



priests for life

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Encouraging Priests in the Pro-Life Cause

Number 1

From the Director

New Abortion Rhetoric: God and Conscience

The October 16, 1995 issue of *The New Republic* contains a very significant article entitled "Our Bodies, Our Souls" by Naomi Wolf, a "pro-choice feminist." It outlines a direction for the abortion-rights movement which many may find surprising. She calls on the abortion rights movement to stop lying and face the fact that abortion ends a life. She says it is a mistake to consider the fetus as a worthless entity. It is also inappropriate, she maintains, to exclude terminology about God, conscience, right and wrong from the context of abortion rights arguments. After all, so many people are sensitive to these matters that if pro-lifers are the only ones talking about them, the pro-life position will have an advantage.

"Feminism at its best is based on what is simply true," she writes. Referring to the Precious Feet, she says, "Those footprints are in fact the footprints of a 10-week-old fetus; the pro-life slogan, 'Abortion stops a beating heart,' is incontrovertibly true...the pictures [of fetal death]...are biological facts."

She challenges dehumanizing rhetoric. "So, what will it be: Wanted fetuses are charming, complex, REM-dreaming little beings whose profile on the sonogram looks just like Daddy, but unwanted ones are mere 'uterine material'?"

Together with honesty, she calls for a moral framework to describe the abortion decision. Rather than a matter "between myself and my doctor," she

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Pro-Life Themes for Lent

by Fr. Frank Pavone

"Each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed." (Preface of Lent 1).

The purpose of Lent is succinctly expressed by this preface. Catechumens prepare for baptism into the paschal mystery. The faithful are reminded of their baptism, and will renew their baptismal vows at the Easter liturgy.

This baptismal focus is a life focus, and is illumined by Lenten readings as well as by the encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*.

Baptism initiates us into the eternal life Christ gives us. 'Eternal' does not only mean it never ends. It also refers to the "quality" of that life, namely, it is a share in the life of the Eternal God.

The baptized, therefore, are sons and daughters of God and are members of the Church, the People of Life (see *Evangelium Vitae* #79). The baptized have

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Euthanasia:

*"If You Consider
God the Master
of your fate...."*

In 1991, one of the leading activists for assisted suicide, Derek Humphry, wrote his book *Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying*. In chapter one of this book on how to kill yourself, Humphry honestly states, "If you consider God the master of your fate, then read no further" (p. 21). He is saying that you cannot reconcile suicide with submission to God, and he is right.

He indicates to us an avenue for our preaching. To counteract euthanasia and assisted suicide, we need to proclaim what St. Paul declared. "You are not your own" (1 Cor 6:19). "None of us lives as his own master and none of us dies as his own master" (Rom.14:7). We do not have a "right to die." A right is a moral claim. We do not have a claim on death. Death has a claim on us.

In the Hail Mary we ask the Virgin's prayers "now, and at the hour of our death." Our Lord instructs us always to be ready for that hour. The Anima Christi says, "In the hour of my death call me, and bid me come unto Thee." Death is in God's hands because life is in His hands. Efforts to promote death as an "ultimate civil right" only serve to trivialize and distort it. They make

(see *EUTHANASIA* on page 3)

recommends, "between myself and my conscience" or "myself and my God." "There is a hunger for a moral framework that we pro-choicers must reckon with," she declares.

This is where we as clergy must take the lead. Abortion rights supporters know and are increasingly willing to admit that abortion kills a baby. The crucial task at this point is to show that killing a baby is never justified by an appeal to conscience or God. God is not what we make Him to be. To invoke Him to justify abortion is the supreme violation of the Commandment, "You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain." Abortion is not only something that God does not "permit." It is against His very nature. He cannot grant an exception. He is life.

Abortion also violates our human nature, for we are made in God's image. Human conscience cannot approve of what destroys the most basic human good, life itself. We never find "wholeness" or "fulfillment" by destroying someone else. We do not find happiness by pushing someone else out of the way. We find it by pushing ourselves out of the way. Conscience does not create the truth about right and wrong. It serves us by enabling us to perceive and submit to a truth that was there long before we were, a truth according to which we were made, a truth inscribed in our very being.

