

# Pro-lifers need support from 'silent majority'

By Fr. Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

New York's Cardinal John J. O'Connor is sometimes unfairly labeled as a one-issue person. It is charged that his definition of life is limited to fetal life in the womb, and that he cares only about abortion.

At the same time, Cardinal O'Connor has been portrayed as a critic of the "consistent-ethic-of-life" approach favored by Chicago's Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and endorsed by the U.S. Catholic bishops.

Perhaps Cardinal O'Connor suffers from an association with certain vocal elements in the pro-life movement who are, in fact, one-issue people and who do, in fact, repudiate the U. S. Catholic bishops' consistent-ethic-of-life approach.

If those groups were to take their lead from Cardinal O'Connor, more room might be available for dialogue and eventually for collaboration among Catholics who have been at odds with one another

over the abortion issue.

At a recent conference of Catholic social justice leaders in Washington in observance of the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Cardinal O'Connor noted that he has "always supported and continue(s) to support what Cardinal Bernardin has always meant by the 'consistent ethic of life'..."

What he fears is that we are becoming "a people whose consistent ethic is an ethic of death."

"Federal, state, county and city governments, for example, give leftovers to pregnancy care, prenatal care, child care, single parents, the needs of working women, but budget hundreds of millions of dollars annually to provide abortions."

Cardinal O'Connor also pointed to the billions of dollars being spent on weapons systems and the financing of the war in the Persian Gulf as further evidence of this ethic of death.

If we are to be effective advocates of human life before birth, he argued, we

must share "the passionate commitment of the bishops of the United States to all human life, at all stages of its existence and to every individual human life whatever the color, the sex, the ethnic background, of every person, friend or enemy..."

Cardinal O'Connor expressed a concern recently about divisions within the pro-life movement, with the hope that these divisions might be overcome.

However, if we were to work simply for unity among existing pro-life groups, it wouldn't help the pro-life cause very much, if at all.

The problem is that too many in the existing pro-life groups are politically reactionary, counterproductive in their tactics, and hostile to the full moral agenda of the U.S. Catholic bishops.

Not surprisingly, these activists have a poor public image.

One doubts that we could mount a more effective campaign on behalf of human life if only the fractures within the existing pro-life movement were healed. The public



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

perceives it to be extremist, and, in large part, it is.

What is needed is an effective strategy to win the active support and participation of the "silent majority" within the church who are opposed to abortion on moral grounds, but who are turned off by the tone and tactics of the pro-life movement and by the ecclesiastical agenda of some of its episcopal leaders.

Those in the silent middle will not commit themselves to the cause, however honorable and urgent it be, unless and until there is a different kind of leadership and spirit informing it.

The middle will not be part of a movement which never questions the morality of any war (be it in Granada, Panama, or the Persian Gulf), which opposes civil liberties for racial and sexual minorities, which openly supports right-wing politicians like senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, which demonizes major public figures like Governor Mario Cuomo of New York, which favors restrictions on freedom of expression in the church, which is insensitive to the concerns of women in the church and in society, and which has a generally negative attitude toward human sexuality itself.

Cardinal O'Connor has urged us and our public officials to be concerned not only with abortion, but also with the homeless, the single parent, children, the poor, the striking worker and with the cause of peace.

Many liberals heretofore have been inconsistent on the abortion issue. Many conservatives have been inconsistent on the rest.

What the pro-life movement needs is a consistent ethic of life. Those who will not support a consistent ethic of life shouldn't be enlisted for service in the movement. Their presence and activities are counterproductive.

And so long as they're there, the middle won't be.

# Jesus shows Peter how to forgive himself, others

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"Sun's coming up," Peter called to his slumbering companions in the boat. "I think it's time to head in. These fish are just getting too smart for this fisherman."

"Did you catch anything?" Andrew asked.

Peter chuckled as he looked around at his drowsy companions. "No, not a one."

As Peter arranged the boat's sails, John helped Andrew pull in the empty nets. "Reminds me of the very first time I met Jesus," Peter reflected.

"After a night of fruitless fishing, you were pretty discouraged until you met Jesus," Andrew reminded his brother. "You thought Jesus was out of his mind when he told you to cast out again."

"There were so many fish after that, the nets almost broke under the weight!" John added. "If not for James and I, you might have lost everything."

Peter's face became somber. "Jesus called me his rock that very first day. How could I have told people I didn't even know him that last night?"

No one offered Peter any consolation and he continued. "Jesus knew somehow. A couple of days before it happened, he told me that I would deny him. I said that it could never be true. Some rock I turned out to be."

"We all left him, Peter," John said. "But Jesus has forgiven us."

"Some things are too terrible to forgive," Peter said as he continued to brood. "I'll never forget what I did to Jesus."

Everyone was silent. The only sound came from the gentle waves lapping up on the side of the boat as it cut through the sea in its journey to shore. The beach was deserted except for a solitary figure.

"Did you catch anything?" the man called out to them as they neared the shore.

"Nothing at all," John shouted back to him.

"If you throw your net out on the right side, you'll catch some," the stranger sug-



gested.

Peter scarcely waited to see the net fill until it was nearly torn with the size of the catch. "It's Jesus!" he cried as he threw himself headlong into the sea.

By the time the others had brought the boat to shore, Jesus already had a small fire prepared. "Give me some of the fish," he suggested. "We'll have breakfast together."

Peter barely uttered a word all through the meal. When they had finished, Jesus took him aside from the others and asked, "Peter, do you love me?"

"Of course I do," Peter stammered.

"I want you to feed my lambs," Jesus told him.

Peter nodded in agreement and Jesus asked again, "Do you really love me?"

"Yes, Lord, I really love you," Peter replied without looking directly at Jesus.

"Then take care of the lambs," Jesus

said.

When Jesus posed the same question to him a third time, Peter cried, "Lord, you know everything about me. You know me better than I know myself. So you must know that I love you!"

"Peter, I have much work for you to do. I have given you the power to forgive sins," Jesus said. "How can you forgive others when you won't forgive yourself?"

"What if I fail again, like last time?" Peter asked, his voice choked with emotion.

"That is why I will send my spirit to help you in all that you say and do," Jesus said gently.

At last, Peter's gloomy face broke into a smile as he said, "I'm ready to try again, Lord."

**Scripture reference:** John, Chapter 21:1-19.

**Meditation:** "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26).

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