

# Priests and Abortion

BY FR. FRANK A. PAVONE

The following is a revised version of an article that originally appeared  
in the August - September 1994 of *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*

---

As a priest involved in full-time pro-life ministry, I have been told a number of times by well meaning friends that they are glad I am happy doing “my thing,” which is fighting abortion. Some of them go on to add that it is not “their thing.” My response to all this is to kindly point out that whether an activity is or is not “one’s thing” has nothing to do with duty or with the demands of justice. I fight abortion not because I am particularly attracted to the battle, but because human life is at stake. It is a duty of conscience to defend it. I do so, furthermore, as a priest. My pro-life work flows from my priesthood, not as an optional, extra “thing,” but as an aspect of the very meaning of priesthood. Every priest, in fact, though not necessarily called to full-time pro-life ministry, is called to a full-time, whole-hearted, active stand for life and against abortion.

Here I briefly examine why that is so, from a consideration of what Scripture says about Christ and justice, and from a reflection on the Eucharist.

## ALTER CHRISTUS.

The priest is “another Christ,” and as such is a man of salvation, bringing others the benefits of the Redemption. Yet the priest is also a man of creation, for Christ not only saved the world, but made it. The earliest New Testament reference to this is 1 Corinthians 8:6, “For us there is... one Lord, Jesus Christ through Whom all things are and through Whom we exist.” Colossians reiterates the theme. “All things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all else that is, and in Him everything continues in being” (Col.1:16-17). It is the message of John’s Prologue. “In the beginning was the Word... All things came to be through Him, and without Him nothing came to be. What came to be in Him was life...(John 1:1-3; See also Heb.1:2; Prov.8:30).

Christ is Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13); He is the beginning of life and the purpose of life. He is the answer to the child’s question, “Mommy, why are there stars and mountains and people?” To stand for Christ is to stand for creation and for life; to minister Christ to the world is to minister life. The pre-born child exists through Him and for Him. To be silent about that child’s destruction is to betray both the child and Christ. To bring salvation to God’s people is first of all to defend their very existence.

## DO JUSTICE!

The prophecies of Christ are heavily linked with the word “justice.” Psalm 72 declares, “Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace till the moon be no more,” and then specifies what that justice entails: “He shall rescue the poor man when he has no one to help him... From fraud and violence he shall redeem them, and precious shall their blood be in his sight” (v. 7, 12, 14). “Justice” refers to an act of intervention for the defenseless. God does it for His people, and His people must do it for one another. If they don’t, worship of God is pointless. This is brought out forcefully through the prophet Amos, when God says, “I hate, I spurn your feasts, I take no pleasure in your solemnities.... Away with your noisy songs! I will not listen to the melodies of your harps. But if you would offer me holocausts, then let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unending stream” (Amos 5:21, 23-24. See also Isaiah 1:10-17).

Christ preaches and acts in the name of justice, declaring that the Spirit of the Lord has anointed Him to free the oppressed (Luke 4:18 from Isa. 61). In His ministry, Christ seeks out those whom society oppresses and rejects: the poor, the lepers, the lunatics, the tax collectors and sinners, and the children whom even His apostles considered troublesome.

His justice, ultimately, is “to undo the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Those works, as Christ declared, are lies and murder (see John 8:44; Psalm 72 said “fraud and violence”). Nowhere is the alliance between lying and murdering more clear than in the abortion industry. Women are told their child is a “blob of tissue.” They are told the abortion procedure is “safe,” whereas in truth it carries untold burdens of physical and mental anguish. The pro-abortion lies are an echo of the original lie told to the first woman, “You certainly will not die” (Gen. 3:4b). Nowhere besides the abortion mills are there larger numbers of more defenseless people crying out for our intervention. A man of Christ must intervene; a priest must “make justice his aim” (see Isa. 1:17).

