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Preparing for the Nov. 4 General Election

I. On Abortion and Catholic Voters

As the presidential election approaches, I want to respond to a few questions that many Catholics are asking themselves, and each other.

“Isn’t abortion the only issue in this election?” No. Any serious Catholic voter must be concerned about a great many issues in this election: the right to life, education, war and peace, how we treat the poor and the vulnerable, the economy.

“Isn’t abortion just one issue among others in this election?” No. Any serious Catholic voter must recognize abortion as the premier threat to human rights and dignity in our day. The right to life is the right through which all others flow.

“So, how’s a Catholic to vote?” Let me put the matter as simply as I can: Abortion results in the killing of approximately 1 million children in the womb every year. A Catholic can, in good conscience, vote for a pro-choice candidate only if other issues outweigh this one in number and in kind.

What do I mean by “in number and in kind”? Let’s take an example. The Church is opposed to the use of the death penalty. But the death penalty does not outweigh abortion because: 1) they differ in number: over 1 million abortions per year vs. less than 100 executions per year, and 2) they differ in kind: the directly willed death of the innocent vs. the directly willed death of those found guilty in a court of law.

Aren’t there other issues to be considered? Absolutely. Immigration, the economy, the use of military force, the care of the poor, the use of renew-

able energy. These are all important issues in the life of the country. In good conscience, a Catholic voter must weigh them all.

But there is also a scale of values. In good conscience, a Catholic needs to recognize that all issues do not have the same weight. The directly willed death of over a million innocent children each year certainly places a special burden on the conscience.

Can any other issue, or combination of issues, attain sufficient gravity to outweigh the directly willed destruction of 1 million children every year? That’s the question we must ask ourselves and each other as we weigh our election choices.

II. Finding Cures and Protecting Life

Proposal 2 asks us to amend the state constitution to expand the use of human embryos for the purposes of embryonic stem cell research.

Regarding the presidential election, there is the potential for Catholics to reach different conclusions in good conscience. Regarding Proposal 2, however, the duties of every Catholic voter are clear.

In the first place, Proposal 2 is scientifically unnecessary for following reasons. 1) The use of adult stem cells has already played a role in the treatment and cure of over 70 types of diseases, including sickle-cell anemia and various types of leukemia. The use of embryonic stem cells has resulted in 0 treatments or cures. (For more information, go to www.stemcellresearch.org) 2) Researchers prized embryonic stem cells because of their capacity to become any other cell in the

body. (In scientific language, they are “pluri-potent” stem cells.) Scientific breakthroughs in the last year have made it possible to take ordinary skin cells from any adult and transform them into pluri-potent stem cells. (In scientific language, these are called “induced pluri-potent stem cells” or iPS cells.) The technique has already been used to cure sickle-cell anemia in mice.

In other words, there are other and better avenues for finding cures. In fact Dr. Field, the Director of the Field Neurosciences Institute (FNI), has made a statement that the FNI “will not be using human embryonic stem cells in its clinical or preclinical research projects. We believe that stem cell therapy has tremendous potential for treating brain and spinal cord damage due to trauma or disease, but that either adult-derived stem cells or inducible pluri-potent stem cells have the potential to provide therapeutic efficacy in this regard.”

In the second place, Proposal 2 goes too far as a piece of legislation. Proposal 2 would not only authorize the destruction of human embryos to obtain pluri-potent stem cells, it would take the drastic step of prohibiting any state or local law that would discourage such research. Even a regulation that required researchers to pursue all other options before turning to embryonic stem cells would be unconstitutional. In this respect, Proposal 2 is not only scientifically unnecessary, it simply goes too far.

In the third place, and most importantly, Proposal 2 is based on principles that are morally reprehensible, namely:

1) Things like size, age, and location matter in determining whether a human life is to be accorded legal protection. If those who are very small, very young, and dependent on others for their existence are not to be accorded legal protection, it is hard to see why those who are very old, very infirm, and equally dependent on others for their existence should be accorded legal protection.

2) One group of human beings can be used to advance the well-being of another group of human

beings. This is the same principle that justified slavery.

3) We can sacrifice the lives of some individuals for the sake of research “because they are going to die anyway.” Those with advanced dementia are also going to die. That hardly justifies using them for research.

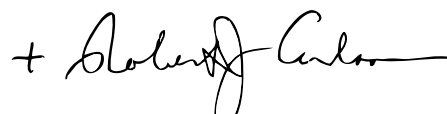
The reasoning behind Proposal 2 establishes dangerous moral precedents. In the words of one commentator, “If a principle is established by which some indisputably human lives do not warrant the protections traditionally associated with the dignity of the human person — because of their size, location, dependency, level of development, burdensomeness to others — it would seem that there are numerous other candidates for the application of the principle, beginning with the radically handicapped, both physically and mentally, not to mention millions of the aged and severely debilitated in our nation’s nursing homes.”

Finding cures for diseases is surely a great good. And science and technology are needed to show the way to those cures. But: 1) there are other avenues for research that protect life rather than destroying it, and have a better scientific track record in finding cures, and 2) there are some things we must never do, like sacrificing our children’s lives to extend our own health and well-being.

Because it is scientifically unnecessary, because it goes too far, and because it is based on reprehensible moral principles, I call on all Catholics in the Diocese of Saginaw to oppose Proposal 2.

For more information on Stem Cells and Proposal 2, visit the following websites: www.2goes2far.com, www.micause.org, www.stemcellresearch.org, and www.ncbcenter.org/10Myths.pdf

Sincerely yours in Christ,



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Bishop of Saginaw