

# Abortion, embryos, euthanasia, and gender theory: an anthropological analysis of the Catholic church's Bioethics Manual at World Youth Day

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## **Abstract**

The present article analyzes the *Keys to Bioethics - JMJ Rio 2013* handbook, produced by the Jérôme Lejeune Foundation and the National Commission for Family Pastoral Care, linked to the National Conference of Bishops in Brazil. This booklet was offered to people attending the World Youth Day that took place in Rio de Janeiro in 2013. It is a student's guide, created to educate young people about the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The text presents bioethical arguments against abortion in any situation, and defends the human rights of embryos and fetuses through topics such as: prenatal diagnosis, medically assisted reproduction, pre-implantation diagnosis, and embryo research (stem cells). The text also condemns euthanasia and repudiates 'gender theory' as false. In essence, it questions individual autonomy. The distribution of this booklet is an example of the activities of the Catholic Church in public spaces.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church, bioethics, abortion, gender, right to life.

# Aborto, embriões, eutanásia e teoria de gênero:

uma análise antropológica do manual de bioética da  
Igreja Católica na Jornada Mundial para a Juventude

## Resumo

O artigo analisa o manual *Keys to bioethics - JMJ Rio 2013*, editado por Fundação Jérôme Lejeune e Comissão Nacional da Pastoral Familiar, vinculada à Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil. Esse material foi distribuído aos inscritos na Jornada Mundial para a Juventude ocorrida no Rio de Janeiro em 2013. O objetivo do manual é formar jovens segundo as diretrizes doutrinárias da Igreja Católica. O texto apresenta discussão bioética contrária ao aborto em qualquer situação, manifestando-se pela defesa dos direitos humanos de fetos e embriões em tópicos como: diagnóstico pré-natal, assistência médica à procriação, diagnóstico pré-implantação e pesquisa sobre o embrião (células-tronco), além de condenar a eutanásia e denunciar como falsa a “teoria de gênero”. A tônica do manual está no questionamento da autonomia individual. A distribuição do manual é marca da atuação da Igreja no espaço público.

**Palavras-chave:** Igreja Católica, bioética, aborto, gênero, direito à vida.

# Abortion, embryos, euthanasia, and gender theory: an anthropological analysis of the Catholic church's Bioethics Manual at World Youth Day

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Analyzing the Catholic Church's position on demands for individual liberties and the debate over human rights, what immediately springs to the fore is abortion, along with other themes related to the 'right to life,' such as euthanasia. The conflicts between the Church, a conservative religious institution, and human rights groups are played out in public space over issues linked to sexuality and reproduction (abortion, birth control, sexual diversity, etc.), as well as questions touching on life, such as embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, or the right to a dignified death. The Catholic church has publicly expressed its opinions on all these topics and has formed pressure groups to try to turn these opinions into policy, particularly in Latin American countries and those European nations that are traditionally Catholic (Vaggione 2012, Ruibal 2014, Zúñiga-Fajuri, 2014). Minkenberg (2002) has analyzed the relationship between religion and public policy, comparatively studying western liberal democracies. He found a positive correlation between restrictive abortion legislation and Catholic heritage, with Ireland being a prime example of this tendency. The correlation is also confirmed in Latin American nations where Catholicism is still hegemonic and which have weak secular traditions and strong anti-abortion legislation (Ruibal 2014, Zúñiga-Fajuri, 2014). Uruguay is the sole exception in this regard, having a strong secular tradition and having legalized first trimester abortions in 2012. Ruibal also describes the reforms that have liberalized abortion in a limited fashion in Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. Abortion has also been legal in Cuba since 1965 and in Guyana since 1995 (Ruibal 2014).

At the World Youth Day event held in Rio de Janeiro in July 2013, a bioethics handbook was distributed among those attending, reinforcing the Vatican's position against abortion under any circumstances, and defending the right to life of fetuses and embryos in the context of topics such as stem cell research and assisted reproduction, condemning euthanasia, while also denouncing 'gender theories' as false.

This manual, *Keys to Bioethics*, included discussions about human reproduction, sexuality, and death. Its table of contents listed the following themes: the history of the small human being; abortion; prenatal diagnosis; reproductive health care; pre-implantation diagnosis; research using embryos; euthanasia; organ donation; and gender theory. Each chapter included a series of moral issues, addressed via religious, biological (biomedical), and legal viewpoints. The Catholic Church's intention was to use this manual to guide its young followers' views of the world.

The distribution of this handbook on World Youth Day is an example of the work the Catholic Church carries out in public space. Authors like Casanova (2010) and Berger (2001) have questioned secularization theory by pointing to religion's retreat into the private domain with the onset of modernity (Berger 1985).

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Berger identifies an ongoing process of desecularization (2001), while Casanova questions the privatization of religion as a consequence of the process of secularization. According to Casanova (2010: 49), Catholic globalization is a process currently being expressed along three different axes. The first is papal intervention in peace processes; the second is the Pope's visibility as a "symbolic priest of the new universal civil religion of mankind" and "the first global citizen of civil society". What is of interest for the present article, however, is the third direction this globalization is taking: "Today's encyclicals not only deal with matters of Catholic faith and morals and the internal discipline of Church, but also with the global secular matters that affect all of mankind" (2010: 49). The distribution of a youth manual containing such content is an excellent example of conservative Catholic activism (Vaggione 2012), which pushes to curb particular groups' rights.

Taking another approach, Turina (2013) analyzes what he calls the Vatican's biopolitics, employing the latter concept – coined by Michel Foucault – as a key to a better understanding of the Vatican's teachings on family, sexuality and human life. According to Foucault (2005), biopower is a technique of power that became installed in human social life from the second half of the eighteenth century. This technique is directed towards humans as a species and takes as its focus the human body via a mass implementation of power. Its objects of knowledge and control are birth, mortality and longevity, and it concentrates on disease as a phenomenon of population management. Turina (2013) argues that over the twentieth century, the Pope took on the role of managing populations of believers, while the Church's functions were related to biopolitical issues, mainly contraception and human life, the recruitment of members and the clergy, the maintenance of a Catholic identity, competition with other religions, and competition with nation states.

The present article analyzes the Church's bioethics manual as a document that reveals a particular institutional orientation. My aim is to utilize this document to look at the controversy surrounding abortion and other topics, which sets the Catholic Church against feminist movements and those in favor of the right to a dignified death (Gomes and Menezes 2008). I believe that distinct concepts of human rights and citizenship are exposed in this confrontation.

The article examines instructional and educational material that seeks to guide young Catholics on problems related to bioethics from the point of view of Catholic doctrine. The manual distributed at World Youth Day will be analyzed in terms of the discourse used, as well as commenting on some of the illustrations. In this sense, the present article continues the tradition of studies of collective representations inaugurated by Durkheim in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1973) and developed in his other works, such as *On Some Primitive Forms of Classification* (Durkheim and Mauss 1981) and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1989), in which Durkheim affirms the social origins of categories of collective thought, concepts and value systems.

