



## AGAINST ABORTION, BUT PRO-CHOICE?



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**ISSUE:** Sometimes I have met Catholics especially where I work who say, “I am personally against abortion, but I am pro-choice.” To me, that makes no sense, but how can I argue with them?

**DISCUSSION:** The pro-abortion movement has made great gains using the “pro-choice” label. First, the “pro-choice” label numbs our moral sensitivity because it masks that anyone really is for abortion, ignores scientific and medical evidence and diverts attention from the act itself. Secondly, the idea of being “pro-choice” seems to appeal to Americans who cherish freedom and the idea of being free to choose rather than being forced to do anything.

In arguing against this “pro-choice” position, one must first focus on the heart of the choice—a child. Proceeding from a purely, scientific approach, we know that when conception occurs, a new and unique human being is created. The DNA genetic code attests to this uniqueness. (Why else has DNA coding become so important in identifying criminals?) Moreover, from that moment of conception, the child continues to develop and to grow; the child is born, matures to adolescence and then adulthood and eventually dies. Note though that this is all the same person who was conceived: all that has been added is nourishment, time and hopefully a lot of love. Therefore, our Church teaches, “From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor of the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already” (*Declaration on Procured Abortion*, no. 12, 1974).

For further information, please check the Nov. 11, 2002 issue of *Time* entitled, “Inside the Womb: An Amazing Look at How We All Began; The Latest Science on How Healthy Babies Are Born.” Also the video and book under the same title, *The Miracle of Life*, are also excellent resources.

Interestingly, this past Fall [2003], General Electric had a commercial showing the new technology/photography they developed enabling doctors to see clearly and in color the baby developing inside the womb of the mother. This new technology far surpasses that of ultrasound. When I first saw the commercial, I said, “Seeing this, how could anyone be for abortion?” The commercial had an impact: Planned Parenthood and the Abortion Rights Action League lobbied General Electric so much that they removed the commercial from television.

Moving beyond science to the level of faith, we also believe that almighty God creates and infuses an unique and immortal soul into that body. This soul—our spiritual principle—is what gives each person that identity of being made in God’s image and likeness. (Cf. *Catechism*, no. 363-368). Even if there were some doubt that God infused the soul at conception or some doubt that the conceived child were truly a person, “it is objectively a grave sin to dare to risk murder. ‘The one who will be a man is already one’” (*Declaration*, no. 13).

We find in Sacred Scripture testimony to the sanctity of life in the womb: The Lord said to the mother of Sampson, “As for the son you will conceive and bear, no razor shall touch his head, for this boy is to be consecrated to God from the womb!” (Jgs 13:5). Job said, “Did not he who made me in the womb make him? Did not the same One fashion us before our birth?” (Jb 31:15). In Psalm 139:13, we pray, “Truly you have formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb.” The Lord spoke to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (Jer 1:5).

For Christians the sanctity of life in the womb and the belief that this truly is a person is further corroborated by the incarnation: Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ true God entered this world becoming also true man. Even though Jesus was still in the womb of His blessed mother, St. Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist, also in the womb, rejoiced at the presence of the Lord. Would anyone dare suggest Jesus was not a person in the womb of His mother? Little wonder in the *Didache (The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles)*—the first manual of doctrine, liturgical laws, and morals written about the year AD 80—we find the moral prohibition, “You shall not kill by abortion the fruit of the womb and you shall not murder the infant already born.”

Given that the heart of the choice involves an unique, human person, the choice of action becomes clear: to preserve and safeguard the life of this person in the womb or to destroy it. Since this is a person, the latter choice does not involve simply a termination of a pregnancy or the removal of a fetus; rather, the latter choice involves a direct killing of an innocent person, a deliberate murder. Therefore, the act of abortion is an intrinsically evil act. The Second Vatican Council asserted, “Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 51).

We do not have the right to choose evil, no matter what the circumstances are or even if some sort of “good” may arise. To purposefully choose to do evil is an affront to God Himself, in whose image and likeness we are made. In the “pro-choice position,” one is not choosing between two good actions; instead, one is turning a blind eye to the objectively evil action of abortion and pretending that it is on the same moral standing as protecting the child in the womb. To say one is “pro-choice” in this matter is no different than saying one is “pro-choice” for apartheid, Nazi concentration camps, or Jim Crow segregation laws—“I am personally against it, but everybody should choose.” Of course, the person who does not get to choose in any of these cases in the one society has deemed dispensable, disposable and unworthy of life.

Pope John Paul II stated, “Anyone can see that the alternative here is only apparent. It is not possible to speak of the right to choose when a clear moral evil is involved, when what is at stake is the commandment, ‘Do not kill!’” (*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 205). Christians must continue to defend the sanctity of human life in the face of this insidious pro-choice argument. To be “pro-life” is not to impose one’s values on another; rather, to be “pro-life” is to uphold the truth of God and the dignity of every human being, born or unborn.

In those difficult, tragic situations—rape and incest (which result in conception at best 2% of the time depending upon which set of statistics one looks at), a young teenage pregnant mother, or a deformed or handicapped child—we must remember the child is still an innocent human being who through no fault of his own was conceived. Here sharing in the cross of our Lord becomes a reality without question. In these cases, we as members of the Church must support both the mother and the child through our prayers and by opening our hearts, homes and wallets to their needs. We must make the sacrifice to preserve human life.

In Fall, 2001, Bishop Loverde issued a letter to mark Respect Life Sunday in which he taught, “To be a faithful and serious Catholic necessarily means that one is pro-life and not pro-choice. To be pro-choice essentially means supporting the right of a woman to terminate the life of her baby, either pre-born or partially born. No Catholic can claim to be a faithful and serious member of the Church while advocating for or actively supporting direct attacks on innocent human life. Moreover, protecting human life from conception until natural death is more than a Catholic issue. It is an issue of fundamental morality, rooted in both the natural and divine law.”

Catholic Education Resource Center: Saunders, Rev. William. “Against Abortion, But Pro-Choice?” *Arlington Catholic Herald*.  
<http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/against-abortion-but-pro-choice.html>.