contacted by Father McHugh. The need for such a response had become all the more apparent when, in your presence, Father McHugh was unable to provide the slightest substantiation for his reckless charge that persons associated with the Congress "have already urged violence."

Since there is no allusion to these requests in your present communication, we immediately telephoned you for a clarification. We were told that you were unavailable. We have therefore concluded that the response to our request that Father McHugh try to right the wrongs already committed is negative.

Under the circumstances, the Society for the Christian Commonwealth has no alternative but to proceed independently to mount a truly national, ecumenical effort to save lives. It goes without saying that we continue to hope for cooperation of the Family Life Division, for it would indeed be tragic if any quarter of the Catholic Church should stand athwart such a campaign.

We prayerfully ask for an indication of your personal blessing of our efforts.

Respectfully in Christ,
L. BRENT BOZELL
E. MICHAEL LAWRENCE

Thus one more struggle for life was turned to waste after four months' effort—the period normally approved for non-Catholic abortions. But it is never permissible for subjects of the King willingly to abandon life. On March 5 a telegram went out:

NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE CONGRESS POSTPONED BECAUSE OF CONTINUING INTERVENTION BY FATHER MCHUGH'S OFFICE. EMERGENCY COUNCIL LAUNCHING NATIONAL EFFORT TO BE HELD WASHINGTON, MARCH 26-27. YOUR ATTENDANCE HIGHLY DESIRABLE. LETTER FOLLOWS WITH DETAILS.

CHARLES E. RICE

TRIUMPH