My decision to analyze the manual as the principle source for this article might seem strange to some readers.<sup>2</sup> But the manual, as educational material, synthesizes a series of social controversies<sup>3</sup> involving abortion, research with human embryos, euthanasia, and sexual diversity. Several points and problems pertaining to these controversies are addressed in the manual, which seeks to establish the viewpoint of the Catholic hierarchy as correct and the one that must prevail in society. Social actors who claim different rights with respect to autonomy and to the right to life or to cease living are represented indirectly

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2 Like Giumbelli, I argue that: "The textual source is not privileged because of its opposition to fieldwork, but because in it is inscribed the methodologically relevant and sociologically significant information" (2002: 102). The textual source, in this case the manual, is in certain circumstances the most relevant material.

3 I adopt Giumbelli's view of controversy: "When one observes a polemic in which a series of social agents become involved, this might be merely an ephemeral convulsion, slated to disappear as soon as other topics become the center of attention. The majority of controversies disappear in this fashion, in fact. However, and without denying their ephemeral nature, one can consider these as a moment of expression and redefinition of points and problems, which may be important and even crucial in the constitution of a society, even if they do not awaken general or intense interest" (2002: 96).

in the manual's didactic structure of questions and answers. In analyzing this document, then, we find the responses given by the Vatican through its authorized voice, the Jérôme Lejeune Foundation, to the feminist movements, LGBT movements, dignified death movement, and those who seek access to assisted reproduction or who wish to develop research with embryonic stem cells.

Furthermore, the Church's anti-abortion stance was reinforced among the young pilgrims of World Youth Day through the distribution of the manual.<sup>4</sup>

## The manual

World Youth Day took place in Rio de Janeiro from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, 2013. According to the CNBB's website,<sup>5</sup> the *Keys to Bioethics* manual was distributed to all those enrolled in World Youth Day. The manual was composed by the "Jérôme Lejeune Foundation, in partnership with the National Commission for Pastoral Family Care, an organ linked to the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), the Center for Biosanitary Studies (Spain) and the Jérôme Lejeune Foundation (USA)." According to the website, 2 million copies were printed in four languages, including 900,000 printed in Portuguese. The manual is 80 pages long and formatted as a magazine, with numerous illustrations and different colors for each chapter.

The manual is divided into the following topics: the history of the small human being; abortion; prenatal diagnosis; reproductive health care; pre-implantation diagnosis; research with embryos; euthanasia, organ donation, and gender theory. The last item (gender theory) is presented as an appendix. Each chapter is composed of the following sections: "what is?" "methods," "questions," "ethical reflections," "testimonies," and "what the Church says." Themes related to life, its generation, reproduction and purpose, predominate in the manual. An exception is the final, annexed chapter on gender theory, which also addresses the issue of sexuality. The themes are chained together in such a way that Chapters 1 through 6 form a cohesive set related to the defense of the lives of embryos and fetuses, opposing abortion, research using embryos, or any assisted reproduction technology.

Before proceeding to describe the contents of the manual in detail, I should advise readers that this article will follow two distinct, but not incompatible, analytic threads. One analyzes the manual as something that exemplifies modern individualist ideology and its value system, with this appearing codified in the manual's various categories and visual images. For this line of analysis, I shall employ Dumont's (1997) approach, opposing two configurations of value that characterize traditional societies and modern society. In traditional societies, with their holistic configuration of values, the emphasis is on society as a whole, as a human collective. The holistic ideal is the organization of society towards its own collective ends; its aims are order and hierarchy. In modern societies, centered on individualistic configurations, the human being is the atomic, indivisible element, appearing as a biological being and thinking subject. Every human being incarnates all of humanity and is the measure of all things. Society is the means, while the life of each and every person is the end. In this worldview, the human being is the individual: an a-social entity devoid of relations, which is the foundation of the axial values of equality and freedom that are present in the modern western social configuration. This category of 'subject' does not suppress the existence of others. Strathern (2005), analyzing the constitution of kinship and its relation to individualism in the West, states that people can be autonomous and relational simultaneously (2005: 27).

4 During World Youth Day, many Young pilgrims applauded the police operation that closed down an abortion clinic in Copacabana, the neighborhood taken over by the event. Anselmo Góis. Anselmo.com. Peregrinos aplaudem ação policial em clínica de aborto. Available at: <http://oglobo.globo.com/rio/ancelmo/posts/2013/07/26/peregrinos-aplaudem-acao-policial-em-clinica-de-aborto-504836.asp>. Accessed on: 31.05.2014

5 "Manual de bioética será distribuído durante a JMJ." Available at: <http://www.cnbb.org.br/imprensa/noticias/12269-jmj-distribuir-manual-de-bioetica>. [http://www.cnbb.org.br/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12269:bjmj-distribuir-manual-de-bioetica&catid=114&Itemid=106](http://www.cnbb.org.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12269:bjmj-distribuir-manual-de-bioetica&catid=114&Itemid=106). Accessed on: 25/04/2016

Relating the individualistic configuration of values to the manual analyzed here, we can see the centrality of the notion of the person in the values that the manual seeks to convey to youth in order to instill in them elements of Catholic doctrine.

The second analytic reading of the manual is through the prism of biopolitics, as suggested by Turina (2013). In this sense, the manual is an instrument of Catholic biopolitics, created in order to influence correlations of power. The manual seeks to contribute to the formation of faithful Catholics and its existence emphasizes the presence of the Catholic Church in public space as part of an attempt to affect the legislation of the world's nation states. In this sense, it is an example of Vatican policy in the public sphere, illustrating the process of Catholic globalization pointed out by Casanova (2010) above.

The manual's first chapter, entitled "The history of the small human being," defines the beginning of human life in fertilization: "the human embryo is a living being, endowed with a human genetic patrimony. It is a human being, in fact" (p. 5). The choice of the title induces the reader to think in a certain way. While it is possible to speak of the beginning of human life, "the history of the small human being" refers to the biological process as if it were a biography, an aspect later repeated in the manual chapter describing embryo research.

The chapter goes on to describe pregnancy, beginning on the first day, and follows the embryonic and fetal development each month from the first to the sixth, then jumping to the eighth, with a linear graph containing photos of each stage. In the section entitled 'the embryo in question,' the main questions of the bioethical debate are listed, addressing abortion, assisted reproduction and embryo manipulation, and embryonic stem cell research.

Questions are always followed by an answer. One observation defines the beginning of pregnancy at fertilization and not at the implanting of embryo in the womb, "contrary to what may be read in certain textbooks" (p. 9). The questions are: "Is the embryo just a clump of cells?"; "Is the embryo a human from fertilization onward?"; "The embryo is a human being ... but will it be a person?"; "Is it a matter of opinion to consider the embryo to be a human being?"; "What causes the embryo to be a human being?"; "Does the embryo or fetus feel pain?"; "Since the embryo is dependent on the mother, can it be a human being?"; "If the embryo does not look like a human being, can it be one?"

