

REFLECTIONS

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Stand and Be Counted

In America, and indeed throughout the world, there is a diminishing respect for life in all its stages. 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 first moments of development through partial (and occasionally full) 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, and personal rights, which mask the selfishness, materialism, lack of self-control and disregard for others that actually exist. This all-out offensive against life brings the nation closer to being permeated by and accepting of a "culture of death."

Every January 22 or thereabouts, for the past 47 years, since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion, Catholics and people of other religious persuasions have joined in the National March for Life to try to stir the conscience of the country to the consequences of this ruling. From the time of the decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, more than 60 million children in the United States have been killed in the womb. What a tragedy of epic proportions – 60 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 infrastructure 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."

Euthanasia, whether it is forced for eugenic purposes as in the Holocaust, or for the convenience of others as in the case of Terri Schiavo's starvation and dehydration, or is voluntary – which is only a palatable way to describe permissive suicide – is a declaration that some lives are not worth living. It says that the utility of one's life is to be judged solely by material considerations, without recognition that man possesses a divinely-instilled dignity, regardless of one's age, physical or mental condition.

Every human life, from conception to natural death, has value. When we ignore the spiritual, decisions about abortion, euthanasia and suicide rest on social, economic and similar temporal factors, which can always be judged unusual enough or serious enough to outweigh competing materialistic considerations and allow the termination of a life. This is the case with the use of embryonic stem cells, whether for research or therapeutic purposes. In order to obtain the stem cells, human embryos are created and destroyed, which disregards the life that exists and violates

respect for human dignity. No intended good for others can justify the taking of a human life, even if it is in the first stages of development.

While abortion, euthanasia and suicide destroy life, contraception and sterilization prevent life. The latter are an abdication of responsibility for personal actions, and allow free reign to one's sexual urges. They promote promiscuity with impunity. Contraception removes the fear that may deter fornication and adultery, behaviors which destroy the family, the basic unit of society. Youths and unmarried adults who are sexually active cannot be expected to discard upon marriage habits of libidinous behavior acquired before their vows. Contraception also is the precursor of abortion. When artificial means of preventing birth fails, the next step is to terminate the life before it becomes viable.

Contraception, sterilization, *in vitro* fertilization, and the redefinition of marriage to include homosexual unions all violate God's commands for marriage. In Genesis, it is written: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh," and again, "Be fruitful and multiply." In accord with these decrees, marriage has two purposes, unitive and generative, that is, to conjoin a man and woman in a lifelong commitment as husband and wife through a complete giving of each to the other, and for them to procreate and educate their children.

Homosexual unions, contraception and sterilization all violate the generative aspect of marriage. They are means of preventing birth from the union of a man and a woman. *In vitro* fertilization, in contrast, discards the unitive aspect. As stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it "entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into...the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person." It tries to give life to children without the complete giving of a husband and a wife, each to the other. Further, in its application *in vitro* fertilization requires multiple embryos to be created. In a businesslike approach, only the most viable ones are implanted, while the others, each of which is the beginning of a life, are discarded or frozen for future use.

One must not only abstain from these many anti-life activities, but must oppose them as acceptable practices in society. Tolerance in these matters is not a virtue. Tolerance only encourages these practices, and others, to proliferate. Planned Parenthood of Indiana, for example, marketed gift certificates during the Christmas season several years ago that could be used for contraceptive services, examinations, medications and abortions. LeRoy Carhart, the Maryland-based, late-term abortionist, offers women remembrances of their aborted babies. The destruction of life is viewed as an admissible commercial activity.

Not bringing one's faith into establishing public policy and a culture that repudiates immoral, anti-life acts is implicitly acknowledging that these behaviors are socially acceptable and that they are no more right or wrong than restraint from these practices.

As Catholics, and as Knights of Columbus, we should work to protect and strengthen the family, promote personal responsibility and accountability for one's actions, and renew in society a reverence for life in all its stages, from conception to natural death. We must help to create a reverence for and a culture of life. Join your brother Knights on the Mall in Washington, DC on January 24 for the National March for Life. Stand and be counted.

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