

Life Insight

A Publication of the USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities † Vol. 19 No. 1 January -February 2008

**Excerpts from Homily of
Cardinal Justin Rigali
Principal Celebrant, Vigil Mass for Life
Shrine of the Immaculate Conception
Washington, D.C.
January 21, 2008**

You have come to our nation's capitol to give visibility to your faith, your heritage and your commitment to life from conception to natural death. Tomorrow you will peacefully protest the injustice of Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton, the 1973 Supreme Court cases that legalized abortion throughout all nine months of pregnancy. ...

But first tonight, we have set this time aside to pray for an end to abortion, and to receive strength from the Lord. ...

Those of you who were here last year will recall the scaffolding erected in the back. ... This year you are able to see the fruit of that work, which is the Knights of Columbus Incarnation Dome.

The Incarnation Dome is made up of 2.4 million pieces of colored glass—cut and assembled in Italian workshops, shipped over the Atlantic in 346 boxes, and painstakingly installed over the course of five months by master mosaic artists.

[It] was a great undertaking that would not have been possible without the generosity of the Knights of Columbus and many others, and without the skills of the artists [and] craftsmen. ... It took time to craft this massive undertaking that will inspire generations of pilgrims yet unborn.

*We, too, dear friends are called to a massive undertaking, to raise up, through God's grace, what Pope John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae* called "a great campaign in support of life." Our task is to build a culture of life in which every person is treated with the respect due to his or her human dignity, regardless of age, physical or mental ability or stage of development. This urgent project is well underway. But we know it is far from complete.*

We are reminded daily of the many direct threats to life through abortion, human embryo experimentation,

and the false mercy of assisted suicide and euthanasia. Violence against the innocent unborn also spills over into disregard for other neighbors, often erupting in violence in our homes through domestic violence and child abuse.

[Y]ou are all part of God's great mosaic making his love visible in your families, parishes, schools, communities, workplaces and neighborhoods. You are the painstaking work of his hands—planned from the beginning of time and loved into existence by the Eternal Master Craftsman.

He now sends you out, thousands upon thousands strong, to do your part in forming a vibrant mosaic on behalf of life. You must be the "rich color" he created you to be. You must play your role in his overarching design, and be patient with others as they seek to do the same. ...

The Incarnation Dome is not made of huge, impressive pieces of glass. Its beauty and impact lie in the intricate interplay of so many tiny pieces. God is good at using many humble "pieces," as we heard in our reading from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Instead of choosing great or impressive people in the eyes of the world, God uses the humble, the foolish, the weak and "those who count for nothing" to accomplish his purposes.

It is when we least expect it that the tiniest among us can humble the powerful. One day not long ago, a very influential stem cell researcher, Dr. Shinya Yamanaka, was humbled when he was looking through a microscope at a human embryo in a fertility clinic. As the New York Times reports:

"The glimpse changed his scientific career. 'When I saw the embryo, I suddenly realized there was such a small difference between it and my daughters,' said Dr. Yamanaka, 45, a father of two. 'I thought, we can't keep destroying embryos for our research. There must be another way'." ... Dr. Yamanaka used his scientific knowledge to discover a new approach to stem cell research that many of his colleagues say will make embryonic stem cells obsolete.

If God can use a helpless embryo to change a human heart, he can certainly use us with all our limitations and weaknesses. Dear Friends, by seeking

after holiness and using the gifts God has given us to accomplish his will in your life, we are contributing mightily to that Kingdom we all long for ... where there will be no more crying or pain or death. Certainly no abortion. No euthanasia. No assisted suicide. No deep-freezing of embryos as though they were merchandise. And no destruction of human life in the name of science.

Make use of the graces we receive here tonight, to change the world tomorrow, and each day after returning home. Pray for the protection of human life and ask others to do so. Care for those around us who are in need physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually—especially those who would consider participating in an abortion. And finally, we need to allow others to care for us when we can no longer care for ourselves. All of us have an important place in conversations about the value of human life.

It is your right and duty as citizens—whether or not you are old enough to vote—to help shape society by offering to everyone the profound convictions of your faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life. In his name, you are also called to pray for an end to abortion in the United States and throughout the world. Roe vs. Wade is incompatible with human dignity. It must not stand. It cannot stand. It will not stand.