The answers provided to these questions dismantle any argument that puts in doubt the embryo's status as a full human being – that is, a person – from the moment of conception. The embryo is not just a bunch of cells, then, because it is an 'organism' or, from the very beginning, "a living being, organized in such a way as to develop on its own in a continuous manner" (p. 8). Here we encounter the argument for autonomy, which is associated with the argument for the individuality of the embryo. Thus, when it is factually stated that the embryo needs "an appropriate **environment** [my emphasis] in order to develop," this does not alter the status of the embryo as a human being. A classic representation is given of an individual placed in a medium, but without any consideration of the fact that this 'environment' in which the embryo develops is itself a person. According to Salem (1997: 84-85), the presentation of the embryo as "social or pre-social, that is, logically prior to social relations" disconnects and hides relationships. According to the manual, the "unique genetic heritage of the person" (and, once again, we see here the argument of individuality) and the fact that this 'heritage' belongs to the human species guarantees the embryo's status as a human being. Should anyone question whether the embryo is a person, a comparison is made with slaves: humans that are not considered to be people. As for considering it to be simply a matter of opinion whether the embryo is a human being or not, this idea is countered with 'biological reality' or 'scientific evidence.' Here we encounter the use of a biological foundation for metaphysical answers concerning the human condition. The question regarding pain sensitivity likewise refers to the characterization of a human being as a living entity endowed with perception and senses.

All of the answers are intended to humanize the embryo and bring it closer to the characteristics of people who are already born and fully developed. This argument prepares the reader for the next chapter on abortion.

The chapter on abortion defines the latter as the “premature death of the embryo or fetus during its development” (p.10). It discusses the different laws pertaining to abortion around the world, the distinction between voluntary termination of pregnancy and medical or therapeutic termination of pregnancy, and estimates the number of abortions per year. The next section describes the methods used to abort: aspiration; curettage; partial birth abortion (“too terrible a method to be described”); abortion by injection; use of an intrauterine device (IUD); abortion by Mifepristone (RU 486); and the day after pill or ‘contraceptive’ emergency pill. These descriptions emphasize that “the IUD and the morning-after pill may induce abortion by preventing the embryo from embedding itself in the uterus” (p. 12). The section “Abortion questions” begins with questions concerning the situation of women: “Abortion: can women be helped?”; “Pregnancy and loneliness: how to overcome the situation?”; “Does abortion have psychological consequences for women?” (p. 13). The answers illustrate a stance that aims to create solidarity with woman, offering help and shelter after abortions, but mostly warning of the serious psychological consequences caused by the practice. The items of the following section do not follow one central line: “Is there a right to abortion?”; “Abortion in the world”; “A paradox surrounding the death of the six-month-old fetus” (p. 14). The text denies the right to abortion, presenting the ‘child’ as defenseless. A panorama of abortion worldwide is presented, with an estimation of the annual number of abortions and a history of abortion legalization, first by ‘totalitarian regimes’ and then by ‘developed countries’ in the 1970s. The next section addresses ‘ethical reflections’: “woman / child : friend / foe?”; “And in the case of rape?”; “Does abortion represent the liberation of women?” (p. 15); “Abortion: can we talk about choice?”; “Material problems”; “What about the parents?”; “Abortion or adoption?” The answers sustain the idea that “**the child is always innocent**” (in bold in the original) and that an abortion after rape is “to add drama to drama.” The feminist argument of the “right to dispose of one’s own body” is contested, arguing that “biologically, the child is not part of the mother’s body, but her guest” (p. 15). In this respect, it is useful to turn to Strathern’s analysis (2005) of the relationship between mother and fetus. If, as discussed in the bioethics manual, biotechnology provides new ways of conceptualizing the fetus’s individuality, the pregnant woman becomes a paradigmatic example of the opposite insofar as she constitutes “a nexus of relations.” The relationship between mother and fetus is thus not one of equal partners. The maternal body’s separate existence is the basis for the interdependence of the pregnant woman and the fetus: mother and fetus are both separable and parts of each other (Strathern 2005: 30).

Returning to the manual, the text asserts that the right to choose is “to decide to kill.” As for the material problems that motivate a woman to abort, it is suggested that she does this to “**resolve her problems**.” The text also reflects on the situation in which there are differences between parents: when the woman “feels obliged to abort” because the father of the child does not want to assume paternity, or when the woman aborts against the will of the ‘father.’ Adoption is presented as an alternative to abortion. One section contrasts “abortion and contraception,” being composed of the following items: “The contraceptive mentality and VIP”; “Does contraception prevent abortion?”; “The contraceptive pill and abortion.” In this section, specific elements of Catholic doctrine become clearly perceptible in its critique of contraceptive methods that tend to be widely accepted by society. The ‘contraceptive mentality’ is defined as “refusing a child,” a position that leads to an acceptance of abortion. The idea that contraception prevents abortion is contested. Contraception is understood as increasing the number of unstable relationships and inciting the use of contraceptive pills that produce early abortions.

The section entitled “Testimonies” presents the testimony of a woman who has aborted and repented, as well as a statement by Mother Teresa of Calcutta that “the greatest destroyer of peace in the world today is abortion, since it is a war declared against the child” (p. 18). The final section of the chapter is entitled “What the Church says...” and is divided into three items: “God, the only master of life”; “Abortion is a serious offense”; “God is mercy” (p. 19). Two Church documents are quoted: the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. Here human life is postulated as sacred because it results from the creative action of God. Abortion is a grave misconduct because it involves “the deliberate death of an innocent human being.” Women who have had abortions are urged to repent in order to obtain forgiveness.

These two chapters of the manual are the most important for the purpose of this article because of the crucial nature of the themes that they expound. The chapters that follow them will be addressed in more summary fashion. It is important to emphasize that the tone of the message present in Chapter 1, on the history of the small human being, and Chapter 2, on abortion, are repeated throughout the manual. In Chapter 3, entitled “Prenatal Diagnosis” (PND), the procedure is defined as “the set of tests performed to prevent early disease or malformation of the fetus in the mother’s uterus.” Here readers are warned against the use of these techniques in order to detect anomalies, because diagnosis may lead to the decision to have an abortion instead of being used for “the protection of the health of the mother and child” (p. 20). The manual’s authors denounce the fact that many countries allow the interruption of pregnancy “up to the day of birth” if a ‘strong probability’ exists of the fetus being “afflicted with a serious and incurable condition” (p. 21). The limit between a ‘serious’ and a less severe condition is questioned. On the next page, one of the items claims that “Down syndrome is widely diagnosed” as a serious condition (p. 22). Questions are also raised regarding eugenics (p. 23) and the use of prenatal diagnosis (p. 23). The section on ethics is all about questioning abortion: “What if I’m expecting a disabled child?”; “Abortion, because my disabled son will not be happy?”; “Who can judge the value of a life?” In particular, the complaint is that “PND has made trisomy 21 syndrome (Down syndrome) a deadly disease [...] 96% of the fetuses identified with the disease are aborted” (p. 24). In the same direction as the earlier chapter on abortion, one of the issues raised is “the suffering of parents.” The solution to this is compassion for everyone, but allied to the question: “how could one think that the suffering of a human being will be relieved by killing another human being?” The following reflections denounce eugenics: “A social malaise?” and “Is there a phobia regarding disability?” A photo of a boy carrying a stop sign reading “stop chromosomal racism” is shown. Turning to phobias towards disability, the manual presents the case of a doctor who was sentenced to indemnify the parents for failing to provide a prenatal diagnosis of a “deeply deficient” child and sentenced also to indemnify the child “for the harm caused by being alive” (p. 25). The section entitled “Testimonies” relates the experience of the mother of a Down Syndrome patient who was glad that she had not made the prenatal diagnosis, which she claimed meant avoiding inducements for her to abort.

