

## *REFLECTIONS*

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### **Creating a Robust Pro-Life Public Voice**

For 45 years, ever since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion, Catholics and people of other religious persuasions have tried to stir the conscience of the country about the consequences of this ruling. Since the decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, over 60 million children in the United States have been killed in the womb. What a tragedy of epic proportions – sixty million children destined to be born in the image and likeness of God destroyed by acts of their mothers' free will and abetted by an industry of death.

Despite almost half a century of opposition, there remains a determined offensive against life at every stage. As a society, we prevent its beginning, manipulate the elements of conception, create life in a laboratory and extinguish it in the name of research, destroy the child in the womb from the moment of conception through the point of (and occasionally after) birth, condone the taking of one's own life, and assist others to exterminate themselves. These acts are justified with terms like mercy, choice, tolerance, medical progress, and personal rights, which mask the selfishness, materialism, callousness and disdain for others that actually exist. This acceptance brings the nation closer to being permeated by and accepting of a "culture of death."

While abortion is the most heinous attack on life, it is not the only one. A reverence for life is assaulted through euthanasia, suicide, sterilization, homosexual acts, *in vitro* fertilization, embryonic stem cell research, and contraception. Each is an affront to man's role as God's partner in the fulfillment of creation through "pro-creating" in marriage other humans to "know, love, and serve God in this life, and to be happy with him in the next." When spiritual concerns are disregarded, decisions about life and death rest on social, economic and similar temporal factors, which can always be judged significant enough to allow the termination of a life.

To willfully destroy life, the most fundamental of all human rights, is an intrinsic moral evil. For too long, Catholics in significant numbers have been silent on anti-life issues. Often they are quieted by a fear of causing dissension, by political correctness, by the argument of a woman's choice. Tolerance of life-destroying practices is not a virtue. Not repudiating these acts implicitly acknowledges that they are socially acceptable and thus encourages their proliferation.

As Archbishop Charles Chaput reminds us: "Pluralism in a democracy doesn't mean shutting up on inconvenient issues. It means speaking up -- respectfully, in a spirit of justice and charity, but also vigorously and without apologies." There are many effective national pro-life organizations, each addressing specific needs. The existence of multiple organizations is healthy for it allows actions to be taken by those closest to and most focused on specific problems. But this also leads to multiple speakers competing for attention in the national arena.

Can it be said that pro-life concerns are heard when Catholic politicians continue to support legislation and provide funding for abortion services? When in the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012 a majority of Catholics voted for a candidate who strongly supported abortion? When Planned Parenthood, the largest provider of abortions in the nation, has been receiving over \$500,000,000 per year from the federal government? When more than 2,500 unborn children are destroyed in the womb each day?

A strong, coordinated, consistent national voice is needed. There must be a balance between the solidarity of everyone working toward a common end, and subsidiarity with each organization addressing its specific concerns. While clergy are necessary to provide moral clarity to the pro-life message, it is the laity who must counter the immoral practices daily in the community, the workplace, the schools, among friends, acquaintances and the public-at-large.

One organization that is well positioned to provide lay leadership is the Knights of Columbus. With two million members, an international presence, a local community structure and extensive resources, it can deal with strategic and policy issues at the national and state levels, while addressing and meeting communal concerns. The Order is unabashedly pro-life, fully in line with the Magisterium, and stands in solidarity with the Pope, bishops and priests. It donates millions of dollars to pro-life causes, has given more than 500 ultrasound–imaging machines to pregnancy care centers, provides pro-life literature, files and supports friend-of-the-court briefs on pro-life issues that have come before the Supreme Court, erected hundreds of memorials to the unborn, takes a primary role in the annual March for Life, and has passed resolutions supporting the sanctity of life from conception to natural death.

The many initiatives of the Knights of Columbus are laudable, but as a response from the largest Catholic, fraternal organization in the world, it is less than robust. Its outcry should be loud and booming. In addition to what it is doing, the Order could:

- Have every council encourage its members to join with the public witnesses already praying before abortion centers nationwide.
- Follow the lead of those bishops who occasionally pray at abortion clinics and offer Masses for the unborn, and request that all council chaplains do the same.
- Replicate the Order’s participation in the national March for Life in January at the state marches for life, such as in Maryland each March.
- Create state initiatives to link local councils with pro-life centers and other organizations that assist women with unplanned pregnancies to provide assistance on a continuing basis.
- More vigorously implement the Order’s long-standing policy of not inviting to any Knights of Columbus event or bestowing honors or privileges on persons, especially public officials or candidates for public office, who support abortion or who advocate the legalization of assisted suicide, euthanasia and other violations of the right to life.

The Knights of Columbus working with the many pro-life organizations at the national, state and local levels can create a resounding voice throughout the land and make respecting life a national norm. There is no need, however, to wait for direction from Supreme. Developing that voice can begin now, with your council, with you. To start, join the March for Life on January 19.

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January 2018