



Respect Life in Political Life

It is the teaching of the Catholic Church from the very beginning, founded on her understanding of her Lord's own witness to the sacredness of human life, that the **killing of an unborn child is always intrinsically evil and can never be justified**. If those who perform an abortion and those who cooperate willingly in the action are fully aware of the objective evil of what they do, they are guilty of grave sin and thereby separate themselves from God's grace. This is the constant and received teaching of the Church. It is, as well, the conviction of many other people of good will.

To make such intrinsically evil actions legal is itself wrong. The legal system as such can be said to cooperate in evil when it fails to protect the lives of those who have no protection except the law. In the United States of America, abortion on demand has been made a constitutional right by a decision of the Supreme Court. **Failing to protect the lives of innocent and defenseless members of the human race is to sin against justice**. Those who formulate law therefore have an obligation in conscience to work toward correcting morally defective laws, lest they be guilty of cooperating in evil and in sinning against the common good.

Catholics who bring their moral convictions into public life do not threaten democracy or pluralism but enrich them and the nation. The separation of church and state does not require division between belief and public action, between moral principles and political choices, but **protects the right of believers and religious groups to practice their faith and act on their values in public life**.

Our obligation as bishops at this time is to teach clearly. It is with pastoral solicitude for everyone involved in the political process that we will also counsel Catholic public officials that their acting consistently to support abortion on demand risks making them cooperators in evil in a public manner. We will persist in this duty to counsel, in the hope that the scandal of their cooperating in evil can be resolved by the proper formation of their consciences.

Catholics need to act in support of these principles and policies in public life. It is the particular **vocation of the laity to transform the world**. We have to encourage this vocation and do more to bring all believers to this mission. As bishops, we do not endorse or oppose candidates. Rather, we seek to form the consciences of our people so that they can examine the positions of candidates and make **choices based on Catholic moral and social teaching**. The Catholic community and Catholic institutions should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. They should not be given awards, honors or platforms which would suggest support for their actions. **Msgr. William Fay General Secretary, USCCB**