Chapter 4, “Medical Care for Breeding,” addresses Assisted Reproduction (AR). In this article I focus in more detail on the chapter’s discussion of the status of embryos, although it also addresses the confusion in kinship relationships supposedly caused by AR. In describing the methods of ‘artificially assisted reproduction,’ the manual’s authors criticize procedures that entail the death of embryos in “frightening numbers.” They ask how many embryos must die to provide a single birth, before claiming that 16 must die “to obtain a living being.” The section “Questions about AR” asks “Does freezing have consequences for the embryo?” and highlights some of the risks. One prominent note makes the Church’s position explicit: “Through *in vitro* fertilization, embryos are conceived outside the mother’s body. From fertilization onward, these embryos are human beings, exactly like embryos created *in vivo*, even if they are not implanted in the womb. To destroy these embryos, *in vitro* or *in vivo*, is an abortion” (p.31). Of the eight items listed in the “Ethical reflections” section of the chapter, five are related to embryos: “Parental design and dignity (1)”; “

“can we speak of ‘surplus’ embryos?”; “Parental design and dignity (2)”; “Freezing embryos?”; and “Embryos for research?” In the two topics on parental design, the IVF technique is questioned as a form of eugenics, given that it depends on the selection of ‘healthy’ embryos, while those “without qualities are destroyed.” A second selection process is also denounced in similar terms. This is the case of embryonic reduction or, in the manual’s words, “Aborting 1 or 2 children to limit the risks of multiple pregnancies.” The second topic questions the expression ‘parental project,’ associating this notion with debates about abortion. It states that even if there is no parental project for the ‘child,’ the child, whether embryo or newborn, will always be a human being (p. 34). The section also questions the term ‘embryo surplus,’ referring to embryos that are not used in the parental project and become transformed into objects. In the last few items of the section, the number of frozen embryos is denounced and the use of human embryos for research judged to be illegitimate: “they are men [sic] and we do not have the right to dispose of the life of another human being, even if it is to save another life” (p. 35). With regard to kinship, the manual questions the “desire for a child at any cost” and calls for “protecting gametes and procreation against manipulation” (p. 33). The final “Testimonies” section tells the story of a woman who conceived through IVF and does not know what decision to make regarding her frozen embryos (p. 36). Although the chapter focuses on defending the life of the embryo, it also questions the artificiality of assisted reproduction techniques.

Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) is discussed in Chapter 5. This is an embryo selection technique used by “fertile couples concerned with hereditary genetic disease” (p. 38). Emphasis is given in the chapter to the destruction of embryos bearing diseases or lacking desired genetic features. One note prominently states, “whether *in vitro* (by IVF) or *in vivo* (in the woman’s body), **the destruction of a diseased embryo amounts to an abortion**” (p. 39, original emphasis). Of particular note is a statement by Jerome Lejeune: “Chromosomal racism is as horrible as all other forms of racism” (p. 35). In the explanation of the methods involved in PGD, “Private selection: double PGD or baby medication” is highlighted. This is where an embryo is selected through PGD via IVF with the goal of treating an older brother who suffers from a serious genetic disease. The section “Questions about pre-implantation genetic diagnosis” has the following topics: “Is it true that PGD cures a child?”; “Can PGD be justified because it prevents abortion?”; “On an ethical level, is it better to have a PGD than a late abortion?” The manual denies that PGD provides cures, claiming that it only eliminates patients. In “On an ethical level,” the manual claims that embryo destruction by PGD “is the same thing as an abortion” and states that “for children identified as sick, the result is the same regardless of the date: they will be killed” (p.40). The manual predicts that some “people may have post-abortion syndrome because they cannot ignore the seriousness of what they did.” The chapter continues in this section with three “ethical reflections”: “Is PGD eugenics?”; “Towards the creation of a ‘superman?’”; and “Babies as drugs: a choice for parents?” (p. 41). These reflections denounce PGD as a eugenic technique. With regard to “babies as drugs,” the authors wonder “how many embryos will be conceived and disposed of so that only one can live?” They also ask how the older brother will feel when he learns that “dozens of embryos were eliminated because they could not serve as a remedy” (p. 41). The chapter emphasizes that human embryos cannot be treated as “simple laboratory materials” and that a diagnosis of deficiency should not be a reason to interrupt a pregnancy (p. 43).

My analysis will focus in more detail on Chapter 6, “Research on the embryo,” because of its continuity with the theme of defending embryonic life. The chapter begins with a question: “Stem cell research: What is at stake?” (p. 44), which reveals the chapter’s emphasis on embryonic stem cell research, the main form of applied research with embryos. The chapter’s second section is entitled “Human stem cell types in the development of the human being.” An illustration shows stem cells in a line with images of a single cell zygote, a 2-7 day old embryo, a 3 month old fetus, a baby, and an adult. Again, there is the same presentation of biology found in the opening chapter on the history of the small human being.

Waldby (2002) asks whether this beginning represents a biography (the starting point of a human narrative that must be allowed to follow its social course), which is the position the Catholic Church takes in the manual, or whether the life of the embryo is a form of brute biological vitality (Luna 2010), which is the position of those in favor of the legalization of abortion or the use of the morning-after pill. The following section examines the characteristics and different types of stem cells – totipotent, pluripotent and multipotent – discussing their origin and explaining IPS cells (“induced pluripotent stem cells”: taken from the adult body and deprogrammed to become undifferentiated cells) (p. 46). Next, stem cells are discussed in relation to cell therapy and research. The authors advocate the use of adult stem cells and describe their application (p. 47). Human embryonic cells, obtained from the embryo between 2 to 7 days after fertilization, and IPS cells are also compared. A table shows the strengths and weaknesses of human embryonic stem cells and IPS: both supposedly have the same capabilities, cause cancerous tumors, and have no current clinical application. Certain strengths are then associated with IPS cells: “Absence of rejection when coming from the patient”; “Producing pathological models directly from the patient’s cells” and “not involving ethical problems.” By contrast, the production of embryonic stem cells implies “the destruction of human embryos” (p. 48).

