

1999

The Bishops' New Statement on Abortion: Why It Isn't Accomplishing Much of Anything.

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Recommended Citation

Raymond B. Marcin, *The Bishops' New Statement on Abortion: Why It Isn't Accomplishing Much of Anything*, 66 *NEW OXFORD REV.* 30 (1999).

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the home be recognized and respected by all in its irreplaceable value." The clincher follows: "While it must be recognized that women have the same right as men to perform various public functions, society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are not in practice compelled to work outside the home, and that their families can live and prosper in a dignified way even when they themselves devote their full time to their own family" (all quotations, *FC 23*). Directly on target is the admonition: "Furthermore, the mentality which honors women more for their work outside the home than for their work within the family must be overcome."

Summary

These papal teachings need no protracted exegesis. Perhaps all that remains to be added here is a brief summary of them.

First, men and women are equal in all that is essential: They are created by God with body and soul, and have an eternal destiny.

Second, women are uniquely ordained to be mothers and uniquely suited by their specific psychological endowment to be nurturers.

Third, motherhood is a full-time responsibility which demands that women who become mothers be allowed to fulfill this responsibility in the home without economic or social penalty.

Fourth, the economic order is to be arranged in such a way that mothers be spared having to work outside the home. This means that the wage for fathers must be just — that is, a wage sufficient to enable mothers to perform their functions as mothers and wives in the home.

Fifth, women who are not mothers, or whose maturing or grown children no longer require great care, have a right to work at all occupations for which they are capable according to their own specific nature as females.

Sixth, whenever women are performing work that is equal, they are entitled to equal pay.

These principles need no exegesis, only enactment. ■

WHY IT ISN'T ACCOMPLISHING MUCH OF ANYTHING

RAYMOND B. MARCIN

The Bishops' New Statement on Abortion

In November 1998 the Catholic bishops of the United States issued a statement entitled *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*. "The Gospel of Life," the bishops asserted, "must be proclaimed, and human life defended, in all places and all times. The arena for moral responsibility includes not only the halls of government, but the voting booth as well" (#33). They addressed their challenge especially to "those in positions of leadership," stating that "no

one...who exercises leadership...can rightfully claim to share fully and practically the Catholic faith and yet act publicly in a way contrary to that faith" (#7). And they made this categorical statement: "Catholic public officials who disregard Church teaching on the inviolability of the human person indirectly collude in the taking of innocent life" (#29).

This was a meaningful call for fidelity to the Church's teaching and a ringing affirmation of the Church's stance against abortion. Moreover, the bishops reminded Catholic officials of "the consequences for their own spiritual well-being, as well as the scandal they risk by leading others into serious sin" (#32). To suggest that the bishops could

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have stated those “consequences” specifically (namely, the risk of eternal damnation), and to suggest that they could have applied the word “sin” to the politicians as well — these may be quibbles, for the bishops’ statement was indeed a strong one.

Why then has compliance with the statement been invisible to the naked eye? In a different era, would not such a statement have resulted in a surge of Catholic politicians unreservedly answering the bishops’ call? Yet I can’t think of a single Catholic politician who has announced since November his abandonment of the dodge “I’m-personally-opposed-to-abortion-but...” In a different era, would not there have been a ground-swell of gratitude from Catholic citizens for the moral leadership displayed by their bishops, followed by a pledge to be diligent in assessing the prolife positions of all political candidates? Yet no such result has followed upon the issuance of *Living the Gospel of Life*.

The reason may be that as sincere as the bishops sound and as compelling as their vision is, their statement lacks a crucial ingredient — an ingredient necessary in the era in which we live. For if we ask how the bishops propose to respond to Catholic public officials who “contradict the Gospel of Life through their actions and policies” (#29), their answer is merely this: They will “explain, persuade, correct, and admonish” (#29).

A few years ago Fabian Bruskewitz, Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, lifted the hearts of orthodox Catholics starved for leadership when he announced that those Catholics in his diocese who continued to remain members of certain “prochoice” organizations, including Planned Parenthood and Catholics for a Free Choice, would be excommunicated from the Church. And they *were* excommunicated. It is a sad commentary on our times in the Church that when Bishop Bruskewitz did that, he stood alone among American bishops. It is no quibble to suggest that what is missing from the bishops’ recent prolife statement is a healthy dose of Bruskewitz-like courage; what is missing is a warning that Catholic politicians who fail to adhere to the teachings of *Living the Gospel of Life* will incur excommunication.