There is a story from the days of the Nazi atrocities that tells of a church along a road where the trains passed, carrying Jews to execution. When they passed the church on Sunday mornings, they would cry out in the hope that the worshipers would hear their cries and rescue them. The

(Continued)

noise of the wailing prompted members of the congregation to ask the pastor, "What are we to do about this disturbance to our worship?" The pastor paused and then said, "Tell the people to sing a little louder." Sing a little louder! Avoid the distraction of human lives in danger! This is the temptation today for Christians, who may think they are too busy with other things to worry about the abortion issue...too busy to worry about justice.

## THE BREAD OF LIFE

A priest is a man of the Eucharist, and it is in the Mass that we touch the definitive victory of life over death. "Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life." "I am the Bread of Life" (John 6:35). The Eucharist is the sacrifice of life and the banquet of life, and because the priest officiates at this sacrificial

banquet, he is truly "Father," imparting life to all who come. The priest guards the Eucharist, which is both a human and a Divine Life, for it is Christ himself. The priest leads his people to adore the Eucharist and to see, beyond the appearances, the reality of life. This is why he must stand powerfully in defense of human life which, in its initial stages, is also hidden from human sight, yet no less sacred for that reason. Just as the Sacred Host is "defenseless," so is the pre-born child. Just as the Sacred Host is sacred because it is God, so is the pre-born child the sacred image of God. If the priest is the defender of the sacred, then he is such wherever and whenever the sacred is attacked. "This is my Body." These words, by which Christ teaches the meaning of life and of love, are at the heart of the priesthood. Isn't it amazing that the very same words are used by those who defend abortion?

## PRACTICAL ACTION

The priest, then, as "another Christ," is a man of creation, of justice, and of the Eucharist. He is, by definition, a man of life. When life is attacked on such a monstrous scale as in abortion, what is he to do? Here are a few practical suggestions for busy priests in an age of abortion.

- 1) Sign up for "Priests for Life," a network of priests who assist one another regarding how to preach and act on the abortion issue (and other life issues). Homily hints, bulletin inserts, and much practical help is available through the Newsletter and the website ([www.priestsforlife.org](http://www.priestsforlife.org)). Write Priests for Life, PO Box 141172, Staten Island, NY 10314.
- 2) Place on the cover of the parish bulletin, along with the other standard information item, a phone number for abortion alternatives. You can draw from any of the national hotlines (such as 1-800-848-LOVE) or from local resources.
- 3) Within the coming year, read David Reardon's book, *The Jericho Plan*, written especially for pastors to show them effective ways to preach on abortion based on the strategy that the healing of women harmed by abortion provides a key to preventing abortion. (To order, call toll free 1-800-BOOK-LOG).

- 4) Within the coming year, plan to attend at least one pro-life vigil in front of a nearby abortuary. See for yourself what it is like. Go where some of your flock is being killed. You will return a different person.
- 5) Encourage pro-lifers in your parish or school to form an active pro-life group. They will be ready to do the work. Let them know that you support them.

Several priests I know conducted essay and poster contests in their parish school on the theme of abortion. One of the winning essays was read by the student at Sunday Mass, and the winning posters were displayed in the vestibule of the Church. One of these posters showed two crosses. On one was Jesus, on the other was a baby. It read, "Jesus did this so we wouldn't do this. Abortion kills."

More and more priests are erecting permanent signs on the Church grounds to carry a pro-life message to the public. Many of these messages offer assistance to anyone in the community who may be pregnant and in need. What a clear way for the Church to demonstrate the charity of Christ!

The US Bishops have called abortion "the fundamental human rights issue" of our day (1989 Resolution on Abortion). If we as priests learn more about it and engage in the battle against it, we will find ourselves penetrating more deeply the very mystery of what it means to be a priest.



**FR. FRANK A. PAVONE** is a priest of the Amarillo Diocese and has served as an Official of the Pontifical Council for the Family, which coordinates pro-life activities throughout the world. With the permission of his Ordinary, he has led the Priests for Life movement internationally since 1993.

