

Forum

WHCF Must Tackle Abortion

By Father James Hewes
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What the family is all about is children and parenting (as distinct from marriage or other institutions). The family is called the "domestic church" by the Second Vatican Council. This is so because there is a strong parallel in its mission. The church is called to be the presence of the love of Christ on earth. The church is the place where all members are given equal importance and dignity. It is the place where new and unwanted life is welcomed and nourished with the love of Christ. The family remains the place where new life begins. It is the life-giving climate of security and stability in which each individual member can grow and be nourished.

Scientist Leon Kass notes, "The family is rapidly becoming the only institution in an increasingly impersonal world where each person is loved, not for what he does or makes, but simply because he is." In other words, a person is valued and has dignity simply because he/she is a member of the family. It is not due to anything one does or perfection one achieves. Similarly in the church, one's worth comes from the fact that God is his/her origin and destiny. In Jesus becoming human, He has given an absolute affirmation of each person's infinite value. The family, the domestic church and the universal church have the same life-giving call to revere each person for their infinite value.

The family is not a self-sufficient social institution. It always has had a close working relationship with existing educational, political, and social institutions. The family affects these institutions and is affected by them.

The American Catholic family then is not only affected by the church teaching, but also by the cultural and social settings in which it finds itself. The pathological condition affecting the Catholic family (and all families) is the acceptance of abortion as normal by the political, legal and medical institutions of our American society. It is becoming institutionalized and even promoted by the subsystems of our society, including the family. The main reasons for doing abortions today (97 per cent) is because the child is unwanted or handicapped. Yet, the family's very existence is because everyone can feel accepted and loved. There is no need to be a perfect specimen off the assembly line to have a right to life in the family.

Yet the underlying value system being accepted and perpetuated on the family is that one can do away with unwanted life. The frightening thing is that a recent survey showed that 32 per cent of abortions were second abortions and 23 per cent were third; abortion and the underlying belief system that allows it is becoming a way of life. The very purpose of the family — to procreate and nourish life — is being lost.

What happens to the relationship between a husband and wife in a family when a woman decides to abort her child? As the law stands now, the husband has no right to interfere in his wife's decision. If a man has no say concerning the fate of the child he has fathered, what hope is there for mutual respect and trust within the family? Abortions are performed on teenagers without parents' knowledge or consent. The avoidance of parental notification eliminates accountability and responsibility by the child to values of the family unit. It destroys the responsibility of parents for the care and guidance of their children; however difficult that responsibility may be during trying circumstances. What of the children whose

mothers or other friends' mothers have had abortions? What feelings and attitudes will children have when they come to understand the nature of abortion and know their mother destroyed an unborn brother or sister? What happens when the emphasis on contraception and wanted children (thus paving the way for "mistakes" — "unwanted children") makes pregnancy become like a disease (Why take a pill? Why are they developing a "vaccine" for pregnancy? Is it a disease like polio?)? In this atmosphere children become a liability and a hindrance instead of gifts from the Lord. Parents can fail to see themselves as co-creators of this magnificent life. What can this atmosphere do but tear apart any hope for strengthening the family.

The Supreme Court decision on abortion has set in a cycle of individualism setting one member of the family against the others and ultimately destructive of the institutional character of the family. The Supreme Court has found that the woman has a "better right" to control the abortion decision and all the other members of the family are left powerless. The highly individualistic nature of the abortion decisions leaves nothing protected. The fundamental right to life and the inherent dignity of one of the members of the family (the unborn) are denied. In other words, the basic issue at stake is the lack of justice to one member of the family — the unborn.

The White House Conference on Families (WHCF) is looking at various rights and duties toward the family. Yet, without this basic right to life, all other rights lose their meaning. This being the case, the issue of abortion is not only an issue of the family, but an issue of justice for the whole human family. Since it is an issue of social justice (not personal morality or sexuality) it has on its side a long history of the social teachings of the church to back up our position. This is articulated in many social encyclicals such as Pope John XXIII's Peace on Earth, where he states:

"Any human society if it is to be well ordered and productive must lay down as a foundation of this principle, namely, that every human being is a person, that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will. Indeed precisely because he is a person, he has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature, and these rights and obligations are universal and inviolable, so they cannot in any way be surrendered."

There are many rights that Pope John XXIII addresses but the first is the right to life, on which all other rights are based.

So, as the WHCF considers many of the rights and duties to the family, it is imperative that this basic right is brought in adequately to the dialogue. The WHCF will focus on how to help the family in its mission of charity; it must also equally talk about the justice within the family.

Several state conferences on the family have already taken a stand for abortion. We submit that abortion is the destruction of the traditional family at its roots. It is not only the abortion decision that is doing this, but the values and ethical principles that underlie abortions, as well as the attitudes and conditions it perpetuates, that are so destructive to the family.

We the Human Life Commission urge our delegates to the White House Conference on the Family in June to continue to be a strong voice in asking support for a Human Life Amendment which protects all members of one's family and, in justice, protects the inherent dignity of the human family as well.

Looking Back . . .

75 years ago this week — It was a dull week, news-wise for the Courier, and when that happens it's a good idea to turn to the "News from Ireland" page. There we learned that "before departing from Skibbersen recently, Most Rev. Dr. Casey, bishop of St. John, Canada, delivered an address at Lisheen church, near which his parents resided prior to leaving for America. He told the people that a lot of people who left Ireland regretted it. Some had succeeded but the great majority got submerged and they would never hear of them. They would read glowing accounts in letters of the one that succeeded but they never heard of the ninety-nine that failed. He advised the people to remain at home."

