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Church must defend its basic beliefs against all

Bishop Thomas

J. Olmsted

My Turn
 Aug. 21, 2005 12:00 AM

I am grateful for the invitation to respond to some articles and letters to the editor that have appeared recently in *The Arizona Republic*. I welcome the opportunity to explain why I feel called by God to teach and to defend the Catholic faith.

In June 2004, the American Catholic bishops said, "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."

We bishops issued this statement in fidelity to our responsibility to hand on the gospel of Jesus Christ and to defend the dignity and the right to life of every human person.

The right to life, however, is not an issue of interest only to Catholics. It is of primary concern for all. The founders of our country recognized this when they stated, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The right to life is indeed an inalienable one. To stand up for the dignity of every person, then, and to speak out against intrinsic evils such as abortion, euthanasia, racism and sexual acts outside of marriage is a service that God requires of us on behalf of all persons, not only members of our own faith.

To do this by actions as well as by words underlines the seriousness of these teachings and the depths of our convictions. One such action is to prohibit the giving of honors or the provision of a platform in Catholic institutions for those who support actions contrary to these core moral principles.

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Saturday

- I trust that this position is not that difficult to understand. Why would we honor or give a platform to someone who radically disagrees with our fundamental teachings? We should instead be criticized if we allowed such things to happen.

This does not mean that we will cease praying for public officials or end our efforts to be in conversation with them and others about these and similar matters.

In fact, the continuity of such conversations is vitally important, precisely because of the serious ramifications of them. There are a variety of appropriate forums for this dialogue to occur, beyond public events at church facilities.

For the Catholic Church to back up its teaching through actions directed at public officials is not something new.

I think for example of the time in 1962 in New Orleans, when Archbishop Joseph Rummel excommunicated Judge Leander Perez when the judge tried to block the desegregation of the Catholic school system.

Was this bishop imposing his sectarian views on a public official? Was he meddling in politics or impeding freedom? Or was he defending the human dignity of all children, no matter the color of their skin?

The statement of the American bishops in June 2004 arose out of a concern for the rights of the most vulnerable members of our society, persons who have no way to raise their own voices because of their age or physical condition.

It also arose out of a conviction about the destructive nature of intrinsic evils, for individuals, for the family, and for the whole of society.

As Pope John Paul II said, "Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights - for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture - is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination."

The writer is bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix.

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