There is another, more subtle reason why the U.S. bishops’ statement has not had its intended effect among Catholic politicians and Catholics in general. Catholic politicians and Catholic voters can

still use “I’m-personally-opposed-but” to justify their departure from the Church’s moral teaching because of years of irresponsible invocation and overuse of what in high Church circles is known as the “seamless garment” position.

Come election time, there are usually voter-information columns in various Catholic diocesan newspapers, usually based on a statement issued every four years by the U.S. Catholic Conference (U.S.C.C.) in the name of the U.S. bishops. The columns usually come fairly late in the game, just before election day, and they contain some variant of the “seamless garment” argument, also deployed by the U.S.C.C. The columns usually begin by announcing a firm, orthodox Catholic opposition to abortion, and then go on to list, say, fifteen other issues that should be of concern to Catholic voters. The columns usually end with the suggestion that one should not be a single-issue voter but should instead take *all* the issues listed into account, which is what the U.S.C.C. statement says.

The subtle verdict of the presumably nonpartisan election-eve columns is that, given the way politicians usually line up on the issues, the prolife cause loses fifteen to one. Doubtless some prolife Catholics thereupon go out and vote — perhaps with a twinge of discomfort but nonetheless in good conscience — for the pro-abortion candidate who takes the supposedly more enlightened stance on the other fifteen issues. Look at what happened in the 1996 presidential election. Bill Clinton is the most pro-abortion president we’ve had. He even vetoed the Congressional ban on partial-birth infanticide. Yet, incredibly, Catholics voted for him by a *larger* margin than did American voters generally.

So pro-abortion candidates continue to be elected, with the help and the votes of many otherwise prolife Catholics, and abortion continues, unchallenged in any serious way. The seamless garment approach usually has this result. But there is a germ of truth in it. Even *Living the Gospel of Life*, in a similar but decidedly more responsible use of the “seamless garment” metaphor, stresses a linkage between the prolife position and “issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing, and health care,” and it contains a somewhat similar suggestion that Catholic citizens and Catholic public officials have an obligation to address each of these other social issues. To their

credit the bishops add this sentence in italics: "*But being 'right' in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life*" (#23). The election-eve columns seldom if ever include such a caveat. Will they now? Probably not, because the bishops addressed that italicized sentence only to "Catholic public officials," and did not say unequivocally that Catholic citizens should give the prolife issue supremacy in their assessment of candidates. In the absence of such a clear statement, the bishops' statement might be understood by the cursory reader in the same sense as those election-eve columns we've seen.

Voting on moral, social, and environmental matters does involve issue-balancing. It may help, however, to view the demands of issue-balancing from a less superficial vantage point. What actually sits on either side of the issues-balancing scale? On one side of the balance — the prolife side — there is a *fact*: Thirty-five million dead human babies, and counting. On the other side of the scale — the cumulative social and environmental side — there is, what? Essentially there's nothing there but an *opinion*. The opinion is that, to put it in simple terms, liberal solutions to domestic problems are better than conservative solutions — that taxing heavily and giving big money to government bureaucracies and trusting that it will trickle down to the benefit of poorer people is a better solution to our social problems than not taxing heavily and letting private business make big money and trusting that it will trickle down to the benefit of poorer people.

Some will instantly see that a death toll of 35 million babies outweighs an opinion that one political philosophy is better than another. But some will not see it. Media influence over social ideology is such that a closer examination of the prolife side of the balance may be needed. The media, reflecting the world's values, have habitually portrayed those who favor legal abortion as the sensitive and caring ones, and have denied such praise to those who favor protecting the lives of pre-birth children. It is only recently, and principally in the context of the national debate over partial-birth infanticide, that compassion is being recognized as existing on the prolife side. Do sensitive and caring people allow the horribly painful killing of an all-but-born child?

Research published in the prestigious British medical journal *The Lancet* in 1994 concluded that

human fetuses, at some time during the second trimester, exhibit all the physiological indications of sensitivity to pain. The article ended with this suggestion: "Just as physicians now provide neonates with adequate analgesia, our findings suggest that those dealing with the fetus should consider making similar modifications to their practice. This applies not just to diagnostic and therapeutic procedures on the fetus, but possibly also to termination of pregnancy, especially by surgical techniques involving dismemberment." In other words, babies in the womb feel pain, and abortionists might consider drugging them before tearing them apart.