And some of the news was of the most dire and provocative nature: "At Wellingtonbridge police station, April 13, Constable Cronin committed suicide by shooting himself." Or, "Mrs. Patrick Kelly, wife of a dairy farmer, living on the canal banks, was found drowned lately in the river Shannon, near the Heaton woolen mills."

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50 years ago this week — The lead story of the paper announced, "The 100th anniversary of the founding of Our Mother of Sorrows Church, on the Latta Road, corner Mt. Read Boulevard, will be celebrated with fitting religious and civic ceremonies next Sunday, June 8th. The Church, and the entire community will be honored by the presence on this occasion of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt and Hon. Charles H. Tuttle, U.S. District Attorney of New York, who will give addresses in keeping with the occasion. These addresses will be broadcast over WHAM, beginning about 11:45 A.M., immediately after Mass."

Lower on the same page was news of a "\$25,000 check by Rockefeller sent to cardinal." The Rockefeller was John D., Jr.; the cardinal was Hayes of New York, and the check was for the Catholic Charities of Greater New York.

And in the world of local commerce, Duffy-Powers was offering a "Smart Straw Hat" for \$1.98. And how many knew that they gave S & H green stamps that long ago?

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25 years ago this week — Graduation news took up much of the front page with the most notable memorabilia, "Fisher College Lists Fifty-eight In First Class."

And the foreign news was unhappy, as usual — "Peron Regime Ousts Nuns Caring For Orphans, Aged."

And from the world of entertainment: "Ed Sullivan Says Public Wants Clean TV Shows." Thank God, Ed does not have to sit in on the current fare.

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10 years ago this week — The editor tried to get fancy. Because it was the anniversary of the D-Day landing, the front page was a montage of the Page 1's from the Courier of June 8 and the Democrat and Chronicle of June 6 — both of 1944. Over both was an outline headline, "June 6, 1970, War Times Cry for Prayers." The "war time" of 1970 was Vietnam.

While much of official Catholic reaction to entertainment efforts always seems to be of the critical kind, back in 1970, the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures actually advised folks to attend a certain movie. The film was "Z" — a French-made film set in Greece about political dissent and violence in a democracy.

On the local scene it was announced that "2 Parish Schools In Inner City Plan To Consolidate Efforts." The schools were Immaculate Conception and St. Lucy's.

IRS Ruling Should Be Fought

A couple of diocesan newspapers have defied the Internal Revenue Service ruling which would emasculate the kind of political information and comment allowable to such publications.

This ruling is tricky. It pretends to avoid first amendment rights. It doesn't prohibit such reporting and editorializing in itself. Instead, it says that if such a publication chooses to exercise these rights under the first amendment, it can lose its tax exempt status.

Among the things that tax exempt publications cannot do, according to IRS, would be endorsement of candidates, rejection of candidates (if only for religious values) reporting of candidates' positions on issues of particular importance to the religious group, accepting or rejecting political advertising according to the

candidates' stands on values espoused by the publication.

Several points should be made on this ruling.

Though it falls within the general principles of the prevailing law on tax exempt institutions, its specific application represents something new and different in our nation.

The ruling, which has the effect of law, did not go through a legislative process in which elected representatives are held accountable to their constituents. Instead, it was simply proclaimed by the agency; it stands as law unless some group chooses to take on the federal government in court, a very costly, time-consuming endeavor.

Unlike most legislation, the origins of such regulations are very difficult



Fr. John Reedy

Looking for the Lord

to trace. There is a strong suspicion that this ruling arose from the concern of some politicians about the effectiveness of pro-life groups in particular campaigns. But you can't be sure. IRS doesn't offer any explanation for why it happened to decide on this interpretation at this particular time.

Make no mistake. There's a long history of political activity on the part of religious tax exempt organizations. It focused on such issues as alcohol, gambling, diplomatic

representation at the Vatican, public aid to parochial schools, and distribution of birth control information and devices.

It was very explicit in challenging the national loyalty of Al Smith and John Kennedy.

But somehow the nation survived — until some non-elected bureaucrat in IRS decided that this sort of thing had to end. It may have been pure coincidence that this judgment came at the time that several influential legislators are

feeling the heat from pro-life people. It may have been!

Churches are willing to support such a challenge.

For most religious publications, the loss of the tax exempt status, with its important impact on postal rates, would amount to a quick execution. Moreover, there are very few of these publications which have the resources to mount a challenge in the courts.

This issue is important not as a restriction on the particular journalists but as a restriction on large numbers of citizens who are served by these publications and the churches they represent.

At present, I see no signs that the various religious press groups are trying to collaborate on a challenge to the ruling. Nor do I see any evidence that groups like the U.S. Catholic Conference and the National Council of

At this time, those publications which have defied the ruling are standing alone and very vulnerable. IRS can simply declare them in violation and strip them of their tax exempt status. Unless they find some way of taking the issue to court, they are dead.

I regard this as too important an issue — for freedom of speech in this country and for the churches — to be left to the arbitrary interpretation of IRS staffers.

The religious press organizations and their sponsoring churches had better start thinking seriously about collaborating on a court challenge. If they don't, they — and the nation — may be forfeiting far more than they realize.