

REFLECTIONS

Lawrence P. Grayson

A Window to Advance the Culture of Life

The unpredicted results of the 2016 election have created the most significant opportunity for restoring the protection of life at all stages, since abortion was legalized in 1973. The Vice President and newly-nominated Cabinet members heading key departments are steadfastly pro-life, and both Houses of Congress have pro-life voting records. Most encouraging, less than 72 hour after he was inaugurated, President Trump issued an Executive Order to reinstate the Mexico City Policy which bans the use of federal funds from promoting or performing abortions in other countries. The President also has stated he will sign the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which prohibits abortion after 20 weeks of gestation, make the Hyde Amendment, which prevents taxpayer-Medicaid dollars from funding abortions but requires annual approval, permanent law, defund Planned Parenthood, and appoint constitutional-originalists who believe in pro-life to the Supreme Court.

This political alignment is unlikely to occur again in our lifetimes. If significant changes are not made – and done quickly – to eliminate oppressive executive orders and regulations and enshrine in law the protection human life from conception until natural death, the pro-life movement will have no one to blame but itself.

The predominance of religious believers in the present Congress will be hard to retain. Currently, 91 percent of the members identify themselves as Christian, compared to 71 percent of the general population. The overrepresentation is even greater among Catholics – 31.4 percent of the members claim that faith, while 21 percent of the adults in the country do.

Conversely, 23 percent of U.S. adults are “nones” – that is, they consider themselves to be atheists, agnostics or have no religious persuasion – while only 0.2 percent of the members of Congress have no denominational affiliation. It is too early to tell when and how the increasing number of religiously-unaffiliated voters will express their political influence, but any group that represents nearly one-quarter of the electorate cannot be ignored. If the unaffiliated become a significant political bloc, they most likely will oppose Catholic teaching on marriage, abortion, religious freedom, assisted suicide, and transgender prerogatives.

It is time for bold action. Political and social change requires strong leadership, a committed constituency and principled courage. This is certainly true in dealing with moral issues, such as abortion. The political leadership is in place. An unanswered question, however, is: Will Christian religious leaders, including the Catholic hierarchy, support them?

In the short term, when political gains can be made, a lot will depend on how Christian politicians vote. Will they adhere to the teachings of their claimed faiths or follow opposing desires of vocal and often minority segments of the people they represent? Will many Catholic politicians continue to claim they are personally opposed to abortion or

same-sex marriage or other violations of Church teachings, but will not deny others from having those options? If they do, will they receive censure from the bishops?

There also is a constituency, as a majority of Americans identify as pro-life and favor restrictions on abortions. A Knights of Columbus/Marist poll released on January 23 found that 74 percent of the U.S. population, including 55 percent of those who supported Hillary Clinton for president, would restrict abortion to at most the first three months of pregnancy. A similar poll in January 2016 found that 61 percent of Americans, including 6 in 10 pro-choice supporters, favor laws that would ban abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy, except to save the life of the mother.

Further, in contrast to the segment of the population advocating abortion, the pro-life movement has a large and growing component of passionate young people. This bodes well for the future. *Students for Life*, for instance, which hired its first staff member in 2006, now has pro-life groups on 1,031 campuses in all 50 states. At the March for Life in recent years, the Verizon Center and Armory in Washington, DC, which combined have seating for over 30,000 people, have been filled to capacity for the Youth Rally and Mass for Life. The number of teenagers and young adults who participate in the March so awed then-NARAL President Nancy Keenan that in 2012 she bemoaned, “There are so many of them, and they are so young.”

With regard to moral courage, it certainly is not lacking among the youth. Lila Rose was 15 when she started *Live Action*, and did her first undercover investigation of abortion providers three years later. David Daleiden was in his early 20s when he founded the *Center for Medical Progress* to engage in citizen journalism. Shortly thereafter, he exposed Planned Parenthood’s illegal selling of parts of aborted children. In spite of strong social, political and legal opposition, Rose and Daleiden have persisted in their efforts to demonstrate that abortion is not a compassionate response to women’s health, but a sordid and callous business. In less dramatic ways, but also requiring moral firmness, many young people have started pro-life groups on college campuses in spite of hostility from pro-choice students and resistance from faculty members and administrators. Many of them are unrelenting in their desire to support life.

Enacting laws to restrict abortion, as important as this is, is only a partial solution. Laws can be rescinded or amended. What is needed is a conversion of the hearts and minds of the American people, a spiritual renewal, the development of a public morality. When a majority of the American people truly believes in God, recognizes that He created men and women in His image and likeness, and acknowledges the innate dignity of every person, laws will be less necessary and it will be possible to create a societal culture of life that will prevail for generations to come.

This will not be easy or quick, but it is not unattainable. It can be won with God’s help enlisted through prayer, penance, and the Sacraments. Let us support the pro-life efforts of the nation’s new political leadership, and pray for their success.