



Testimony of

**His Eminence John Cardinal Krol
Archbishop of Philadelphia
before the**

**Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments
of the
Senate Committee on the Judiciary**

March 7, 1974

Mr. Chairman:

I am Cardinal John Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia. I appear before this Subcommittee today in my capacity as President of the United States Catholic Conference, the official, national-level agency of the 300 American bishops who minister to the spiritual and religious needs of nearly 50 million American Catholics. I am accompanied by Cardinal John Cody, Archbishop of Chicago and Chairman of the Catholic Bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities; by Cardinal Timothy Manning, Archbishop of Los Angeles; and by Cardinal Humberto Medeiros, Archbishop of Boston.

Each of us will present a brief oral statement, after which we shall be happy to respond to the questions of the Subcommittee. We also ask your permission to submit for the record a longer written statement of the position of the United States Catholic Conference, in which we express the enduring principles of the Catholic Church on this question.

We are pleased at this opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee. We are pleased, too, that the Subcommittee has decided to conduct hearings on proposed constitutional amendments to protect the life of unborn human beings from conception onward. This is an encouraging sign of forward

movement which, we hope, will soon lead to congressional enactment of such an amendment.

I emphasize the word "soon," for this issue has an urgency shared by few others now confronting the nation. Each day that passes without such an amendment signals further massive destruction of unborn human beings in this country. It has been estimated that there is one abortion every 20 seconds in the United States -- three every minute. Every week, since the Supreme Court's decisions of January 22, 1973, there have been as many deaths from abortion as there were deaths at Nagasaki as a result of the atomic bomb. Every nine days there are as many deaths from abortion as there were American deaths in the 10 years of the Vietnam war.

Last month Mr. Justice Blackmun was quoted as saying that the court's abortion ruling "will be regarded as one of the worst mistakes in the Court's history or one of its great decisions, a turning point." I agree with Justice Blackmun at least to this extent, that the abortion decisions will be viewed as a tragic mistake. But I am convinced that they will ultimately be seen as the worst mistake in the Court's history. Only a constitutional amendment can correct this mistake.

At the same time, we are aware that amending our Constitution is not a step to be taken lightly. Congress and the states are obliged to reflect seriously on such an action. In this process of reflection it is essential to consider the views of many concerned Americans. It is precisely as concerned Americans who are moral leaders that we appear here today.

We do not propose to advocate sectarian doctrine but to defend human rights, and specifically, the most fundamental of all rights, the right to life itself. While we are leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States, we believe that what we say expresses the convictions of many Americans who are members of other faiths and of no faith.

I do not intend to dwell at length on this point, but I believe it is important at least to raise it, in order to dispose of a facile but misleading slogan often directed against those who speak against abortion. We reject any suggestion that we are attempting to impose "our" morality on others. First, it is not true. The right to life is not an invention of the Catholic Church or any other church. It is a basic human right which must undergird any civilized society. Second, either we all have the same right to speak out on public policy or no

one does. We do not have to check our consciences at the door before we argue for what we think is best for society. We speak as American citizens who are free to express our views and whose freedom, under our system of government, carries with it a corresponding obligation to advocate positions which we believe will best serve the good of our nation. Third, in our free country, decisions concerning issues such as the one before this Subcommittee are made by legislators who themselves are free to act according to their own best judgment. We dare not forget, however, that to separate political judgment from moral judgment leads to disorder and disaster.

In order to grasp what is at stake in the issue before us, it is essential to understand the nature of the being whom an abortion kills. There is an impression in some quarters that the child before birth is simply a lump of tissue, an undifferentiated part of its mother's body, rather like an appendix. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

What comes into existence at the moment of conception is nothing less than a human being in the earliest stages of development. As our detailed statement shows, medical science has amply documented the humanity of the fetus. There would be no question about the humanity of the unborn except that some wish to kill them.

Before a woman ordinarily knows that she is pregnant, the new human being has developed thousands of cells, a heart which began beating within 25 days from conception, veins and circulating blood, a backbone and skeletal system, a brain with traceable brain waves, rudimentary organs, arms and legs, fingers and toes, eyes and ears and a mouth. At the very moment of fertilization, all of the unique genetic characteristics of an individual are determined: eye, skin and hair coloring, height and bone structure, intellectual potential, inherited emotional makeup, etc. From conception on, 46 chromosomes are present, 23 from each parent. This is the chromosomal content defined by biologists as that of a normal human being. Furthermore, this new individual's chromosomal pattern is utterly unique, absolutely its own and unlike that of any other human being in the world, including either of its parents. The scientific evidence points to only one possible conclusion: this is a new, unique, human individual. When this individual is killed, human life is destroyed.

It is true that new human life is uniquely defenseless. But defenselessness is not an argument for killing.

I do not impute evil motives to those who seek to justify abortion. I do contend that the legalization of abortion is a tragic error which cries out for correction. The only avenue of correction is a constitutional amendment to protect the unborn.

Mr. Chairman, Cardinals Manning, Medeiros, and Cody will address themselves to other aspects of this question as they are viewed by the United States Catholic Conference. I say, in conclusion, that the fundamental question facing this nation in the abortion issue is whether or not we, as Americans, reverence human life in all its stages and are prepared to protect it. All human life is sacred. It is the best part of the American tradition not only to recognize this principle in the abstract but to embody it in our laws and institutions.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Subcommittee and I pray that these hearings will prove to be the first step in a successful effort to re-extend the protection of law to the unborn.

Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202) 541-3070