Chapter 6 also discusses the use of umbilical cord blood and animal embryos in research and cloning. It praises the scientist who discovered the IPS “as a result of his studies with rat embryos.” Reproductive cloning (“aimed at reproducing a being intended to be born”) is opposed to therapeutic cloning (“cloning useful for research”). The section on “Ethical reflections” includes the following questions conscientious objection; new slaves; adult stem cells or embryonic cells; the ethical problem of human cloning; and prohibitions on patenting the embryo. One prominent note includes the following statement: “Regardless of the mode of conception (fertilization or cloning), the developing embryo is a living being. If it is a human embryo, it is a human being” (p. 50). The chapter argues that embryo research “is contrary to ethics, because it destroys a human being” (p. 50) and questions the option to pursue non-therapeutic research in detriment to potentially therapeutic research. Conscientious objection is invoked to argue that no researcher is required to participate in studies involving human embryos or embryonic stem cells, citing European Council Resolution 1763. In this case, we can observe that secular legislation is invoked to give legitimacy to the Catholic public position. The embryos used in research are compared to “new slaves,” comprising “a class of humans used to satisfy the needs of other human beings.” In its stance against the destruction of any human embryo, the manual states that “reproductive cloning, which at least aims to give life, is less serious in ethical terms than therapeutic cloning, whose goal is to create a new human being to serve the purposes of research” (p. 51). It is important to note that the enormous risks of generating a baby through reproductive cloning are not considered in the Catholic manual, which limits its complaints to embryonic stem cell research, because this supposedly entails more risks than research with adult stem cells. The chapter’s emphasis is on not reducing the human body to the sum of its cells, but treating it as a human being from conception onward. In this sense, the authors affirm the value of human life and its inviolability: is research using embryos ethical;

Chapter 7 begins with the question “Euthanasia: What is at stake?” It is divided into the following sections: “Palliative treatments/Euthanasia”; “Questions about euthanasia”; “Ethical reflections”; “Testimonies” and “What the Church says...” The chapter begins by setting out the general thesis of the manual: “every stage of human life has an irreplaceable value.” The end of life is thus cast as potentially the most important step in the human experience, presenting an opportunity to care for a person by demonstrating that they are worthy of esteem and consideration. It may be necessary to relieve pain through palliative treatments. The second section contrasts palliative treatments and euthanasia. Palliative treatments are not aimed at healing, but at end-of-life care, and include procedures for reducing

suffering and distress. In medical practice, the priority is the fight against pain, but psychological and bodily treatments are also included, as well as “establishing a privileged space for friends and family” (p. 55). Euthanasia is defined as “deliberate medical action or omission in order to cause the patient’s death” (p. 55) by injecting the patient with a lethal substance or suspending essential treatments. Proponents of euthanasia claim that it alleviates suffering, but the manual’s authors believe that the proper course is to alleviate pain until such a time as death occurs naturally. The questions section of the chapter interrogates the differences between euthanasia and therapeutic obstinacy – “when can one fall into the practice of euthanasia?” – and the distinction between active and passive euthanasia. “Therapeutic obstinacy” is defined as “continuing treatment that is unnecessary in view of the patient’s condition” (p. 56). Discontinuing disproportionate treatments, whose objective would be to *artificially* prolong (my emphasis) the patient’s life, is not euthanasia. The patient’s basic needs cannot be interrupted, however. The text questions laws that permit euthanasia, but admits the possibility of suspending food and hydration at the request of the patient, which would condemn him or her to death. The distinction between active and passive euthanasia is criticized, since euthanasia only occurs by either action or omission. The section on ethical reflections raises questions about whether suffering is moral, dying with dignity, and the impact of the denial of death. There are sections on “what good is it to live connected to a machine?” and “what use is it to live unconscious.” Finally the manual asks if suffering is indeed unbearable. As for the morality of suffering, the manual states that it can be attenuated by care and that patients who receive affection and care will not seek death. It claims that the defense of death with dignity is an opening for legalized euthanasia, since “every human being is worthy regardless of their condition.” The manual also points to society’s difficulties in accepting death, “considered more of an injustice than a *natural* process (p. 57, my emphasis). As for living connected to a machine, this possibility is deemed valid only when it can temporarily assist a damaged vital function. The manual questions the validity of this option if the goal is to extend the life of a terminally ill patient. With respect to living while unconscious, the text asks to what extent the actual degree of consciousness is known and affirms that no right exists to steal the last moments of a life. It also raises doubts about the existence of unbearable suffering, since palliative treatments alleviate most of this.

The “Testimonies” section relates the experiences of medical staff who deny requests for active euthanasia, attributing to the patient’s confusion or to the doctors’ lack of understanding. The defense of palliative care is key in this chapter.

The section entitled “What the Church says” contains the following items: “Life is a gift of God’s love,” based on the expression *iura et bona*, which considers the ‘homicidal’ gesture to be a “violation of divine law,” an “offense to the dignity of the human person.” The next item, entitled “The confusion between good and evil,” is grounded in the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* and addresses the elimination of “human lives that are in decline,” affirming that ‘dazed’ human consciousness has difficulties perceiving the distinction between good and evil. Of all the manual’s chapters, this one addressing euthanasia is the least repetitive and simplistic in its arguments. Although it does not admit euthanasia as a medical option or a patient’s choice, refuting the existence of unbearable suffering or total unconsciousness, it is ambiguous in its criticism of therapeutic obstinacy, while continuing to recommend that basic care for life support not be suspended. The religious foundation for this position is, again, life as a gift from God, a conception derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition (Franklin 1995), which bestows a sacred character upon life (Durkheim 1989), allowing no room for human choice, even in the case of preventing suffering. In this respect, the arguments used in relation to abortion or embryonic stem cell research continue to be deployed in this chapter. Human dignity does not imply the right to choose, for the sacredness of life as a divine gift is greater. In its defense of palliative measures, the manual’s arguments hover at the limit between deciding to suspend care or not (Gomes and Menezes 2008).

The chapter on “Organ donation” is one of the shortest in the manual, as well as the least controversial. It addresses the purpose of organ transplants as an important medical advancement that allows improvement to a patient’s quality of life and that may even save a patient from death. The topics discussed in the section “What is it?” include organ removal from live bodies and corpses, the criteria used to determine death, and the types of organs that can be removed. The emphasis here is on the distinction between dead and living donors. The manual explains the criteria involved in declaring encephalic death, that is, the cessation of encephalic functions, which only occurs with the “total and irreversible destruction of the brain” and not only of the cortex. Removal of organs from a living donor is understood to be ethical only in cases of “directed donation,” that is between a donor and related recipient, requiring the free consent of both. The questions section on organ donation actually focuses on defining the concept of death more clearly. Differences between a deep coma and death are discussed, emphasizing that in the first case there is still brain activity. As for the question of whether or not the criteria for death are valid, the manual informs us that scientists question these criteria. Finally, the manual asks whether cardiac arrest is the correct definition of death. The section on ethical considerations addresses the following questions: transplantation and ethics; respect for the corpse; and consent and respect for the living donor. For organ removal to be ethical, a conscious and free agreement on the part of the donor and their family, and the certainty of the recipient dying without an organ donation, is indispensable. The respect due to any human person is also extended to the corpse. Consent for the donation must be made, therefore, while the donor is alive, which is understood in different ways according to the laws of different countries. In the case of a living donor, the rules that require due respect for the body and the obligation to act for the good of the patient may be nullified in favor of a greater good: saving the life of another person, provided it is through a voluntary act of the donor. The “Testimonies” section is provided by a doctor responsible for resuscitation who opposes the concept of presumed consent and denounces the risks of appropriating the organs of the dead without asking for permission. The section on “What the Church says” is composed of a subsection on “Loving as God loves,” based on the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, which discusses organ donations made in accordance with ethically acceptable forms. The next item, “Respect the donor,” is drawn from the Youth Catechism and describes as key elements the donor’s free and informed consent and the certainty of brain death. The section ends with “A culture of gift and gratuitousness,” in which organ donation is depicted as an act of love, based on Benedict XVI’s address at a congress sponsored by the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Chapter 8 is the least controversial in the manual, but its principles can be contrasted with those presented in Chapter 6 on embryo research. In embryo research, the manual argues, it is unjustifiable to use human embryos to manufacture stem cells in order to benefit sick people. This contrasts with the manual’s praise for organ and tissue donation. The rules that require respect for the body are not nullified in organ donation, as shown by the recommended practice of consensual donation among the living. The manual argues that these rules are absolute, however, when it comes to the use of human embryos.

