



OFFICE OF THE CARDINAL

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

September 2, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the midst of a lengthy political campaign, matters of public policy that are also moral issues sometimes are misrepresented or are presented in a partial or manipulative fashion. While everyone could be expected to know the Church's position on the immorality of abortion and the role of law in protecting unborn children, it seems some profess not to know it and others, even in the Church, dispute it. Since this teaching has recently been falsely presented, the following clarification may be helpful.

The Catholic Church, from its first days, condemned the aborting of unborn children as gravely sinful. Not only Scripture's teaching about God's protection of life in the womb (consider the prophets and the psalms and the Gospel stories about John the Baptist and Jesus himself in Mary's womb) but also the first century catechism (the Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) said: "You shall not slay the child by abortions. You shall not kill what is generated." The teaching of the Church was clear in a Roman Empire that permitted abortion. This same teaching has been constantly reiterated in every place and time up to Vatican II, which condemned abortion as a "heinous crime." This is true today and will be so tomorrow. Any other comments, by politicians, professors, pundits or the occasional priest, are erroneous and cannot be proposed in good faith.

This teaching has consequences for those charged with caring for the common good, those who hold public office. The unborn child, who is alive and is a member of the human family, cannot defend himself or herself. Good law defends the defenseless. Our present laws permit unborn children to be privately killed. Laws that place unborn children outside the protection of law destroy both the children killed and the common good, which is the controlling principle of Catholic social teaching. One cannot favor the legal status quo on abortion and also be working for the common good.

This explains why the abortion issue will not disappear and why it is central to the Church's teaching on a just social order. The Church does not endorse candidates for office, but she does teach the principles according to which Catholics should form their social consciences. The teaching, which covers intrinsic evils such as abortion and many other issues that are matters of prudential judgment, could not be clearer; the practice often falls short because we are all sinners. There is no room for self-righteousness in Catholic moral teaching.

The Conference of Bishops in this country and the Bishops of Illinois have issued statements about Catholic social teaching and political life. They are available in our parishes. All of us should keep our country and all the candidates for office in the next election in our prayers. God bless you and your families.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.
Archbishop of Chicago