

# Tragic reality belies promise of legal abortion

By Richard Doerflinger

After 16 years, it is apparent that abortion has failed to alleviate the problems its advocates said it would resolve; instead it has brought new problems in its wake.

In 1973, abortion-rights advocates claimed that abortion must be legalized to prevent huge numbers of maternal deaths from illegal abortions. They claimed that more than a million abortions were performed in the United States each year, and that these procedures caused the deaths of 5,000 to 10,000 women annually.

The basis for this claim was exploded in 1979 by Dr. Bernard Nathanson, co-founder of the National Abortion Rights Action League. Nathanson publicly admitted that he and his colleagues fabricated these numbers.

Pro-abortion groups' casual references to "safe and legal" abortion belie a tragic reality: Legal abortions can still be unsafe for women and may even be performed by the same unsafe practitioners who once plied their trade outside the law.

Ironically, it is now more difficult to prosecute unsafe abortionists because the courts routinely invalidate even those regulations designed to protect women's health during first-trimester abortions.

But would women be endangered if abortion became less available? That question was raised in 1977 when Congress' passage of the Hyde amendment ended public funding of abortions in most states.

Saying the Hyde amendment created the equivalent of a legal ban on abortion for the poor, abortion advocates predicted it would produce a sudden rise in abortion-related maternal deaths as poor women resorted to non-physicians for unsafe abortions.

Despite an intensive collaborative effort by pro-abortion groups and federal researchers to prove this charge in the state of Texas, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control admitted in 1980 that "more than

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one-third of the legal abortions expected among Medicaid-eligible women were not obtained in the post-funding restriction period."

Moreover, "low-income women ... do not appear to be resorting to illegal abortions." It seems the chief effect of restrictions on abortion is not to make abortion more dangerous but to make it less common. Unborn children's lives are saved without discernibly increasing the risk to their mothers.

The violence done to women by abortion has become apparent in thousands of cases of post-abortion psychological trauma. In a 1986 report, the American Psychological Association concluded that women sometimes experience "psychotic breaks following abortion despite the absence of preexisting psychological problems."

The study also found somewhat more negative effects from abortion among teenagers, including suicide attempts on the anniversary of the abortion or on the day the child would have been born.

While few women experience psychotic breaks from abortion, few are not affected by it. Dr. Julius Fogel, a psychiatrist and gynecologist who has performed abortions, says in the February 5, 1989, *Washington Post*: "A psychological price is paid. I can't say exactly what. It may be alienation. It may be a pushing away from human warmth, perhaps a hardening of the maternal instinct. Something happens on the deeper levels of a woman's consciousness when she destroys a pregnancy."

By offering abortion as a simple solution to a broad range of pregnancy-related problems, our society has ignored the reality of unborn life and evaded or trivialized the real problems of women already born. Even in the most pragmatic sense of the term, therefore, abortion on demand simply has not worked.

Realization of this should lead Americans to offer life-affirming assistance to women and children. The only humane abortion policy will be one that fosters human life at every stage.

Doerflinger is associate director for policy development for the NCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities.

## Right to privacy cannot negate duty to honor life

By Helen Alvare

Since the 1970s, American courts have moved toward giving individuals the absolute right to decide the time and manner of their deaths.

One of the most significant aspects of this legal trend is the widespread reliance on the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe vs. Wade* as precedent for a constitutional "right of privacy." Although nowhere explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, recognition of a right of privacy was developed by the U.S. Supreme Court in a long line of cases beginning in 1886.

Cases locating an affirmative "right to die" within the federal constitutional "right of privacy" are problematic primarily because they incorporate into law some practices that derogate the value of human life in community.

While praising the value of human life, particularly insofar as it grounds the living human's free will to decide, judges almost invariably follow this buildup with the conclusion that when the patient is no longer capable of autonomous life, he or she would obviously no longer desire to live.

This is a subtle and perhaps unconscious way of labeling life as worthless because it is unproductive, costly, and unattractive. What is often being subjectively adjudicated is the value of an impaired life to family and/or society.

The most important policy consequence of accord-ing constitutional status to a right to choose death is that it shields the right from a wide variety of legislative attempts to tamper with it. Thus, after enough judges have reached consistent results about the "right" of persons to terminate medical treatment or sustenance, the practice of termination will be carried on from day to day without further guidance or restraint from the judiciary or the legislature.

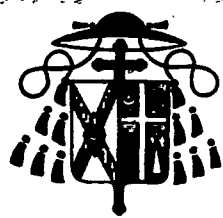
The duty to care for life, to act as its steward, refers to all life, our own as well as others. Thus we are not at liberty to dispose of our lives or the lives of others, but are called to act as stewards of God's creation.

This does not mean there are no situations in which — because of the proportion of benefits and burdens — it is appropriate to cease medical treatment for a terminally ill patient. But the civil law has moved very far away from even a basic affirmation of the stewardship principle.

As Christians called to stewardship, we affirm both individual freedom and the common good, fully aware that these principles necessarily exist in tension. In contemporary society, however, the emphasis is on the individual as a locus of all rights.

We believe, as Christians, that there is a better

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Bishop's Office

My Dear People,

Every October, the U.S. Catholic Community renews its commitment to protect and promote human life. We gather this month in our parish communities to mark Respect Life Month and to offer thanks and praise to our loving God for this precious gift of human life.

The Scripture readings for Sunday, Oct. 1, offered us some profound insights; they challenge us to reflect on who we are and where we stand in response to all that threatens human life. Amos describes a society so wrapped up in personal luxury and pleasure-seeking that there is no time for those in need. In the Gospel account of the rich man and the beggar, Jesus explains that giving crumbs to the beggar is the supreme example of blind indifference to the realities of life and to our covenant with God. Paul's advice to the early Christian community is relevant for us at the end of the 20th century as we await the return of the Lord. We must center ourselves in Him and live as faithful disciples open to God's presence in others.

We need to be aware of all the contemporary threats to human life — abortion, euthanasia, pornography, capital punishment, suicide — but we need not be discouraged or overwhelmed. Our faith sustains us!

As communities centered in Jesus, we search for concrete ways to speak up for life. Please consider participating in the ongoing, year-round Respect Life activities sponsored by your parish Social Ministry Committee.

Moved by God's deep and abiding love and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can together act to affirm the sacredness of life.

Your Brother in Christ,

+ Matthew H. Clark  
Bishop of Rochester

*His Love Endures Forever*