

so hard to take. Except maybe for some ultrasounds, we have not seen them. Nor have we begun to experience the special, unique features of the personality of each one, or the early signs of the promising contributions they can make to society and history. Because of all this, their loss has less of an emotional price tag.

Here, then, is the challenge for us: Will we respond (and will we help our people respond) to the destruction of a moral good based primarily on its psychological aspect or rather based primarily on its moral aspect?

If the former, then the unborn will continue to receive less attention than the (morally equivalent) destruction of their older brothers and sisters.

A minister recently used this comparison for a fellow-pastor who was reluctant to do much about abortion, because, he said, "My mission is to proclaim the Gospel."

Suppose you knew that at a given moment, a father was taking his child to "The First Church of the False Gospel," and another father was about to kill his child.

If you were able to intervene, to which situation would you direct your attention first?

In attempting to save the child's life, one does not deny the critical importance of raising that child in the truth of the Gospel. But error in religious matters can be dealt

with throughout life. One needs a life to begin with.

It is a strange concern, indeed, that addressing abortion somehow "intrudes upon" our mission of evangelizing. *Evangelium Vitae* points out that because life belongs to God, "whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself" (EV 9). Quoting Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, John Paul II later says, "'By his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person' (Gaudium et Spes, 22). It is precisely in the "flesh" of every person that Christ continues to reveal himself and to enter into fellowship with us, so that rejection of human life, in whatever form that rejection takes, is really a rejection of Christ" (EV 104).

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Pamphlet 459

Evaluating Issues

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In an election season, Catholics are called upon to evaluate a wide range of issues as they determine what candidates they will support.

We who are leaders in the pro-life movement do not say that abortion is the only issue. It is, however, the *foundational* issue. Many things *destroy* human life. Yet abortion goes beyond that. Our nation's current abortion policy *authorizes such destruction, by a direct denial of the protections granted to persons under the US Constitution.*

An example will clarify this. We are rightly concerned about the poor, and need to develop programs and policies to advance their rights and enhance their lives. Sometimes people are heard to say that offenses against the poor are a more compelling concern to them than the abortion problem. Certainly, the problems are related, because a consistent ethic of life recognizes that human life is sacred always and everywhere, and that progress in any area of advancing human dignity means progress in all the other areas as well.

But to make a *truly equivalent parallel* between the plight of the poor and that of the unborn, one would have to imagine a policy whereby *a) the poor were officially*

declared to be devoid of "personhood" under the Constitution (as Roe vs. Wade did to the unborn), and b) over 4000 of the poor were put to death daily against their will, while efforts to directly save them were prosecuted by the government (as is the case regarding the unborn).

It is one thing to assert that a particular policy does or does not advance the rights of the poor; it is quite another to assert that the poor have no right to exist. Debates about the poor are in the first category; the debate about the unborn is in the second.

In their 1989 *Resolution on Abortion*, the US bishops therefore declared, "*At this particular time, abortion has become the fundamental human rights issue for all men and women of good will.*"

In their 1998 statement *Living the Gospel of Life*, the bishops likewise explained, "Opposition to abortion and euthanasia does not excuse indifference to those who suffer from poverty, violence and injustice.... Therefore, Catholics should eagerly involve themselves as advocates for the weak and marginalized in all these areas. Catholic public officials are obliged to address each of these issues ... *But being 'right' in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life.* Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the 'rightness' of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community. If we understand the human

person as the "temple of the Holy Spirit" -- the living house of God -- then these latter issues fall logically into place as the crossbeams and walls of that house. *All direct attacks on innocent human life, such as abortion and euthanasia, strike at the house's foundation*" (n. 23).

The Unborn: Poor and Marginalized

Abortion not only kills babies, it insults them by saying that there is a right to kill them. But such an insult is not only an insult to the unborn; it is an insult to all of us. Life is the condition for other rights not only in a temporal sense (in other words, you have to be born in order to live), but in a logical and moral sense as well. In other words, my dignity here and now demands the acknowledgment that every human being has the inherent right to life. Take that away from someone else, and you weaken it in me. No man is an island. Either we are all safe together, or none of us is safe.

This line of thought begins to reveal that to argue for the priority attention that the abortion tragedy deserves is, in the end, to argue for the critical importance of every effort to promote human rights and dignity in every circumstance.

A particular type of defenselessness

There is an aspect to the weakness, the poverty of the unborn that deserves more attention. It is a weakness in their ability to make a psychological impact on us. Part of this problem, despite the advancement of imaging techniques that introduce us to the

unborn, is "out of sight, out of mind." But the problem is even deeper.

When teens are shot in schools, or people die in an airline disaster, or troops go into war, prayer services are held all over the place. Petitions appear in the General Intercessions at Mass, and expressions of concern appear in the bulletin. Well they should.

Yet when the same number of babies are killed by abortion every few minutes, there is no comparison in the reaction. Instead, in some quarters, objections are raised about even mentioning the fact.

Where is the disconnect here?

On a moral level, we can acknowledge readily enough that all human beings are equal and that, therefore, on the most fundamental level, the taking of a human life is as much of a tragedy in one situation as in another. Considering the moral good being attacked -- human life -- the age of the human being does not make a difference.

But psychologically, there is a big difference, and the unborn are on the losing end of the deal. While their death will have a devastating impact on the mother and father (and others in the family) who will experience some form of post-abortion distress, Why, nevertheless, does their death make less of an impact on us and on society overall? Well, we haven't yet named them or heard their voices... There are no memorable experiences we have shared with them, or bonds of friendship that make their passing