

A Response to Archbishop Wuerl of Washington DC
“Is Overturning Roe vs. Wade an article of the Catholic Faith?”
Answer: Consider the words of John Paul II.

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On October 11, 2008, national Catholic reporter journalist John Allen Jr. posted a Q&A interview with the Archbishop of Washington, DC, Donald W. Wuerl. The Roe vs. Wade section of Q&A can be read at <http://ncronline3.org/drupal/?q=node/2120>.

Allow me to state my premise: Archbishop Wuerl’s comments (quoted below) do not reflect the Catholic Faith concerning the defense of human life. To prove my point, I will quote our late beloved Holy Father, John Paul II.

By way of introduction, I make four observations:

First, note that Archbishop Wuerl never quotes John Paul II or *Evangelium Vitae*. Unfortunately, he refers to *Faithful Citizenship* twice, which has no binding teaching authority on bishops or the lay faithful. Canonically speaking, *Faithful Citizenship* is not the infallible teaching of the Church; *Evangelium Vitae* is.

Second, note that Archbishop Wuerl’s answers equivocate; they are muddled and unclear. Contrast that with the words of John Paul II -- which roar like thunder and have razor like precision.

Third, note that the Archbishop opens the door to the notion that a Catholic could claim to be pro-life and simultaneously **not support** the overturn of Roe vs. Wade and the complete criminalization of abortion – i.e., making it illegal again in all 50 states to kill unborn children. These ideas are in direct contradiction to John Paul II’s clear teaching that abortion must be made illegal – *which is the infallible teaching of the Church*.

Fourth, in addition to quoting *Evangelium Vitae*, I quote from John Paul II’s specific instructions to American bishops given in Rome, October, 1998, on the occasion of the *ad limina* visit of U.S. bishops from several dioceses from the west coast.

Here are excerpts from the interview with Archbishop Wuerl (AW), followed by the words of John Paul II.

Question to AW: “Some Catholics believe that abortion is profoundly intrinsically evil and must be combated, without believing that criminalization is the best way to accomplish it. Is that at least conceptually possible?”

Answer from AW: “Yes, it’s conceptually possible. But when you get into the realm of politics, the realm of translating the need to preserve life into the circumstances of our

day, what is conceptually possible and what is pressingly obligatory now begin to become two different things. That's why there is so much confusion. I don't think you can make things black and white, I don't think you can separate or rule out the grays."

Now compare the words of John Paul II. You decide if there are "shades of gray."

In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore **never licit to obey it, or to "take part in a propaganda campaign in favour of such a law, or vote for it"**. 73 (*Evangelium Vitae*, emphasis added.)

Laws which authorize and promote abortion and euthanasia are therefore radically opposed not only to the good of the individual but also to the common good; as such they are completely lacking in authentic juridical validity. Disregard for the right to life, precisely because it **leads to the killing of the person whom society exists to serve**, is what most directly **conflicts with the possibility of achieving the common good**. 72 **It is impossible to further the common good** without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop...101 (*Evangelium Vitae*, emphasis added)

An essential feature of support for the unalienable right to life, from conception to natural death, *is the effort to provide legal protection for the unborn, the handicapped, the elderly, and those suffering from terminal illness*. As bishops, you must continue to draw attention to the relationship of the moral law to constitutional and positive law in your society: "Laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings... are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 72). (6, *ad limina*.)

Catholics, and especially Catholic legislators, must continue to make their voices heard in the formulation of cultural, economic, political, and legislative projects which, "with respect for all and in keeping with democratic principles, will contribute to the building of a society in which the dignity of each person is recognized and the lives of all are defended and enhanced" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 90). Democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 70). In defending life you are defending an original and vital part of the vision on which your country was built. **America must become, again, a hospitable society, in which every unborn child and every handicapped or terminally ill person is cherished and enjoys the protection of the law**. (6, *ad limina*, emphasis added.)

Question to AW: To put the question in its sharpest form, is overturning *Roe v. Wade* an article of the Catholic faith?

Answer from AW: No, but it is one of the most clearly aligned practical ways to stop what's happening.

Compare the words of John Paul II. He clearly instructed the faithful and the bishops to strive to make abortion illegal again – *which must include overturning Roe vs. Wade.*

Among all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable. The Second Vatican Council defines abortion, together with infanticide, as an "**unspeakable crime**". But today, **in many people's consciences, the perception of its gravity has become progressively obscured.** The **acceptance of abortion in the popular mind, in behaviour and even in law itself,** is a telling sign of an **extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense,** which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, even when the fundamental right to life is at stake. Given such a grave situation, we need now more than ever to **have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception.** (58 *Evangelium Vitae*, emphasis added)

An essential feature of support for the unalienable right to life, from conception to natural death, is the effort to provide legal protection for the unborn... (*ad limina*, 6, emphasis added.)

Question to AW: Seeking a legal ban on abortion is, however, a political strategy, not a point of doctrine?

Answer from AW: Here, a lot of that meshes. It is the firm teaching of the church that you cannot take that life, you simply cannot do that. It's an innocent life, and when you do that, you cannot claim to be innocent and participate in it.