Over and above all the compelling reasons that nature gives us to respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life, the mighty dome of the Incarnation that we look up to tonight in this Basilica confirms us in an even deeper certitude. The eternal Son of God who took flesh from the Virgin Mary, was born and lived and died for our salvation, has uplifted all humanity to a further dignity and destiny, to share in his divine life forever in the communion of the Most Blessed Trinity. For this reason we know that life indeed will be victorious, and, with St. Paul, we say: “For this we toil and struggle, because we have set our hope on the Living God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and who is blessed forever.” Amen.



Do You Know the Way to the Moral High Ground?

On January 22, the retired leaders of two abortion industry organizations offered strategic advice to pro-choice forces in the op-ed pages of the *Los Angeles Times* on how to “regain the moral high ground.”

Scanning the 40-year war between “choice” and “life,” Frances Kissling, former president of Catholics for a Free Choice, and Kate Michelman, former NARAL head, recount the ebb and flow of battles past, identifying the tactical mistakes of the movement they helped lead. The candor is refreshing, but they disappoint by rehashing discredited abortion myths and, in the end, remaining oblivious to why the pro-choice side can never prevail, much less capture “the moral high ground.”

Choice can never defeat life. Killing one’s children to indulge in a commitment-free, hook-up lifestyle, or for financial reasons or career advancement or any other pretext, is simply too heavy a price for parents to bear.

“Choice” is fundamentally opposed to human nature and dignity. It is a betrayal of one’s child and one’s humanity, as countless grieving mothers and fathers have discovered. Thankfully, healing and peace are possible after abortion. Project Rachel and similar ministries are helping thousands annually.

Let’s take a look at the myths the Mses. Kissling and Michelman continue to spin.

Mythperception 1: “The United States has some of the most restrictive policies on abortion in the developed world. In contrast to Europe ... the Supreme Court has upheld state laws that require parental consent or notification, mandatory waiting periods and antiabortion counseling.”

The facts: Apart from countries not known for human rights, like China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and Cuba, and excluding our neighbors to the north (Canada has no federal abortion law), the United States has arguably the most permissive abortion law on the planet. European abortion laws are far more restrictive.

Ireland, Poland, Spain and Malta ban or restrict abortion to a few narrow categories.

In the United States, a woman can legally abort her child for all 40 weeks’ gestation for any reason, but most European countries limit abortion access to the early months of pregnancy: 10 weeks in Portugal; 90 days in Italy; 12 weeks in Denmark, Greece, Hungary,

Norway and Switzerland; 14 weeks in Austria, Belgium, France and Germany. The Netherlands and Great Britain are the exceptions at 22 and 24 weeks, respectively. After these limits, abortion is typically allowed only with the permission of a medical board and only under narrow circumstances, for example, a serious risk to the mother's life or physical health or serious fetal anomalies.

Parental authorization for a minor's abortion is the norm, required in 14 countries in western and central Europe.

Compulsory "*anti-abortion counseling*" and *mandatory waiting periods* are more onerous than the typical 24-hours found in most of our state laws. Waiting periods range from 3 days in Germany to 5 in the Netherlands, 6 in Belgium, and 7 days in France, Italy and Luxembourg. In Sweden, where there is no compulsory waiting period, some women wait up to four weeks for an abortion due to the relatively small number of providers available to meet the demand.

Mythperception 2: "The court's 2007 decision on so-called partial-birth abortions was an unprecedented infringement on physician autonomy."

The facts: *Gonzales v. Carhart*, which upheld the federal ban on partial-birth abortion, did not infringe on physicians' rights. It affected only about a dozen MDs who erroneously thought *Roe v. Wade*'s extreme abortion license also gave them a right to kill children whom they had already partly delivered from the mother's body. In *Gonzales v. Carhart*, the Supreme Court clarified the limits of *Roe*: the fatal act must occur before the entire head (or trunk past the navel in a breech delivery), exits the mother, rejecting the industry's attempt to obliterate the distinction between abortion and infanticide. Late term abortion providers remain free to kill viable unborn children by any other method they choose.

One must add that the Kissling/Michelman concern for physician autonomy rings hollow. They've spent their adult lives fighting against physician and institutional autonomy to conscientiously refuse to perform or refer for abortions. They've even promoted mandatory abortion training in medical school as a condition of accreditation!

Mythperception 3: "We are the ones actually doing things to make it possible for women to avoid needing abortions."

