

## **Catholic Days at Capitol**

*Tallahassee, Florida – January 23, 2002*

By Bishop Victor Galeone

The first test of justice is how we treat the most defenseless among us. That explains our reaction to the surprise attack on our country of last September 11th. It was a desecration of all that is noble in the human spirit. And yet the perpetrators of those cowardly assaults were allegedly acting in the name of higher law.

Yes, the first test of justice is how we treat the weakest among us. Measured by that standard, America, too, fails miserably: For each day we permit the extermination of thousands of innocents in the womb. Even worse, two years ago the highest court in our land enshrined as a constitutional right the partial delivery of a viable baby before stabbing and crushing its head. In both the terrorist attacks and the killing of the unborn, there's a common denominator: Innocent human life is deemed to be dispensable in the pursuit of a supposed higher good.

A month before the last general election, in the church where I was a pastor at the time, I said that I failed to see how a committed Christian could in good conscience vote for a candidate who supported abortion on demand.

A parishioner wrote to me, asking me to keep politics out of the pulpit. I replied by saying that abortion is a moral and not political issue. Our constitution does not prohibit a member of the cloth from addressing moral issues. If it did, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would never have achieved all the good that resulted in the area of civil rights. Besides, would not my silence be similar to that of the German clergy who looked the other way while millions of innocent victims were being herded off to the ovens?

Another parishioner wrote: "The government should not have to legislate basic morality to have the populace behave properly. That's the task of parents and religious leaders." I agreed. However, when the populace fails to behave properly, then the state must pass laws constraining those who don't. The state does in fact pass laws for the common good on what we may or may not do to our own bodies. For starters, we may not jeopardize the freedom of another, walk down the street naked, jump in front of a moving vehicle, use drugs abusively or alcohol excessively.

Another correspondent objected that no one in the public office should force his morality on others. That sentiment is echoed by the candidate who says: "I'm personally opposed to abortion, but I can't force my morality on anyone else. If a woman wants to have an abortion, that's her choice." Against that backdrop, I ask you to judge the following cases:

A legislator at the time of the Missouri Compromise: "I'm personally opposed to slavery, but I can't force my morality on anyone else. If a master wants to own slaves, that's his choice."

A member of Congress in 1964: "I'm personally opposed to racism, but I can't force my morality on anyone else. If a restaurant owner wants to discriminate, that's his choice."

A hypothetical legislator today: I'm personally opposed to pedophilia, but I can't force my morality on anyone else. If a man wants to engage in that activity, that's his choice.

Why is it that in each of these cases, we not only can, but do "force our morality" on others? Because the civil rights of innocent parties are being violated: The slave, the person of color, and the minor are being trashed by someone more powerful. Can the same be said of abortion? If there is an innocent party involved, then yes! So in reality, only one question is pertinent: Is the fetus a member of the human family or just an appendage of the woman, like her tonsils? If it's the latter, then she can do what she wants with her body. If it's the former, then the rights of an innocent party are being violated.

It's biology, not theology that teaches us the distinct, individual humanity of the fetus. Check out any standard text on *Human Embryology* and you will read something like the following: "Development is a continuous process that begins when an ovum is fertilized by a sperm and ends at death. All the genetic information of the adult human being is already present in that single combined cell, the zygote, which definitely marks the beginning of a new individual." The only thing lacking for development is time and nourishment the same components needed by any newborn child. Where does one draw the line?

"But in *Roe v. Wade* the Supreme Court ruled that the fetus cannot be granted the protection of personhood under the 14th Amendment since one cannot be sure when human life begins." Why not? Because the fetus cannot reason? Neither can a two-year old child, or a comatose patient, or any of us while asleep. Besides, cases of doubt should always be resolved in favor of human life. If not you're sure that it's a deer or hunter in the bush, in conscience you should not pull the trigger. As Justice Byron White stated in his dissenting opinion, *Roe v. Wade* was an "exercise of raw judicial power."

I have considered the Life Issues solely under the ramification of abortion. I did so intentionally, because how we treat the weakest among us is the first test of justice. However, along with the late Cardinal Bernardin, I too hold that life is interrelated. They form part and parcel of a seamless garment. All human life must be loved and respected on every level. Accordingly, I would like to conclude by quoting from the document, *The Church in the Modern World*, issued by the catholic bishops at the Second Vatican Council (GS #27):

The upright conscience calls good and evil by their proper names:

" – Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction; – whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torture, attempts to coerce the will itself;"

“– whatever insults the human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, – as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere tools for rather than as free responsible persons...”

“All these things and others of their kind are infamous indeed. They poison human society and they do more harm to those who practice them, than to those who suffer injury from them. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator of us all.”