Compare the words of John Paul II: Without question, *making murder (abortion) illegal again is a central point of Catholic doctrine.*

The legal toleration of abortion or of euthanasia can in no way claim to be based on respect for the conscience of others, precisely because society has the right and the duty to protect itself against the abuses which can occur in the name of conscience and under the pretext of freedom..." 71 The doctrine on the necessary **conformity of civil law with the moral law** is in continuity with the whole tradition of the Church." 72 As 'a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good', solidarity also needs to be practised through participation in social and political life...**Serving the Gospel of life thus means...to ensure that the laws and institutions of the State in no way violate the right to life, from conception to natural death, but rather protect and promote it.** 93 (*Evangelium Vitae*, emphasis added)

Question to AW: “Lots of pastors don’t want to touch politics in the pulpit because it’s so divisive. You live in Washington, D.C. so I imagine it’s tough for you to steer clear of politics. What’s the trick to doing it right?”

Answer from AW: “One of the things we did as a conference of bishops is to produce the ‘Faithful Citizenship’ document on forming conscience. I think that’s an excellent document. What it says is that the role of the bishop is to teach. We present what the gospel says, what it means in terms of today, but the translation of that teaching into action belongs to the lay person. It belongs to people with responsibility for the “transformation of the temporal order,” as the council put it. That’s their responsibility. It’s the task of the faithful. I think we’ve done a good job in ‘Faithful Citizenship’ of saying, ‘These are the things you need to be aware of,’ but the transformation of this culture is not going to depend on us.”

Compare the words of John Paul II. *The Holy Father specifically charged the bishops with the duty to transform the culture.*

Faced with so many opposing points of view, and a widespread rejection of sound doctrine concerning human life, we can feel that Paul's entreaty to Timothy is also addressed to us: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching" (2 Tim 4:2). **This exhortation should resound with special force in the hearts of those members of the Church who directly share, in different ways, in her mission as "teacher" of the truth. May it resound above all for us who are Bishops: we are the first ones called to be untiring preachers of the Gospel of life. We are also entrusted with the task of ensuring that the doctrine which is once again being set forth in this Encyclical is faithfully handed on in its integrity. We must use appropriate means to defend the faithful from all teaching which is contrary to it...** May Paul's exhortation strike a chord in all theologians, pastors, teachers and in all those responsible for catechesis and the formation of consciences. Aware of their specific role, **may they never be so grievously irresponsible as to betray the truth and their own mission by proposing personal ideas contrary to the Gospel of life** as faithfully presented and interpreted by the Magisterium. **In the proclamation of this Gospel, we must not fear hostility or unpopularity, and we must refuse any compromise or ambiguity which might conform us to the world's way of thinking** (cf. Rom 12:2). (*Evangelium Vitae*, 82, emphasis added.)

Again, in the ad limina address, immediately after His Holiness charged U.S. bishops to be involved with “political, and legislative projects... in which every unborn child and every handicapped or terminally ill person is cherished and enjoys the protection of law...” John Paul II said this to U.S. bishops:

Dear Brother Bishops, *Catholic moral teaching is an essential part of our heritage of faith;* we must see to it that it is faithfully transmitted, and take appropriate measures to guard the faithful from the deceit of opinions which dissent from it (cf. *Veritatus*

Splendor, 26 and 113)... **May your fidelity to the Lord and the responsibility for his church which he has given you make you personally vigilant to ensure that only sound doctrine of faith and morals is presented as Catholic teaching.**"
7 *ad limina*, emphasis added)

Clearly, no thinking Catholic, reading the words of Archbishop Wuerl and our late Holy Father could believe that they are saying the same thing. Neither could anyone trust that Archbishop Wuerl's statement, "the transformation of this culture is not going to depend on us [bishops]..." reflects the intent and instruction of John Paul II quoted above.

Are you familiar with the lives of St. Patrick, or St. Bonaventure, or St. Justin Martyr, or St. Telemachus? Surely anyone who knows of our first Apostles and the glorious Saints – that ended slavery, ended child-prostitution, ended infanticide, ended horrible pagan idolatry, and ended child-killing by abortion in other centuries past – could believe that U.S. bishops **should not be leading** and fighting in the epic clash between the Culture of Life and the culture of death. The assertion defies all of Catholic history.

The road to ending child-killing goes through the bishops' offices; evidently, the greatest road blocks to ending child-killing are there as well.

The statements by Archbishop Wuerl are a perfect illustration of why child-killing has not been defeated here in America. About the only thing his words show with crystal clarity is why the consciences of so many of the faithful are dulled and corrupted, and why they are prepared to support Obama – a promoter of child-killing – for President.

Finally, to show the poverty of Archbishop Wuerl's reasoning and arguments, take out the word "abortion" every time you see it, and insert the word "slavery." Picture saying: "We do not necessarily need to overturn the *Dred Scott* decision upholding slavery; it is not a point of doctrine to make it completely illegal in all the United States." Then you will see how impoverished these statements are.

God have mercy on us, and give us shepherds who will protect the sheep, not abandon defenseless lambs into the jaws of wolves. May God raise up bishops of great valor to lead the Church Militant in this life and death battle.