

In the Heartland

Striving for Unity via Universal Truth

An individual I was recently speaking with had come to the conclusion that the harsh rhetoric of political discourse and the uncompromising divide that characterize sectors of American society can be traced to *Roe v. Wade*. Response to the 1973 court decision knows no middle ground. It is a question of life and death.

A similar situation existed following the Dred Scott decision in the 19th century. This determination of the Supreme Court declared that the black person essentially was not totally human and could be considered property. The country was at odds internally about the truth of slavery. The practice definitively divided the nation. Unfortunately, the resolution of the conflict occurred by war.

Today, the nearly unanimous moral consensus among Americans is that persons of all races insofar as they are fully human are entitled to all human rights. They should be accorded the divinely endowed dignity that is theirs and be legally protected from discrimination. This consensus has grown in momentum over time.

As we engage in the resolution to the question of abortion, hopefully, we can avoid harmful conflict and outright hostility. But we ask how? What is the key to bring a deeply divided society to an insight of truth which is universally applicable and which would guide our culture and our lives?

The protection of the human person from its very first moment of differentiated existence until natural death is a commitment that resides deeply in the institutional heart of the Catholic Church. It is based on the realization that each of us is created in the image and likeness of God with an eternal destiny. It is God who gives and takes life in its human expression. The fifth commandment directly states “Thou shall not kill.”

Thus, we as Catholics are expected to be pro-life. In our defense of life, however, we are frequently challenged in a pluralistic society – that our beliefs are based on a religious foundation and thus cannot be imposed as such on others in the legal framework of the country.

It is at this point, that we need to drill more deeply and to advocate life on a basis that is universally applicable, that is written in the human heart that classically and historically has been known as the “natural law.”

In the present instance, two scientific and universally moral truths emerge:

- 1) Each human individual is entitled to life. The protection of that life is expected to be accorded by society no matter how vulnerable that individual might be. Differentiated life and two individuals exist from the moment of

conception. Father Tad Pacholczyk the renowned ethicist of the National Catholic Bioethics Center observes: "I am merely a grown up embryo."

- 2) No person can use another person in a harmful manner for his or her benefit. Thus, the utilization of persons for physical advancement or personal needs is not morally acceptable.

I would contend that the foregoing is self-evident to every person who is in search of truth. It is posited that such is not based on a particular religion or theology but is universally applicable and resides as such in the human heart. It thus serves as the basis for the advocacy of the protection of the life of every human person and which advocacy can eventually be fashioned into law in a representative/democratic society.

There appear to be two essential steps in the relentless effort to protect human life at each stage:

- 1) The education of the public in the scientific and moral data/truths that are involved in supporting the life and dignity of every human person. This essentially infers placing people in touch with the truth that resides in their own hearts or universal truth. Headway is being made in this process. The most recent Gallup Poll of May 2010 states that 47 percent of the U.S. population is "pro-life" compared to 45 percent who consider themselves "pro-choice."
- 2) The eventual inclusion of the protection of life at all stages as a constitutionally protected right. Arriving at this point depends heavily on the success of the educational component. Once enacted law protects the individual and also serves as an educational force.

For us Catholics one essential factor is our witness of compassion in the face of the realization that this question has great emotional and psychological implications for certain women. Our support, commitment and love to these women can never lag if we are truly faithful to our convictions.

Today, we recognize that excessive polarization does not serve the common good. May we have the courage to address a fundamental issue that once resolved could unlock the prospect of good will and justice for all.