

The 2008 Election: A Pro-Life Perspective

Father Dan/Bob, Worthy Grand Knight, Worthy District Deputy, Brother Knights:

For almost three years now, I have stood before you twice a month and attempted to educate this council on the challenges facing life in our country and the world, the Church's teachings on the life issues and the actions we can take as Knights and as Catholic Christians to honor and defend life, from the moment of conception until natural death. For the most part I have enjoyed doing so and have found my role as Pro-Life Chairman rewarding and fulfilling. But, to be honest, there have also been those meetings when I have been very uncomfortable because I have had to address topics that are divisive, particularly the issue of voting. In the looks I have seen and the reactions I have received, I know that what I've had to say has, on occasion, caused some of you to become upset, maybe even angry.

On those nights, and there have been more than a few, I have driven home disturbed and had difficulty falling asleep. In part, I believe my anxiety has been caused by the fact that, despite my efforts, I have not been able to convey my messages in a manner convincing enough to help some of you "think with the Church." On those nights, I always find great comfort in remembering the words of Blessed Mother Teresa who said, "God doesn't require us to succeed; He only requires that you try." And so once again, I find myself before you preparing to address a very uncomfortable subject.

I WILL TRY MY BEST.

I find courage to do so by openly admitting that I am leaning on our Lord Jesus Christ right now, knowing that it is only through His strength and not my own that I am able to say what I will say over the next few minutes. I also find motivation in the words of very holy men and women, among whom is Archbishop Charles Chaput, who many of us heard speak at last year's Catholic Men's Conference. Archbishop Chaput recently told us, "If we believe in the sanctity of life from conception to natural death, we need to prove that by our actions, including our political choices. Anything less leads to the corruption of our integrity. The 'choice' in abortion always involves the choice to end the life of an unborn human being. For anyone

who sees this fact clearly, neutrality, silence or private disapproval are not options. They are evils almost as grave as abortion itself.” Brother Knights, especially because you have honored me with allowing me to serve as your pro-life chairman, *I* will not cooperate with evil and remain silent when it comes to the ramifications the upcoming presidential election hold for the cause of life in this nation that we all love so dearly.

And so let us begin.

First of all, I would like to make it clear that I do not allow myself to be labeled as Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative. I try to shape my entire life, including my civic duties as a voter, by the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Therefore, my vote will be cast for the candidate who most closely upholds the ideals we should aspire to as Christians as taught by the Church. So please do not interpret the information I am about to give you as a pitch for or against either candidate. I will simply present the facts.

As a pro-life Catholic engaging family, friends and co-workers in discussions concerning the manner in which we should vote, I have often encountered the argument that there is a “separation of church and state,” and the Church should not be telling us how to vote. I whole-heartedly agree. Casting our vote is something we do according to the dictates of our own consciences. But what we must understand is that the Church does have a role in forming our consciences, especially when it comes to moral issues such as the dignity of human life and the sanctity of marriage.

Listen to the words of Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, who taught us during our 126th Supreme Convention in Quebec City last month, “When you talk about protecting innocent human life, this is something that we need to do as human beings. And the fact that the Church has a voice on this issue and a position on this issue, doesn’t mean it’s an imposing of our beliefs or values, any more than the effort to break down segregation by the Church was an effort to impose some kind of religious doctrine on the culture or society, but it was us standing up for a fundamental human right.”

On morally-urgent life-and-death issues such as abortion, embryonic stem cell research, human cloning and euthanasia, the social teaching of the Catholic Church can shed considerable light on how we are to approach issues of moral significance at election time, and how to prioritize our moral values when we consider how we should vote. This is why our bishops worked so diligently to give us the document “Faithful Citizenship” last November. We talked about this document shortly after its release and gained some insight as to its content. But I once again highly encourage each of you take the hour or so it will require to read this important teaching yourselves and gain a personal understanding of what the Holy Spirit is teaching through our bishops.

Before getting into the specifics of the upcoming election, I also want to remind each Knight that, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it is our principal duty as lay faithful members of the Church to do all that we can to “seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will....It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are closely associated that these may always be effected and grow according to Christ and maybe to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer.” The Catechism goes on to teach us that, “The initiative of lay Christians is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life.”