The final chapter on “Gender theory” is an annex. In the version of the manual published in Portugal as *Bioethics for Young People* in 2012, a year before World Youth Day in Brazil, the part on organ donation included the chapter on “Euthanasia / donation of organs” while the chapter on “gender theory” was absent. In the initial section of this chapter, gender theory is defined as “a hypothesis according to which the sexual identity of the human being depends on the sociocultural environment and not on the sex – boy or girl – that characterizes the human being from the moment of their conception” (p. 68). After observing that, according to this theory, gender should be based on sexual orientation, the manual informs readers that “some people” (not stated who) claim that there are as many as “six genders: heterosexual male, heterosexual female, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual and undifferentiated – neither male nor female)” (p. 68). Here we can see that this example of ‘genders’ mixes gender and sexual orientation, as per the

concepts defined by Grossi (1998). After this rather odd definition, the manual presents its critical thesis: gender theory “underestimates the biological reality of the human being. Reductionist, it overestimates the sociocultural construction of sexual identity, opposing it to nature” (p. 68). This is one of the richest chapters in terms of imagery. The first section is illustrated by a young man reading a book, asking himself, “Well, what gender will I choose this year?” Heavy irony also permeates the illustration in the following section regarding the consequences of this theory: a boy observes a female kangaroo carrying two joeys in her bag. He then asks himself: “Among the kangaroos, is it society that decides whether the mom will have a bag to carry the babies?” (p. 69). The supposed consequences of gender theory are portrayed in the topics “A new family model” and “A new organization of society”: families formed by a couple composed of a man and a woman are, in this view, no more legitimate than other forms, meaning that the law should recognize ‘homosexual marriage’ (quotation marks in the original). The consequence is to allow all couples to have children, including through adoption and assisted reproduction. The organization of society is no longer based on the differences between men and women, but on the diverse forms of sexuality. A prominent passage shows the position of the manual’s authors in response to this model: “the union between a man and a woman is the only one capable of generating a child and inscribing it in the continuity of the generations” (p. 69).

The section entitled “What makes us a boy or a girl?” explains the difference between males and females by utilizing genetics: the 23 pairs of chromosomes resulting from the union of the ovum and the sperm, and the existence of the X and Y sex chromosomes. Although the manual contests gender theory, female is represented by pink and male by blue according to the symbolism of hegemonic gender representations. “The sex of the child (XX girl or XY boy) is determined at the instant of conception, from the constitution of the first cell.” The manual then affirms the continuity of this genetic heritage throughout life and repeats statements from previous chapters on the history of the small human being, abortion and research on the embryo: “Genetic heritage is unique. Every human being is unique and irreplaceable” (p. 70). In addition to the schematics showing the distribution of the chromosomes, there is an illustration with a naked boy who asks, while looking at his own penis: “I’m not a man? Me? So what’s this?” (p. 71).

The “Key points” section asks about the difference between sex and gender, the definition of homoparentality, and whether two people of the same sex can have a child. The manual states that gender theorists define sex as a “biological reality,” while gender is understood to be the “social dimension of sex.” Gender is thus stipulated as subjective and something dependent not on sex, but on an individual’s perception of themselves and “the sexuality they choose to live.” Homoparentality designates the role of parents who are of the same sex. It differs from ‘kinship,’ which is linked to procreation (birth by father and mother). The manual states that parenting claims hide the child’s right to know his or her father and mother and grow up with them. It also states that the child will ask about his or her biological origin and that they need sexual differentiation to form their personality. Children “deprived of their affiliation” are, the authors argue, thrust into a situation of inequality. Finally, the manual states that two persons of the same sex cannot bear a child (even though the original question was ‘to have’ a child) and that, even with assisted procreation, it is necessary to unite a female and a male gamete. It also criticizes the use of gamete donation and ‘surrogacy.’

The section on ethical reflections presents three questions, the first being: “Why can no one decide to become a man or woman?” The answer is based on biological difference and admits that sexual identity is formed by psychological and cultural forces, yet it must be in harmony with biological sex, since to do differently would be a source of suffering. The biological basis of the manual’s arguments becomes apparent here: “adherents of gender theory pretend that by a simple act of will, we can change the reality of who we are,” accusing gender theorists of “erasing evidence.” The manual’s authors ask whether “our bodies

would lie to us?” (p. 73) This question reproduces a popular belief formed during the Enlightenment period during which the modern Western cosmology became founded on the domain of facts. Biology – the stable, a-historical, sexed body – is understood as the epistemic foundation for claims about the social order (Laqueur 1992). The body is real, while cultural meanings are epiphenomenal.

The second question is “Are all family models valid as long as the child is loved?” The answer calls for realism regarding birth as a boy or a girl. The manual states that every child needs a father and a mother in order to develop properly. The last question asks: “Isn’t it homophobia to refuse to allow homosexuals to adopt?” The answer resembles the earlier critique of medically assisted reproduction: “having a child is not a right.” A child is not a “consumer good.” Ignoring the biological evidence that a man and a woman are needed to create a child would be an indication that homosexual claims to children are unjust. The manual defends the child’s right to have a father and a mother in order to build the child’s personality. In the “Testimonies” section, an unidentified author’s testimony is taken from the website “Liberté politique,” mentioning a scientific study, based on a vast set of samples, according to which the stable union between father and biological mother are the most suitable environment for a child’s development. This upholds the principle of “the best interests of the child,” based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Children.