Pro-abortion advocates often argue that fetuses are not human beings. It sometimes surprises people to learn that the Supreme Court, in its infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision back in 1973, did *not* rule that fetuses are not human beings. The Court said that the proposition is debatable, declared its own inability to settle the debate, and ruled that, human or not, fetuses are not "persons" within the meaning of the U.S. Constitution. Some have considered this to be the great moral flaw in the *Roe* opinion, for if there is honest doubt as to whether a given entity is a person (and the Court admitted as much in *Roe*), a truly humane and civilized society should and would resolve that doubt in favor of personhood, rather than against it.

A similar moral position applies to the issue of fetal pain. Even if there is only an honest doubt as to whether a child in the womb feels pain, a truly humane and civilized society ought to resolve that doubt in favor of the thesis that fetuses *do* feel pain. So we can add to the prolife side of the balance the infliction of pain on innocent human beings. Those millions of babies did not evaporate or simply disappear. They were brutally exterminated.

Abortion methods are disturbing to contemplate, but they are facts, and they must be known if the morally crucial questions of fetal pain and fetal personhood are to be looked into seriously and not polemically. From the suction-aspiration technique commonly used in early pregnancies (which involves violent tearing and dismemberment) to the dilation-and-curettage method (cutting the baby's body into pieces and scraping the pieces into a basin) to the dilation-and-evacuation method commonly used after 12 weeks (twisting

and tearing the baby's body parts off, snapping the baby's spine, and crushing her skull for easier evacuation) to the saline-injection method commonly used after 16 weeks (insertion into the baby's sac of a poisonous solution that burns the baby alive as she kicks and jerks) to the hysterectomy and certain chemical methods (which essentially involve the premature delivery and subsequent neglect of fetal babies and which are in some disfavor because not infrequently the babies survive) to the now infamous partial-birth technique used in late-term abortions (which involves delivery of all but the head of the baby in the breech position, the stabbing of the points of surgical scissors into the base of the skull of the all-but-delivered child, the suction removal of the child's brain, the crushing of the emptied skull, and then the completion of the delivery of the corpse of the baby) — the business of aborting fetal children cries out for moral review and analysis.

Mother Teresa once said, with obvious reference to the United States: "Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion." The then Surgeon General of the U.S.,

Joycelyn Elders, uttered one of the pro-abortion movement's most candid responses to Mother Teresa: "We would like for the right-to-life and anti-choice groups to really get over their love affair with the fetus." It is perhaps the single greatest moral judgment on our society that we have adopted the dismissive cynicism of Joycelyn Elders over the altruism of Mother Teresa.

On one side of the balance, then, are dead human babies and (very likely, in many instances) unimaginable pain. On the other side is an opinion about which political philosophy is better. There's a contest? Catholic politicians and Catholic voters must grasp that abortion is the defining social issue, the defining ethical challenge of our age. Each of us is destined some day to be called to account for our response to that challenge, and it may not be a sufficient answer to tell the Creator that we tolerated the slaughter of His children because we preferred one political philosophy to another or were "personally opposed, but...."

With *Living the Gospel of Life*, our shepherds have taken a step forward, for which we must be grateful, but they still have more steps to take if they really want to lead their flock to live out the Gospel of Life. ■

THE NEGLIGENT CATHOLIC HOMILIST

TOM FATH

LOST SHEPHERDS, VULNERABLE SHEEP

Christianity is a dynamic, challenging, and difficult way of life. It is not a religion for the sheepish. Yet Our Lord and Savior more than once drew parallels between His followers and the four-footed woolly ruminants of the genus *Ovis*. "I am the good shepherd. The good

shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." "I have other sheep, that are not of this fold." "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep." (Jn. 10:11,16,26) Speaking for myself, I am not aware of possessing any particularly sheepish characteristics. I ruminate — but only my thoughts, not my food. I eat greens, but never grass. I feel no need to be dipped or shorn. But trusting in Jesus' word, I acknowledge myself as one of His flock — and I wonder sometimes what

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