Simply put, we are to allow Jesus Christ to be Lord of every aspect of our lives, personal and social, including everything that pertains to our family life, work life, economic life and even our political life. As Knights, we cannot be like those Catholics who like to keep their religious lives relegated to a personal, private realm, and do not allow the teachings of the Church to inform their everyday decisions. This is why so many of our bishops are now openly challenging those Catholic politicians who claim that they are “personally opposed” to abortion, but vote to maintain abortion and other culture of death laws, claiming they cannot allow their religious beliefs to influence their political decisions. Likewise, we cannot take a position of being personally opposed to the culture of death and yet cast our votes for candidates who support the culture of death.

One final thought before we address Mr. Obama and Mr. McCain. There have been those who have accused me of being too narrowly focused on the life issue, of being a “single issue” voter. My answer is simple and always the same: the right to life is not a single issue; *the right to life is foundational*. Every other right depends on it. The right to life is a foundation for how we understand human freedom, a test of how we understand our obligations in solidarity to the poor, and a lens through which we must examine all of our claims of compassion.

Obviously, there are many important issues to consider as we approach November: the economy, gas prices, the war in Iraq, national security and immigration justice to name a few. But we will never be able to build a healthy society while ignoring the continuous and very profitable legalized murder that occurs 4,000 times every single day against America’s unborn children. As Deacon Keith Fournier correctly points out, “If we do not hear the cry of those whom Mother Teresa rightly called ‘the poorest of the poor’, those in the womb who have no voice but ours, then our claims of concern for the poor and our claim of compassion for them are selective. We will care about only those poor whom we find to be convenient. We will select who is our neighbor.”

Having said all of this, let’s take a look at the two primary contenders in this November’s presidential election and see if we can’t determine which of the two will have more compassion for the “poorest of the poor.”

The Hyde Amendment is federal legislation which prohibits taxpayer funding of abortion through the Medicaid program. It was passed in 1976 with bipartisan support. It is the key piece of federal legislation which prevents our tax dollars from paying for the destruction of children through abortion. Senator McCain has consistently supported this amendment. Senator Obama’s campaign has stated that he “does not support” the Hyde Amendment and while a state senator in Illinois, he voted against comparable legislation that prohibited taxpayer dollars from being used to pay for abortion.

Partial birth abortion is a procedure performed on babies who are viable, that is, who if born can survive outside of their mothers' wombs. It involves partially delivering the baby until a large part of the body is outside of the uterus, then inserting a sharp instrument into the base of the little one's skull and killing the baby by scrambling her brains. In 2002 the United States Congress voted to ban this procedure. Senator McCain supported that ban. When the United States Supreme Court upheld this federal restriction on abortion on demand in the case *Gonzales v. Carhart*, Senator McCain called their decision "a victory for those who cherish the sanctity of life." Senator Obama stated with clarity his opposition to the Supreme Court's decision with these words, "I am extremely concerned that it will embolden state legislatures to enact further measures to restrict a woman's right to choose, and that the conservative Supreme Court Justices will look for other opportunities to erode *Roe v. Wade*." Gentlemen, remember what we're talking about here.

Roe v. Wade was the 1973 Supreme Court decision which legalized abortion on demand throughout all nine months of pregnancy and for virtually any reason. For the past 35 years, Senator McCain has spoken out repeatedly against this decision. Senator Obama has consistently supported *Roe v. Wade*, proclaiming, "I have consistently advocated for reproductive choice (abortion) and will make preserving women's rights under *Roe v. Wade* a priority as President." By his own words, Senator Obama considers it a priority to insure the continued killing of America's unborn children.

The next president will be responsible for placing at least two supreme court justices. Due to age and ill health, it is anticipated that Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and John Paul Stevens will retire shortly after the new president takes office. The next two justices will determine whether or not *Roe v. Wade* is overturned as a bad court decision, or entrenched for another 35 years. Senator McCain has promised that, if elected, he will appoint judges who would strictly interpret the constitution and not make up law from the bench. Since there is no constitutional foundation for legalized abortion, we can expect Senator McCain's judges to stand opposed to *Roe v. Wade*. Senator Obama has promised only judges who take a strong pro-abortion view.

Senator McCain has consistently voted for restrictions on abortion. For example, he supported a bill that would have required an abortionist to

notify at least one parent before performing an abortion on a minor girl from another state and he is on record in support of Parental Notification Laws. Senator Obama has publicly stated that one of his first actions as President, one of his *very first* actions, would be to pass the Freedom of Choice Act, federal law that would invalidate ALL state and federal restrictions on abortion, including common sense measures such as parental notification and the partial birth abortion ban.

