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Abortion

RT. REV. PAUL V. HARRINGTON, J.C.L.

Let us not deceive ourselves; Let us not be deceived by others. There is a very active and well-organized campaign in operation, whose ultimate objective and goal is the legalization of criminal abortion in each of the sovereign states of these United States.

Until recently, this group worked perseveringly and incessantly to assure that contraceptive advice and instruments could be legally made available to any citizen in each of the fifty states. For some years, there were only two recalcitrant States, Connecticut and Massachusetts, which would not recognize the legality of disseminating information or the providing of contraceptive devices for those persons who did not wish an increase in their family at the present time. The statute of Connecticut was recently set aside as unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court and a recent attempt to change the statutory legislation in Massachusetts failed by a vote of 119 to 97.

Now that the campaign to legalize contraception has had almost one-hundred percent success, a national

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organization, taking advantage of the same propaganda techniques and promotional methods, is turning its attention to an intensive campaign to legalize criminal abortion in every State.

In the recent past, a one and one-half hour television program was presented by a major network at prime time, the sole and very evident purpose of which was to sell abortion to the people of America. This program was blatant and overt in its sales presentation and method; the usual indirect and subtle approach was noticeably absent.

With the exception of a Catholic theologian and a religious, who is the Dean of a Catholic law school, all the participants were members of the medical profession. A well-known and well-respected Catholic obstetrician and gynecologist, who is forthrightly opposed to any type of abortion under any circumstances was interviewed. It is obvious that these three proponents of the "Catholic" position on abortion were allowed to be present on the panel to give "balance" so that no one could challenge the "objectivity" of the program but it was evident, even to the most casual viewer, that they were allowed very little time both

absolutely and in relation to the length of the program, and only innocuous remarks of theirs were presented after very careful editing of their original statements. The emphasis and stress was very definitely slanted in favor of the social and human advisability of adopting legislation in the several states, which would allow and legalize criminal abortion.

It was agreed that more than a million abortions occur in these United States annually and that approximately eighty percent of these are performed on married women. No attempt was made to investigate whether these pregnancies among the married women were legitimate or illegitimate. In fact, very little attention was given to abortions among married women and the emphasis was directed almost exclusively to the twenty percent, which occur among unwed girls.

The approach was not based on principle or ethical postulates and the conclusions were not reached by reason; rather the stress was on emotional reaction and maudlin sentimentalism.

The situation was presented of a young, unmarried girl, who discovered that she was pregnant. The script told of her obvious worry, fear, and anxiety but absolutely no mention was made of any criticism or censure for her pre-marital promiscuity or the fact that she had contravened the law of God and the law of society. Complete absence of any such moral reference gave the impression that all the panelists were in agreement that she had a

perfect legal and moral right to participate in marital intercourse, although she was single, but that it was a shame that she was not more cautious in preventing pregnancy. The decay, deterioration, and disintegration of American life was never so obvious as by the total omission of any reference to the transgression, which occasioned the pregnancy.

The traumatic experience of the young girl was vividly portrayed—moments of bitterness, loneliness, indecision, uncertainty, doubt and fear of the future. Very little attention was given to a very respectable solution, which was available to the distraught young girl—the services of a reputable social agency, which could provide for prenatal care, hospital delivery and eventual placement for adoption in a foster-home care.

Rather, the attention of the audience was focused on abortion as the ideal solution, which would once and for all put an end to the fears and anxieties and trauma of the unfortunate young girl.

It was at this point of the dramatic unfolding that the greater number of medical panelists became very vocal and very intense. Those favoring abortion regretted the fact that an unmarried, pregnant girl was looked upon with disdain and suspicion by a large segment of civilized society; that she could not walk through the main door of a general hospital and into the foyer and register for an abortion; that trained, skilled practitioners of the medical and surgical arts were denied the right to practice their pro-

fession in a manner that would benefit this much-to-be-pitied young girl; that she had to consider herself as a common criminal and walk down dingy alleys or side streets in the darkness of night and be operated on by "mechanics or plumbers" under the worst possible surgical conditions with definite danger to her own health and life.

The regrets of these physicians were presented in a manner to cast aspersions on those members of society who, in these enlightened days, would dare to be critical of pre-marital promiscuity or direct murder.

As there was previously no censure for immorality, there was no censure for murder except in the very forthright denunciation by the Catholic obstetrician-gynecologist, the Catholic theologian and the Dean of the Catholic law school. Only these three spoke about creation of life by God, the sanctity of life once it was conceived and the responsibility of man to safeguard and protect life and to do nothing in a positive way, which would threaten or terminate life.

The attitude toward life on the part of most of the physicians interviewed betrayed a complete absence of any religious conviction—a frightening reality when one considers that these men have been trained to honor and respect life and are supposedly dedicated to the preservation of life.