This chapter is one of the most strongly marked by a biological determinism, which is contrasted to the ‘will’ advocated by what they authors call gender theory. It takes up and reworks elements defended in previous chapters on genetic identity as something established from conception on. Interestingly, the criticism in this chapter turns against homosexual identities basically by appealing to genetic determinism. It describes the differences between men and women as necessary for the constitution of the family and naturalizes maternal and paternal roles. The manual admits that the personality is formed and not given by genetics, but considers only one type of family to exist and only one type of development-friendly environment. As in the chapters on abortion, rights are considered to belong to the ‘child.’ Similar elements are found in Butler’s 2003 paper analyzing the debate on the civil solidarity pact in France. Butler also identifies how kinship variations that stray from the heterosexual family model are considered to be dangerous for children. Butler compares the debate in the United States, where conservatives denounce the unnatural character of homosexuality, with the controversy in France where, according to philosopher Silviane Agacinsky, the State’s recognition and tolerance of the formation of families by homosexuals goes against the ‘symbolic order.’ In an editorial entitled “Against the erasure of the sexes,” Agacinsky identifies “a certain variety of queer and gender theory” as contributing to “the monstrous future of France,” if such changes in kinship are allowed to occur (see Butler 2003: 267). Her views are very much in line with the criticisms presented by the manual. Agacinsky accuses gay kinship of being unnatural and a cultural threat. According to Butler, concerns are expressed about the child’s upbringing in a homoparental family: “the child appears in the debate as a dense nexus for the transference and reproduction of culture” (Butler 2003: 232). Such a position is explicit in the manual, which claims to be defending “the best interests of the child” in line with UN declarations. This approach to child protection, aiming to protect children from being raised in a non-natural family of same-sex parents, is an example of Catholic biopolitics according to Turina (2013). The Church has seen the family as a strategic partner from the late nineteenth century onward, with increasing emphasis on this alliance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Considering the millennial history of the Catholic Church, its recent emphasis on family and child rearing reflects a political project of ensuring the growth of truly faithful Catholics, which is related to the Vatican’s competition for preeminent influence on the laws of national states and international organizations. It also is an attempt to compete with other growing religions, particularly Islam, as well as defend the vocation of the Church’s clergy, who tend to come from larger families. Turning to the manual (in contrast to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which recognizes homosexuality, although it states that homosexual

acts are “intrinsically disordered,” p. 2537), the interpretation of gender theory presented by the manual rejects the possibility of it even occurring in nature, opting instead for an argumentation that considers sexual difference as simply and completely natural and rooted in genetic identity from conception onward.

## Final considerations

This article is based on the analysis of a document chosen as an example of the Vatican’s doctrinal position on certain issues: namely, the *Keys to Bioethics* manual that was distributed during WYD in Rio de Janeiro in 2013.

The chapters analyzed above form a coherent set of so-called abortion-centered, pro-life teachings, touching on related issues in fetal and embryo defense in the case of stem cell research or assisted reproduction. The description of the problem in each item, along with its practical and ethical implications, reiterates the thesis of life from conception and absolute respect for the life of the embryo or fetus, regardless of its context, whether formed in the laboratory or as a result of sexual intercourse, whether inside or outside the mother’s womb. The physical conditions of the embryo or fetus are also relativized. Any allusion to a malformed or nonviable fetus, in the case of prenatal genetic diagnosis, or to an embryo that will develop with serious or incurable genetic pathology, in the case of pre-implantation diagnosis, is considered to be a form of eugenics. Since the fetus or embryo is a full human being, in the sense of being a person, any manipulation or experimentation undertaken with it is seen as a crime and as murder (in the case of embryonic stem cell research). The image of the slave is employed, defined as a human being used for the benefit of another, disregarding any health benefit or development of scientific knowledge that might result from using or experimenting with embryos. The initial raw vitality of the set of cells is portrayed as an inexorable process of development, the first step in making a full person. Again, the embryo is presented as an individual in the sense formulated by Dumont (1992, 1997): an a-social entity devoid of any relations, which is the basis of the axial values of equality and freedom present in the modern Western configuration. The life of the embryo or fetus is sacred just as the individual is sacred, according to the ideology of the modern West (Durkheim 1970). Notions of sacred life embodied in the embryo recall Durkheim’s (1989) approach to the power contained in magical objects. Durkheim (1970) had already pointed to the individual as an object of worship in modern Western societies, a hypothesis that illustrates the individual’s assertion as an element of value (Dumont 1992). By emphasizing the biographical dimension in the linear and automatic description of embryonic and fetal development (cf. Strathern 1992) and by representing fetuses and embryos as sets of biological and genetic characteristics, the presence of a network of relationships involving the embryo is thereby hidden (Salem 1997). Any reference to the motivations of pregnant women who want abortions or who do not assume the role of maternal kinship, or those of both parents when faced with a serious illness that will entail serious suffering for the unborn child, is minimized. According to the hierarchy of values (Dumont 1992) expressed by the manual, comprehension of the suffering of the parents is secondary in terms of absolute weight when compared to the life of the embryo as a person endowed with life granted by God. As in other Catholic documents (Luna 2010 and 2002), biological argumentation is the outward aspect of a prior metaphysical assumption, based on previously held religious convictions.

Another essential point in the manual’s moral arguments concerns its notions of life and personhood. To better understand this, I take up the analysis proposed by Dworkin. The author identifies an intellectual confusion in the public debate on abortion, specifically regarding the pro-life position, which states that human life begins at conception, that the fetus is already a person from this moment on, and that abortion is murder or an assault on the sanctity of human life. In Dworkin’s view, different ideas are embedded

in the following two phrases: 1. the presupposition of the existence of rights and interests held by all human beings, including fetuses, given that the latter are entities with their own interests from conception onward; 2. abortion is wrong because it disregards the sacredness of any form of human life. In the first case, the government should prohibit or regulate abortion because of its derivative responsibility to protect the fetus; in the latter case, however, the government is taken to have the independent responsibility to protect human life itself. The first objection recognizes the fetus as a person, a subject of rights, while the second objection argues for the sacred value of human life. These are the themes in the anthropology of the relationship between person and life. According to Dworkin, claiming that abortion is an iniquity because human life is sacred is different from saying that it is wrong because the fetus has the right to live (2003). The rhetoric of the pro-life movement presupposes that the fetus is a person in the total moral plenitude of the term from conception onward, with rights and interests of equal importance to those of other members of its community.

The manual presents the anti-abortion stance of the Vatican, displaying a special interest in the protection of embryos and fetuses. This position is based on the narrative of embryonic and fetal development as a biographical continuum from fertilization until death as an adult. This perspective underpins the anti-abortion position that abortion is considered unjustifiable under any circumstance. Even contraceptive methods are accused of promoting an 'abortion mentality' or constituting abortion methods themselves in the case of emergency contraception. Along the same lines, this position condemns the generation of embryos in vitro, since this implies the death and destruction of such embryos. It likewise condemns any embryonic or fetal diagnostic technology that is not exclusively therapeutic, questioning tests that involve the non-transference of the embryo and its destruction or abortion. Any diagnostic intervention is qualified as eugenics, promoting the exclusion of those who are different. The humanization of the embryo and fetus is associated with the dehumanization of those around them, whose interests and motivations are disregarded in view of the priority of fetal rights (Strathern 1992).

Another aspect of this self-styled 'defense of life' is the attack on euthanasia. The right to choose is challenged when it contemplates choices that touch upon lives taken to be sacred, whether these are extracorporeal embryos consisting of a few cells or endangered human subjects. The desire to intervene to reduce suffering is as heavily questioned as the person's self-determination of the experience of gender identity or sexual choice. Criticism of gender theories emerges against a prior backdrop of the questioning of choice and will and the defense of natural determination of identities. Just as in the case of abortion, here it is argued that to defend the child's greater interest, the constitution of families that do not correspond to the model of heterosexual marriage must not be allowed.