Both Senator McCain and Senator Obama voted to support human experimentation, the always deadly research on human embryos which “extracts” their stem cells. Senator McCain claimed it was a “difficult” moral decision and, upon hearing of the advances being made in the arena of adult stem cell research he declared, “I believe that skin stem cell research has every potential very soon of making the discussion (of embryonic stem cell research) academic.” Senator Obama, on the other hand, has declared, “We should expand and accelerate research using these embryos.”

Between 2001-2003, on three different occasions as an Illinois State Senator, Senator Obama prevented passage of the Born Alive Infant Protection Act. This act was introduced after it was revealed publicly that Christ Hospital in Illinois left babies who survived abortion—viable babies whose delivery was induced, and whom the abortionists intended to kill but somehow survived—in a utility room to die. The legislation mandated that medical care be provided to such living babies. Senator Obama prevented this bill from being passed for three consecutive years, even though a comparable bill passed in the United States Senate by a vote of 98-0, having gained the support of pro-choice politicians such as Hillary Clinton and Ted Kennedy. Senator Obama voted to let these already-born children die rather than provide them with the medical care they needed. Senator Obama voted for infanticide.

At the Saddleback Civic Forum debate on August 16th, Pastor Rick Warren posed this question to each of the candidates, “At what point does a baby get human rights, in your view?” Senator McCain’s answer was direct and to the point, “At the moment of conception.” Senator Obama’s answer, “Answering that question with specificity, you know, is above my pay grade.”

Who did Senators McCain and Obama choose as their vice-presidential running mates? Senator Obama chose Delaware Senator Joe

Biden, a pro-choice Catholic who for the legislative year 2007-2008 accumulated a pro-life voting record of 0 percent according to National Right to Life. Senator McCain chose Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, a mother of five who this past April, despite pressure to have an abortion, gave birth to Trig Palin, who had previously been diagnosed with Down syndrome. Here is what Governor Palin had to say about Trig, “We knew through early testing he would face special challenges, and we feel privileged that God would entrust us with this gift and allow us unspeakable joy as he entered our lives. We have faith that every baby is created for good purpose and has potential to make this world a better place. We are truly blessed.”

Perhaps most telling of all when it comes to the life views of these two candidates is this comparison. In 1991, Senator McCain’s wife Cindy visited Mother Teresa’s orphanage in Bangladesh. The orphanage could not provide the medical care needed to save a little girl’s life. So the McCains, already the parents of six children, adopted the baby girl and paid for desperately needed surgeries and years of rehabilitation. That baby is now their teenage daughter Bridget. On March 29th, Senator Obama had this to say, “Look, I got two daughters-9 years old and six years old. I am going to teach them first about values and morals, but if they make a mistake, I don’t want them punished with a baby.” Senator McCain saw an unwanted baby as a gift to be cherished and cared for. Senator Obama sees unwanted children as punishment.

Brother Knights, as you can see, our presidential election this year presents a very stark contrast in the life position taken by each of the two primary candidates. One of the candidates, Senator McCain, has been a staunch defender of life from the moment of conception until natural death. The other, Senator Obama, is without doubt the most pro-abortion candidate ever to run for the presidency of the United States. These are not my opinions; these are the facts as reflected in their voting records and stated positions.

In closing, I would like to leave you with three thoughts.

First, I remind you of what our bishops emphasized in “Faithful Citizenship” last November. “There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called “intrinsicly evil” actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia.” Senator McCain opposes the intrinsicly evil act of abortion. Senator Obama supports that evil.

Second, on your drive home tonight, I ask you to reflect upon this question recently proposed by Father Frank Pavone, head of Priests for Life. “If a politician cannot respect the life of a little baby, how is he supposed to respect yours and mine?”

Finally, I believe we would all do well in listening to the words of Cardinal Edward Egan, head of the Catholic Church in New York, who, in referring to our unborn neighbors in the womb, proclaimed on August 25th, “Anyone who dares to defend that they may be legitimately killed because another human being ‘chooses’ to do so or for any other equally ridiculous reason should not be providing leadership in a civilized democracy worthy of the name.”

Brother Knights,

- ☉ may the Holy Spirit fill each of us with His wisdom so that we may form our consciences in accordance with His teaching as given to us through our bishops;
- ☉ may our Lord Jesus Christ fill each of us with His grace so that our vote is cast in accordance with His will;
- ☉ and may our Almighty Father give each of us the strength and the courage to stand up for life, especially the lives of those who cannot defend themselves. Amen.