Probably the most appalling part of the discussion—from the point of view of the reaction on the part of the viewers, who ordinarily have

tremendous respect for the medical profession and individual practitioners—was the business-like attitude of the participants towards those doctors who regularly contravene, not merely the moral law but also the state law, and make a livelihood of performing repeat abortions. It was indicated that some doctors specialize in this nefarious type of work and do little else because it is lucrative.

Granted that only a very small percentage of doctors in this country specialize in abortion and granted also that only another small percentage dabble in this from time to time, it is still disheartening and alarming that there are any and especially that these are tolerated in such a noble profession.

In the television discussion, there was evidence of some irritation on the part of some of the doctors because they believed that their rights and freedom to practice medicine, as they see fit, are seriously abridged by reason of state laws, which prohibit criminal abortion. These doctors do not seem to realize that abortion is murder, since it entails the direct killing and snuffing-out of an innocent, unborn life. These same doctors do not seem to appreciate the fact that they are merely agents of their patients and are not allowed to do for the patient what the patient is not allowed to do by right.

The excessive compassion of these doctors for the health and life of the would-be mother is ill-placed since more concern is shown for her and her life, when she was per-

sonally responsible, by her immoral behavior, for her pregnancy, than for the life of the innocent child.

The life of the unborn, who cannot be seen and, for that reason is less tangible and concrete, is just as sacred as is the life of a living person and by reason of his complete helplessness, he must depend on others for the protection of his life and his right to life. Yet, in these circumstances when the physician is crying for the right, the privilege, the opportunity to abort, he is preferring the life of the guilty to the life of the innocent. Certainly, this is not equity or justice, particularly in view of the fact that she could choose adoption and foster-home care and give the child, conceived in the image and likeness of God, the opportunity to live out his life in the love of God.

Not only does abortion rob the conceptus of the right to earthly life but it robs it of its right to eternal life and happiness in the company of his Creator because, conceived as he was in original sin, his premature death takes from him a chance to be reborn in grace by baptism.

Furthermore, abortion is the direct antithesis to and contradiction of the purpose, spirit and ideal of medicine. The purpose of medicine—both in its scientific research and in its practice—and the ideal of the physician has always been to preserve health and prolong life. This is certainly a respectable, laudable and constructive goal.

Yet, in contrast, the only purpose of abortion is to kill and destroy

life, almost before it begins and certainly before it is allowed the light of day. This is negative and destructive—hardly worthy of a physician. Much better would it be for the aborting practitioner to use his time and talents in strengthening of the moral fiber of society and in teaching discipline and restraint among the young people, which would preclude the promiscuous sexual promiscuity, which brings about the pregnancy that calls for the abortion.

In addition, abortion transgresses and violates the precepts of the Oath of Hippocrates, which is sacred to every dedicated physician: "I will not give a fatal draught to anyone even if asked, nor will I suggest any such thing. Neither will I give a woman a pessary to procure an abortion. . . . Whenever I go into a house I will go to help the sick and never with the intention of doing harm or injury. . . . I will use my power to help the sick to the best of my ability and judgment and I will abstain from wrongdoing or harming any man by it."

It seems strange and perplexing that, as our government is striving to inaugurate the Great Society with its emphasis on rights—the rights of equal opportunity, the right of equal citizenship, civil rights, etc. some members of the medical profession are moving for the legalization of criminal abortion, which is an absolute denial of the right to life. There is something wrong in a culture, civilization and society when the rights that flow from life become more important than the right to life itself.

The sacredness of the right to life must be understood, accepted, appreciated and followed. The right to life is basic and fundamental to civilization. In fact, it is the right to life, which is respected by a cultured civilization, which differentiates this from the life of the jungle, where assault and murder are characteristic modes of living.

The right to life must not be restricted merely to the living, to the strong, to the independent, who can in some manner protect themselves from assault and safeguard themselves from murder. This right must also be accorded to the unborn, who is just as much a person and an individual with rights, as is the living but who is weak, helpless, dependent and unable to protect himself against the murderous, criminal assaults of others and depends for his continued existence, development and birth on the charity and the solicitude of his mother and her physician.

Once a state grants a right to murder the unborn, it is only a short step to the position where the state could order the killing of the unborn and a shorter step to commanding the death of living defectives and then healthy individuals. Once criminal abortion is legalized, then murder has been legalized and the state could move very rapidly in the direction of having the power to decide who is to be born and who is to be aborted; who is to live and who is to die. This is a right which, under the circumstances of our discussion, the state must never have. The wedge should not be inserted

by giving to the state the right to legalize criminal abortion.