Naomi Wolf calls for an acknowledgment of truth. She is to be commended for this, but she does not go far enough. We have to acknowledge not only the truth that abortion kills, but the whole truth about the human person, namely that we exist to love and be loved, to give ourselves away in love to God and one another. Love says, "I sacrifice myself for the good of the other person." Abortion is just the opposite: "I sacrifice the other person for the good of myself." Abortion can never be reconciled with truth, love, conscience or God.

Fr. Frank Pavone
National Director

What's happening in Congress?

Get up-to-date news on pro-life legislation by calling National Right to Life's legislative update line, 202-393-LIFE. Keep informed!

A Priests for Life INVITATION

Priests for Life is an officially approved Catholic association of priests, deacons, and lay auxiliary members. Members make a special commitment to spread the Church's teachings on the sanctity of every human life from fertilization to natural death. Members benefit from contact with others throughout the country who have a similar commitment and much experience. Priests for Life works closely with diocesan respect life co-ordinators and in accordance with local diocesan policies. The Board of Directors serve the organization with the permission of their Ordinaries.

Please join by sending us the following information:

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SUGGESTED DONATION: \$15

Priests for Life
P.O. Box 141172
Staten Island, NY 10314
(914) 937-8243
FAX (914) 937-9207

Have you commissioned your Respect Life Group?

Each year, many parishes and schools hold commissioning services for various ministerial groups: servers, catechists, choirs, and so forth.

How about commissioning the respect life group? It is certainly a ministry to promote the sacredness of life. It is a work which especially requires fortitude and prudence.

A suggested format would be to call the members forward after the homily, ask them some questions, say a prayer of blessing, and present them with a symbol of their mission.

Questions could be:

Are you resolved to promote the church's teachings on the dignity of human life, as outlined in *The Gospel of Life*?

Are you ready to work together with your pastor, under the guidance of the Bishops' Pastoral Plan for Pro Life Activities, to pray, educate, shape public policy, and provide concrete assistance to women in crisis pregnancies?

The prayer of blessing can be:

Father of all life, we thank you that you have called us into being and made us the people of life. Bless our brothers and sisters who dedicate themselves to be a voice for the voiceless, a defense for the defenseless. By their example enable all of us to proclaim, celebrate, and serve the Gospel of Life. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

The symbol given to members of the committee can be the Precious Feet, the pro-life rose, or a copy of *The Gospel of Life*. Such a ceremony could be done at any time of the year.

it into yet another tool we use to advance our own, or society's, agenda. But death is the most important moment of our life. It becomes, in Christ, the climax of our self-offering to God. We have the privilege and duty to teach our people to prepare for death with faith and obedience to the God who leads us beyond it.

by Fr. Frank Pavone

taken hold of the eternal life promised them (see Rom.6:4) and are already living it (Gal 2:19-20; John 6:47).

The choices of the baptized are therefore to be shaped by their new identity (see Rom 6:6; Eph. 4:17-24). We see how Christ calls the Samaritan woman to repent as she accepts the waters of new life (see John 4:15-24). Lenten repentance is necessary so that God's people may more deeply become who they are. They are called to see their sins more clearly. Hence baptism is known as "illumination." The passage about the man born blind (John 9) is therefore a key Lenten passage (4th Sunday of Lent-A and optional Mass for 4th week of Lent).

Anyone who makes the Lenten journey is called to be more alert to the attacks on human life and dignity around them. The people of life are called to reject sin and all the devil's works and empty promises (Renewal of Baptismal Promises, Easter Liturgy). The "pro-choice" and "right to die" mentalities are two of those "empty promises" which are firmly rejected by the baptized. A firm rejection of these positions is integral to repentance. Lent is the perfect time for us to call our congregations to a clearer understanding of why this is true, and to lead them to a deeper affirmation of life, both natural and eternal, in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery.

Homily Excerpts:

Are You an Innocent Bystander?

Abortion is a symptom of our Nation's monumental loss of faith, more pervasive than at any time in human history. America has become a society willing to sacrifice its own children on the bloody altar of lust and freedom of choice.

All this is being taught.

I ask you, who is responsible to teach our children? Who should be teaching by example — you are! The parents are. God gave these children to you, and you are responsible for them. You have to teach them by example. You can tell them all you want that church is important, and what the Church teaches is important, but if you don't follow up, if you don't stand up for what the Church tells you is right, and stand against what the Church tells you is wrong, then it sends a signal to them that says — it's not important.