The positions of the Catholic Church defended by the manual attack the exercise of individual autonomy and the right to choose (Gomes and Menezes 2008) in the name of a higher dimension: religious values. In this sense, the manual confirms Turina's analysis of Catholic biopolitics:

The biological body has now become a battleground. The State, the Church and individuals strive to maintain a firm grip on it. The Vatican states that the body belongs to God, who has created it; only the Church, representing God on earth, has the authority to judge which uses of the body are right and which are wrong. In sum, the Catholic Church has passed the threshold of biological modernity (Turina 2013: 139).

The biological body has become a battlefield disputed by the Church and State, as well as individuals. The Church, claiming to be God's representative on Earth, wants to have the authority to judge the correct uses of the body and, for that purpose, it wishes to disseminate its values. These values were reaffirmed during World Youth Day with the distribution of the handbook to the 'pilgrims' enrolled in the event,

in order to instruct them regarding these controversial themes. While the pro-life discourse prioritizes the autonomy of the fetus and embryo, the feminist and LGBT movements defend the autonomy of subjects and their decisions about the body itself. In a conflictive situation in which individual liberties and the hegemony of the Catholic tradition in the Brazil are opposed, abortion, sexual diversity and other actions related to the right to choose, such as euthanasia, are transformed into public issues by the publication of the manual. These feminist and LGBT movements protest against the interference of the Vatican in the lives of women and men with respect to their decisions about sexuality and reproduction as well as gender identity. In the controversy surrounding the public debate on abortion in Brazil, a dialogue between the deaf is constructed in which a closed doctrinal position on abortion, refused under any circumstance, a viewpoint extended to other reproductive techniques, is opposed to claims of autonomy that accuse religion of fundamentalism, focusing on the Catholic Church as the main antagonist. The claims made by the latter groups on the secular state propose the curbing of religious influence on legislation and public policies (Ruibal 2014, Zúñiga-Fajuri 2014 and Diniz 2011).

Another significant point, clearly exemplified in the dilemmas about abortion and euthanasia and in the discussions on whether or not someone can decide to cut short a life (Gomes and Menezes 2008), is the manual's portrayal of social processes as grounded in nature. We thus find here a critique of the artificial prolongation of life in therapeutic obstinacy, but also a demand that death occur naturally, without euthanasia, even in the context of great suffering. The use of assisted reproduction techniques is also attacked as artificial. The defense of natural determination is likewise at the core of the arguments against so-called 'gender theory,' with its effects considered to be harmful to the identities of subjects and to the reproduction of the family. Sex is natural; 'gender theory' is an invention and has harmful consequences for the development of children. Hence the argument, "our bodies would not lie to us." From the perspective of biopolitics, the Catholic Church thus has a project for power. The manual represents several strategies within this perspective to achieve control of biological bodies in the regulation of practices such as abortion, contraception, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, reproductive modalities, and marriage. This represents one possibility for addressing the issue. However, another possible approach, attempted in this article, is to understand the value systems that underlie Catholic doctrine, whose various aspects are exemplified in the manual. The manual defends the value of life as the gift from God. To this value of life is connected a conception of nature as the foundation of reality, a characteristic belief of the modern West (Laqueur 1992). However, the metaphysical definition of life predates this belief and nature is subordinate to it. Nature is used to deny assisted reproduction and to refuse the formation of homoparental families. The 'nature' argument grounds the reality of the embryo as being (genetically) autonomous from conception. In the case of Catholic doctrine, a metaphysical argument about life, God's gift, slides into a naturalist argument that aims for greater legitimacy in public space. The third argument presented concerns autonomy. The document denies women's autonomy to decide with regard to their own pregnancies and situates women who terminate pregnancies as victims of abortion. It denies the legitimacy of a reproductive autonomy that seeks to regulate the number of children or seeks to create children through assisted reproduction technologies. On the other hand, the autonomy argument is put forward in favor of the embryo and the fetus to claim that any abortion is a murder, or that the use of embryos in research, which requires them to be destroyed, is a crime and the same as abortion. The fetus is an autonomous human being and the woman is subordinate to it, encompassed by it, comprising a receptacle for its development. This idealized image of motherhood is celebrated in the manual.

In some respects, when it comes to population control, the biopolitical argument for maintaining a Catholic contingent makes sense. It does not make sense, however, in the context of stem cell research which seeks to develop therapies that would allow Catholics to remain alive or in better health. Neither does

it make sense in terms of opposition to abortion even in the case of anencephaly or other conditions in which the fetus is nonviable. The analysis of the Catholic position through the lens of biopolitics highlights some important aspects in the Church's struggle to retain its power, but it is also restrictive and cannot encompass the rationale of various Church arguments. The intransigent defense of the right to life of embryos and fetuses under any circumstance is not necessarily consistent with the growth of the Catholic contingent, which would be a reductionist view of the biopolitics identified by Turina (2013). Sexuality, family and human life have become important investments for the Vatican, in both a symbolic and strategic sense, in its competition with other religions and in recruiting clerics and followers (Turina 2013: 144). From the 1960s onwards, there has been a growing divergence between religious law and civil law in many countries with regards to abortion, contraception and homosexuality. According to Turina, it is crucial to have heterosexual couples who provide education for their children in the Catholic faith as a means of propagating and maintaining Catholicism, and this is one of the reasons for the biopolitical emphasis identifiable in many of the Catholic Church's pronouncements.

Among the tensions and contradictory aspects present in these conflicts, it should be noted that in the debates on euthanasia and abortion "[i]ndividual autonomy – a central reference in contemporary Western society – is conveyed by movements for the 'right of the unborn,' 'death with dignity' or the 'right to die'" (Gomes and Menezes 2008: 96).

This is observed in the manual, which conveys a tense relationship between Catholic and Christian values and individualism (Dumont 1992 and 1997). Although the manual reaffirms the values of individualism by consecrating the idea of the embryo as an autonomous entity and the subject of rights (Dworkin 2003), it also refers to already born human subjects and their responsibilities as Christians. Here the individual is portrayed as a human being in relation to a God, as someone who owes God obedience, the Catholic doctrine being understood as the correct interpretation of what such obedience comprises (Dumont 1997). It is possible to speak of a selective assimilation of elements of individualist ideology in the manual, as in the prescription of contracts of free and informed consent for organ donation. This selective assimilation of liberal ideology can be seen in the denunciation of so-called 'chromosomal racism,' in which racism appears as synonymous with discrimination against those who are different.

If there is an understanding of citizenship in the manual, it refers to the rights of fetuses and embryos. But a woman faced with an unwanted pregnancy, LGBT couples who wish to have children, those who seek to avoid prolonging a process of suffering and who opt for its termination, those who care about the health of the fetus, or the possibilities for treatment opened up by embryonic stem cell research... in terms of the position taken by the manual, none of these would be considered to be citizens.

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