The United States, as all other civilized powers, was appalled at the crimes of genocide practiced by Adolph Hitler, in which millions upon millions of Jews, particularly of German and Polish ancestry, were exterminated in the concentration camps of Dachau, Auschwitz, etc. We were outraged and we attempted to bring to justice, at the Nuremberg trials, those leaders of Hitler's government, who were responsible for these deaths, either by direct order or by willful toleration. We, as a nation, felt that a basic right to life had been violated and it called to Heaven for vengeance. If we respect the basic, fundamental right to life of one who has been born, we must also, if we are to be consistent, respect the right to life of one who is a person and is the subject of rights, even though he has not as yet been born.

This writer visited Dachau, a few miles outside of Munich, Germany, on a dreary, cold, drizzly day in the latter part of July 1960, with Cardinal Spellman, when he was dedicating the new chapel which had been erected by the German people to make atonement to the civilized world for the atrocious crimes of their leaders. This day will never be forgotten and the memory of seeing, visiting and inspecting the crematoria, the tremendous ovens, the gas chambers—all of which claimed the lives of more than 6,000,000 innocent Jews—still haunts. There and then, this writer, maybe for the very first time, came to appreciate

how important is the right to live, how basic and fundamental is the right to life and continued existence and how absolutely necessary it is to protect and safeguard these rights. A government must never be given the right, apart from the commission of a previous crime or in a just war, to be the arbiter and deciding factor of who is to be born and who is not; who is to live and who is to die.

Abortion is murder particularly and precisely because it fulfills in every respect the definition of murder—the willful, direct taking of the life of an innocent person without justifiable cause. Semantics will not justify abortion—because, call it whatever you will, it is killing; it is murder.

Some question the right of the unborn to life on the basis that a conceptus or fetus is not a person or an individual, who can be the subject of rights. This point was raised indirectly by one of the panelists in the televised discussion. One doctor, who believes in the right of abortion and who has performed abortions, admitted that he does not abort after four months of fetal life. Obviously, he must feel that, after the fourth month, the fetus has developed to the point that he is a person, endowed with rights, and his right to life should not be abridged.

But, what about a fetus from the moment of conception up to the fourth month? Is "it" nothing but a grouping of cells, a mass of protoplasm without life, without rights? If such a fetus does not have life, then how account for its growth and development throughout the first

four months? And does have life, which accounts for the maturation process, what is responsible for this life, what is the principle of this life?

We understand the soul is the principle of life and that the rational soul, with faculties of intellect and will, capable of being developed, is what specifically differentiates human life from all other forms of life and, since the time of St. Thomas, we accept the fact that this soul is implanted by God, directly and personally at the very moment of conception and that the fetus is not just matter but is a living, dynamic person and individual, who is the subject of rights—particularly the right to life and the right to be born.

Our opponents would say that we could not demonstrate in a concrete, tangible way in a science research laboratory the fact that a soul is implanted at the moment of conception and that a fetus is a person from the moment of fertilization. We can answer that there are many things which, by reason of their non-material nature, cannot be demonstrated and yet we know them to be true and we accept them as facts. The demonstrability of something is not necessarily a criterion for judging its actual existence.

Secondly, we can remind our opponents that they cannot prove or demonstrate that a soul or principle of life is not implanted at the moment of conception and, where something as important as a right to life is involved, the safest course to

insure the rights of a possibly living person should and must be followed.

To demonstrate in a concrete way the principles just enunciated, it may be worthwhile to quote, in its entirety, an editorial, which appeared in the *Denver Register* on August 19, 1962, entitled "Diary of an Unborn Child":

Oct. 5: today my life began. My parents do not know it yet. I am as small as an apple seed, but it is already I. The whole big world cannot say I, but I can.

Oct. 19: I have grown a little, but I am still too small to do anything by myself. My mother does just about everything for me. Some say that I am not a real person yet, that only my mother exists. But I am a real person, just as a small crumb of bread is truly bread. My mother is. And I am.

Nov. 2: I am growing a bit every day. My arms and legs are beginning to take shape. Even if I were to be born deformed, without arms and legs, I could have artificial

ones, as grown people sometimes have—and even at the worst I would be I, ready to have water poured on my head so that I can see God.

Nov. 20: It wasn't until today that the doctor told Mom that I am living here under her heart. She is helping me already; she is even feeding me with her own blood. She is so good.

Dec. 10: My hair is growing. It is smooth and bright and shiny. I wonder what kind of hair Mom has?

Dec. 13: I am just about able to see. It is dark around me. When Mom brings me into the world, it will be full of sunshine and flowers. I have never seen a flower. But what I want more than anything is to see my Mom. How do you look, Mom?

Dec. 24: I wonder if Mom hears the whispering beat of my heart? Some children come into the world a little sick. And then the delicate hands of the doctor perform miracles to bring them to health. But my heart is strong and healthy. You'll have a healthy little daughter, Mom!

Dec. 28: Today my mother killed me.

