

Msgr. Kavanagh on target with Gov. Davis

January 22 was the 30th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion throughout pregnancy. As many of you are aware, Monsignor Edward Kavanagh, Pastor of St. Rose Parish and Director of St. Patrick's Home, has been one of our leading pro-life activists for many years. In December, Monsignor confronted Governor Gray Davis about his support of abortion and challenged him to examine his conscience. I applaud Monsignor Kavanagh for his strong and consistent witness. People need to understand that you cannot call yourself a Catholic in good standing and at the same time publicly hold views that are contradictory to the Catholic faith.

As your bishop, I have to say clearly that anyone — politician or otherwise — who thinks it is acceptable for a Catholic to be pro-abortion is in very great error, puts his or her soul at risk, and is not in good standing with the Church. Such a person should have the integrity to acknowledge this and choose of his own volition to abstain from receiving Holy Communion until he has a change of heart.

Earlier this month, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith addressed a statement directly to politicians. In part, it stated: Catholic politicians "have the right and the duty to recall society to a deeper understanding of human life and to the responsibility of everyone in this regard. . . . Those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a grave and clear obligation to oppose any law that attacks human life. . . . A well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals."

Issues of the sacredness of human life and other questions of basic morality are matters of natural moral law, not simply of Church teaching. The Vatican statement states: "No Catholic can appeal to the principle of pluralism or to the autonomy of lay involvement in political life to support policies affecting the common good which compromise or undermine fundamental ethical requirements." There can be no division between public and private morality. It is untenable to say, "I am personally opposed to abortion," but support someone else's right to kill their unborn baby. Catholic moral doctrine respects the "rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere from that of religion and the Church — but not from morality." (Vatican statement)

The U.S. Bishops' statement of November 1998, *Living the Gospel of Life*, is even more explicit. "As bishops, we have the responsibility to call Americans to conversion, including political leaders, and especially those publicly identified as Catholics. . . . As chief teachers in the Church, we must therefore explain, persuade, correct and admonish those in leadership positions who contradict the Gospel of life through their actions and policies. Catholic public officials who disregard Church teaching on the inviolability of the human person indirectly collude in the taking of innocent life." (No. 29)

"We urge those Catholic officials who choose to depart from Church teaching on the inviolability of human life in their public life to consider the consequences for their own spiritual well being, as well as the scandal they risk by leading others into serious sin. We call on them to reflect on the grave contradiction of assuming public roles and presenting themselves as credible Catholics when their actions on fundamental issues of human life are not in agreement with Church teaching. No public official, especially one claiming to be a faithful and serious Catholic, can responsibly advocate for or actively support direct attacks on innocent human life. . ." Those who justify their position "on the

grounds that abortion is the law of the land need to recognize that there is a higher law, the law of God. No human law can validly contradict the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” (No. 32)

The path Jesus chose was not the easy one; but then the path of a leader never is. A true leader stands up for what is right, not for what is popular, and serves as an example for the rest of us. We know it is not politically correct to be pro-life; but right and wrong, good and evil, are never revealed to us in a poll. All human life is sacred. As stewards of God’s gift, we are to respect and protect it — always and without exception. “Governor, we pray for you that you will change your heart.”

The U.S. bishops want to help women in difficult circumstances: “We renew our offer of assistance to anyone considering abortion: If you are overwhelmed by the decisions you face, if you cannot afford medical care, if you are homeless or feel helpless, whatever your needs, we will help you. The Church and her ministries, inspired by the word and example of Jesus Christ, will help you with compassion and without condemnation. . .

“Roe v. Wade cannot stand as the law of this great nation, a nation founded on the self-evident truth that all people are created with an inalienable right to life. We are committed, no matter how long it may take, no matter the sacrifices required, to bringing about a reversal of this tragic Supreme Court decision. We will speak out on behalf of the sanctity of each and every human life wherever it is threatened, from conception to natural death. . . .Roe v. Wade must be reversed.” (U.S. Bishops, November 2002)