

## Can A Catholic Politician Be Pro-Choice?

By Bishop Victor Galeone

In 1962 Archbishop Joseph Rummel of New Orleans excommunicated Judge Leander Perez for attempting to block the desegregation of the school system in the archdiocese. The mainstream and liberal media applauded the archbishop's action. Racists and segregationists attacked him vehemently. How dare he try to impose his sectarian views on those who held a different opinion on how the schools should be integrated?

In recent months, several Catholic bishops have issued directives forbidding the Eucharist to Catholic politicians who support abortion-on-demand. The media has been quick to respond with scurrilous editorial cartoons and commentaries, castigating those bishops for breaching the wall between church and state. How dare they try to impose their sectarian morality on the rest of the nation?

How does one respond to these charges? First, one should bear in mind that the right to life is not a sectarian Catholic issue - "like celibacy for priests or meatless Fridays during Lent. It is a fundamental moral attribute of our humanity. We possess this right not from the state, not from the church, but from God himself. The founders of our nation acknowledged as much when they declared to the British monarch: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *unalienable rights*, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." (*emphasis mine*)

Second, the right to life is the foundation of all our other rights. Just as a building without a foundation will ultimately collapse, so too, every other right we enjoy will crumble unless buttressed by this most basic right of all. So a politician of whatever or no religious persuasion at all is bound to respect the right to life of others, including incipient life in the womb.

*"But the Supreme Court ruled in Roe v. Wade that one cannot be sure when human life begins."* That assertion was disingenuous on the part of Justice Harry Blackmun. It's embryology, not theology, that asserts: Development is a continuum that begins when an ovum is fertilized by a sperm and ends at death. All the genetic information of the human adult is already present in that single combined cell, the zygote, which definitely marks the beginning of a new individual." All that is needed for development is time and nourishment, the same components needed by a newborn child.

*"Can an avid proponent of abortion-on-demand be at the same time a Catholic in good standing with the church?"* I answer that question by asking another: Can an avowed racist be a member in good standing of the NAACP? For similar reasons, there are some positions so extreme that they would bar one from being considered a good Catholic, not because a specifically Catholic teaching is being denied, but because a basic tenet of the natural law is being trashed. As members of the human family, we must obey the natural law, written on our hearts: "You shall not take an innocent life."

*"Are you implying that Holy Communion should be denied to Catholic candidates who espouse abortion-on-demand?"* I would hope that those candidates who consistently vote in

support of abortion have enough integrity to willingly exclude themselves from receiving the Eucharist. After all, they are supporting a procedure for which the church reserves the penalty of excommunication for those directly involved. Besides, consider what St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:27: "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in any unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord."

*"What about Catholic politicians who support the death penalty? Shouldn't they refrain from receiving Holy Communion too?"* According to church teaching, the state has the right to protect its citizens from unjust aggressors through use of the death penalty. However, at present the church stresses that non-lethal means - "namely life-imprisonment - "are more in keeping with human dignity, thus making reasons for recourse to the death penalty almost non-existent. Still, the church does not deny that the state continues to have the right to impose the death penalty. Furthermore, although the life issues are all interrelated, not all of them are of equal importance. In 1998, the bishops of the United States issued *Living the Gospel of Life*, a pastoral letter that stated categorically that the right to life carried more weight than other issues because it served as their moral foundation.

*"I still feel that you bishops are meddling in politics."* Abortion is a moral, not a political issue. The United States 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 our silence be similar to that of the German clergy who looked the other way while millions of innocent citizens were being herded off to the ovens? And finally, God's word roundly condemns anyone who tolerates evil. God commands Samuel to inform Eli that his house will be punished "because although he knew that his sons were blaspheming God, he did not reprove them" (1 Sam 3:13). A very similar message is found in the prophet Ezekiel 33:7-9. The lesson from Scripture is clear: Whoever tolerates evil becomes an accomplice in that evil.