If you don't back up what the Pope says, then what he says is not important. You must even say No. We had more arguments at my house over that little bitsy word no. Sometimes the argument would last for days. But now that our children are adults, they come back and tell their mother, "Thank you for saying no. You were right."

The breakdown in family, the lack of love in family, the lack of caring and being responsible, is a great deal of the cause of our problems. God is family! And the ultimate defiance of God is the breakdown of family and the killing of human beings.

In 1973 when the abortion law, *Roe v. Wade*, became the law of the land, doctor John Kelly, who was an eminent physician in this country, left saying, "I will not live in this country and pretend to be an innocent standby." He wrote, "Once you permit the killing of one unborn child there will be no stopping, no age limit. You are setting off a chain reaction that will eventually make you the victim."

We are not a people of darkness, we are a people rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ and He tells us, "I am the way, the truth and the life." He also says "I came to bring you life so that you might have life and have it to the fullest."

We who believe in eternal life, when we die, will face the Lord of Life, and He will ask us, He will ask you and He will ask me, "Did you know, did you stand up for life or did you turn your head and pretend to be an innocent bystander?" This is the Lord Jesus who said "Whatever you do to these the least of my children you do to me." God bless you!

by Deacon Garrett Caraway,
Diocese of Lake Charles, LA
Respect Life Coordinator

Requiem for the Unborn

Requiem for the Unborn is a four-movement cantata which fosters the protection of unborn children. American composer John Boyle has woven into this work the sadness and turmoil of a woman who has an abortion, and the redemption that can follow. Contact Priests for Life for more information on this new avenue for the pro-life message!

Priest Profiles

Msgr. John Burke

Msgr. John Burke is pastor of Holy Child parish in Staten Island, New York. Along with many of the other pastors on Staten Island, he has set up a permanent pro-life sign on his parish property. The sign displays a statement which research shows is one of the most effective statements to convey the pro-life message: "Abortion Stops a Beating Heart." The sign has been up for several years and parishioners are very supportive of this witness to the local community.

Except for one or two, that is. Someone called Msgr. Burke to ask that the sign be taken down. Msgr. Burke explained that it would remain up because of the importance of the message, which is an essential aspect of what the Church has to say to society. "If I get 500 signatures, will you take it down?", the caller asked. Msgr. Burke responded, "If you got 50,000 or 500 million signatures, the sign would still not be taken down."

At one point, someone marred the sign, attempting to erase the word "abortion." The sign was repaired, however, and there has been no problem since then.

Msgr. Burke has an active respect life committee in his parish, and participated with other Staten Island priests and deacons in having a pro-life statement published in the local secular press. The statement, entitled "The Child," asserted that the humanity of the pre-born child is not a religious opinion but "a question of fact" whose truth is demonstrated by modern genetics. It called the phrase "pro-choice" an "unfinished phrase." The statement made the offer of alternatives to abortion as well as compassion, understanding, and forgiveness for those who have had abortions.

Priests for Life thanks Msgr. John Burke for spreading the pro-life message. We invite other pastors to set up pro-life signs on their property, and we invite local associations of clergy to issue joint statements to the secular media regarding abortion.

Resources

Defending Life is a set of 14 half-hour television shows on abortion. It is presented by Fr. Frank Pavone and has aired on EWTN since May, 1995. It is now available on videotape for \$49.95. Please order it through Priests for Life.

Come Aside and Rest!

Every year Fr. Mike Mannion co-ordinates the "Come Aside Retreat" for pro-life leaders. It is held every July in New Jersey. Priests for Life is helping to expand it to other locations. The Archdiocese of Denver has become the second location for this retreat (February 2-4, 1996), preached by Fr. Pavone. To register for it, contact Come Aside Retreat, Archdiocese of Denver, Respect Life Office, 200 Josephine Street, Denver, CO 80206. Tel. (303) 388-4491, ext 152. If you are interested in helping bring the Come Aside Retreat or other prolife retreats for both clergy or laity to your area. Please call Priests for Life at (914) 937-8243.

Attention Members!

We have a Priests for Life "Commitment Pledge" for clergy members and for lay auxiliaries. Have you received and signed yours yet?

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Fr. Richard Hogan, Associate Director, takes part in a pro-life memorial service in the Twin Cities. Fr. Hogan, as well as Fr. Pavone, willingly speak at prolife events and at parishes all over the country. To schedule them to come, call our main office (914) 937-8243.