The facts: For thirty-five years the things they've done have conspicuously and consistently backfired. They've urged Congress to give hundreds of millions

annually to subsidize Planned Parenthood (where abortions increase every year!). They've promoted comprehensive sex education and ever greater access to contraception (the "Prevention First" strategy) which has been shown time and again and again and again to fail. And they've fought every type of state and federal regulation that actually does reduce abortions.

Look under "Issues" at www.usccb.org/prolife for fact sheets on "Contraception" and the "Morning After Pill" that summarize the dozens of studies showing that increased access to contraception and emergency contraceptives always fails to reduce rates of unintended pregnancy and abortion.

Visit www.heritage.org for analyses by Robert Rector and others of studies evaluating successful abstinence programs. That site also has original studies by Michael New on the impressive impact of state regulations in reducing abortion rates.

Let's turn now to what Mses. Kissling and Michelman have to say about cultural and strategic developments in the past 35 years.

Public opinion, they claim, shifted from "broad support for legal abortion to strong support for restricting access." Quite true, but here is what they offer as proof: "Twenty years ago, being pro-life was déclassé. Now it is a respectable point of view."

Funny, I always thought this struggle was about protecting vulnerable lives. Apparently it's really about which side looks "respectable." But I, for one, will sleep much better knowing that I've shed my déclassé image!

The authors continue: Did abortion opponents "simply respond more effectively to the changing science ...?"

Changing Science? The pro-life movement didn't need to "respond" to "changing science," because the essentials haven't changed in 40 years. For more than a century before the '60s, science had established that human life begins at conception. And well before 1973, science taught that the unborn child was not a clump of disorganized tissue, but a developing human being with a beating heart (at 22 days) and recordable brain waves (at 42 days). The only relevant scientific advance was that ultrasound imaging allowed millions more people to see through the abortion industry's lies and discover the child's humanness, which the pro-life side always maintained was the case.

Thoughtful messaging? Mses. Kissling and Michelman claim that pro-life strategy has shifted

from the language of “murdering babies” to noting that “caring societies ... seek to expand inclusion into ‘the human community.’ ... Why not welcome the fetus (who, after all, is us) into our community?”

Now that is an excellent question, which regrettably, they chose not to answer. But has pro-life verbal strategy shifted? No. Some pro-life people continue to talk about murdering babies, language both morally accurate and off-putting. And some continue to appeal to reason and human decency, by asking how a community—especially one that prides itself on equal rights and inclusiveness—can exclude an entire class of human beings from the protection of law.

Slogan or Way of Life? Mses. Kissling and Michelman see John Paul’s exhortation to build a “culture of life” as a successful “slogan.” But it’s far more than a slogan. It’s a way of ordering human society based on mutual respect and concern for others, especially those whose need and vulnerability should elicit our loving response.

Now for their advice to abortion supporters:

1. Convince “America that we support a public discussion of the moral dimension of abortion.” Great! Pro-lifers win when we dialogue, because the truth eventually wins out.
2. Convince “people that we are the ones actually doing things to make it possible for women to avoid needing abortions.” (Refuted earlier.)
3. Instead of defending “every individual abortion decision,” defend the woman’s “right to make the decision,” because “women can be trusted.” We ask: Why should any woman or man *ever* be entrusted with the power to decide whether to kill an innocent child?

4. “If pro-choice values are to regain the moral high ground, genuine discussion about these challenges needs to take place within the movement. It is inadequate to try o message our way out of this problem. Our vigorous defense ... needs ... greater openness regarding the real conflict between life and choice, between rights and responsibility.” As pro-choice activists begin to struggle with these issues—rather than just repeating their slogans and sound-bites—it’s safe to assume that even more consciences will be open to the truth about abortion.

My advice for Mses. Kissling and Michelman:

When you’ve had a chance to examine the real conflict between life and choice, between rights and responsibility, if you’re still having trouble finding the moral high ground, just follow the signpost up ahead, the one that reads “Choose Life.” The road isn’t always easy, but once you’re there, you’ll rediscover life and joy, justice and mercy, hope, love, and lasting peace in your souls and with others.

Let’s pray for our pro-choice friends and be ready to welcome them with love into a true Culture of Life.

*Life Insight** is a publication of the
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www.usccb.org/prolife
Made possible through the generosity of
the Knights of Columbus

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