

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



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LIFE ISSUES: PROTECTING THE LIFE OF THE UNBORN, STEM CELL RESEARCH AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT.

The following is the text of the *Statement of the Catholic Bishops of Florida* on the 33rd Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*.

On this 33rd anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision and its companion case, *Doe v. Bolton*, women continue to suffer physical, emotional and spiritual harm from their decision to abort their unborn child. The world also suffers, losing the gifts and talents of all the aborted children God created in His image and likeness. Every life is part of God's plan as revealed in Jeremiah 1:5: "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.*"

The truth compels us to accept the mystery of life from its conception rather than our very subjective effort to define when it begins. The dubiously formulated right to privacy is ill defined and deeply damages human dignity and the common good.

In Florida, the passage of the Women's Health & Safety Act and Parental Notice of Abortion Act hold promise in the battle to decrease abortions. With increased funding, crisis pregnancy centers can and will provide emotional and financial support to women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. Even though the number of abortions in the United States is decreasing, over one million of our brothers and sisters in Christ are killed in the womb each year, including over 90,000 per year in Florida.

A new threat to pre-born life is genetic testing, tempting parents to abort any baby not considered perfect. The commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves demands that all life in all stages must be protected, particularly those with special needs. "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution," Pope Benedict XVI pointed out at his Inaugural Mass. "Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."

For any women or men who have suffered separation from the Church because of an abortion, we encourage you to call the statewide Project Rachel help line* (1-877-908-1212) for confidential counseling. We have all sinned against God sometime in our life, but He is "slow to anger, rich in mercy." Reconciliation with the Lord brings peace and healing.

We welcome indications that more citizens in our country prefer that the matter of abortion be returned to the States, as the unborn will find greater protection than presently exists under the *Roe v. Wade* decision. We call on all women and men of good will to join us in praying for the day when laws violating the right to life are set aside or overturned.

Stem Cell Research Statement

Last year Archbishop Favarola of Miami wrote the following article. It is an amazing article for its clarity and readability. He writes:

In talking about stem-cell research, it is very important to make distinctions.

Most people associate stem-cell research with human embryos. They incorrectly assume that one is not possible without the other. They infer, then, that because the Catholic Church opposes research using stem cells from human embryos, we oppose all stem-cell research and even the progress of science itself. Worse, they say we demonstrate no compassion for those suffering from the debilitating illnesses that such research could cure. Nothing could be further from the truth. The church supports ethical stem-cell research and our living tradition supports science. Throughout the centuries, many priests and religious have devoted their lives to scientific studies, including Gregor Mendel, whose research provided the basis for our modern understanding of heredity and genetics.

A stem cell is a relatively unspecialized cell that can do one of two things: make another cell like itself or make any number of cell types in the body with more specialized functions. This second activity is critical in the development of our bodies as we grow and is central to the ability of our organs and tissues to regenerate and heal. For example, just one kind of stem cell in our blood

can make new red blood cells, white blood cells or other kinds, depending on what the body needs.

Most stem-cell research today involves cells obtained from adult tissue, umbilical cord blood and other sources that pose no ethical dilemma since they do not entail the killing of human beings. Adult stem-cell research has already yielded actual treatments for conditions such as Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injury, sickle cell anemia, heart damage and corneal damage. Bone-marrow transplants to cure leukemia are an example of the successful results already achieved with adult stem cells.

In stark contrast, embryonic stem cells are harvested by a procedure that destroys live human embryos. Experiments have shown that, even though they are able to make virtually any kind of cell, embryonic stem cells are extremely unstable, readily cause uncontrolled tumors and have yet to lead to any beneficial application in any human patients.

This experimentation with embryonic stem cells is what the church opposes, because it entails the direct destruction of innocent human life. That is a moral evil that cannot be brushed aside even when the laudable goal of alleviating the suffering of others is invoked.

The reasoning that these embryos are "going to die anyway" is also absurd. We will all die anyway. That does not give others the right to kill us. In opposing embryonic stem-cell research, the church is not choosing the lives of embryos over suffering patients. We are called to respect them both. In other words, we must help those who are suffering—and the church witnesses to this in many ways—but we may not use a good end to justify an evil means.

The choice is not between science and ethics, but between science that is ethically responsible and science that is not. History is rife with examples of failures to properly channel research and the terrible, broad social repercussions that follow.

Capital Punishment: Two Executions Scheduled in Florida.

Two executions of Florida death row inmates are scheduled for this month, January 24, Clarence Hill, and January 31, Arthur Rutherford, at Florida State Prison. Last March our U.S. Catholic Bishops called all U.S. Catholics to participate in a campaign to achieve the end of the use of the death penalty. Again, in November, our Bishops said, "At a time when the sanctity of life is threatened in many ways, taking life is not really a solution but may

instead effectively undermine respect for life." These pending executions give Florida Catholics the opportunity to be a part of the campaign in a very personal way. Our hearts and lives must have special space for the victims and their loved ones. "However, standing with families of victims does not compel us to support the use of the death penalty" (U.S. Bishops).

Bishop Wenski's Article

In case you do not receive a weekly copy of the *Florida Catholic* or did not read last week's issue, I am reprinting Bishop Wenski's excellent article on Capital Punishment. He writes:

Last month while California's governor contemplated the fate of Stanley Tookie Williams whom he later had executed, Gov. Jeb Bush signed two death warrants for two men on Florida's death row. Later this month, Clarence Hill, 47, and Arthur Rutherford, 56, will also be executed, by lethal injection.

Both men were guilty of shedding innocent blood. And both have been imprisoned for some years; their crimes were committed more than 20 years ago. Yet, is it any more necessary for the state of Florida to kill these men than it was for California to kill Williams? Does society really make a coherent statement against killing by killing?

The argument has been made that the application of the death penalty represents the legitimate self-defense of society from an unjust aggressor, i.e., the murderer.

And, historically, the church has conceded the point that the state can rightly apply capital punishment when absolutely necessary, i.e., when otherwise impossible to defend society. There is, in church teaching, no moral equivalence between the execution of the guilty after due process of law and the willful destruction of innocent life that happens with abortion or euthanasia. However, Pope John Paul II has pointed out in "Evangelium Vitae" (No. 56), given the organization of today's penal system and the option of imposing life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, such an "absolute necessity" is "practically nonexistent."

Also, it is difficult to defend the "necessity" of executing someone when often his accomplice, in exchange for information or testimony, is given through plea-bargaining a lesser sentence.

And while some loved ones seek "closure," it is hard to see how capital punishment as "social retribution" or

"institutional vengeance" really serves the purpose of punishment, which should be designed to redress the disorder caused by the offense. The death penalty cannot bring the victims back to life.

Even from a purely pragmatic or utilitarian point of view, the death penalty cannot be defended. It is not an effective deterrent to crime. Texas has executed more criminals than any other state, yet it still has one of the highest murder rates in the nation. And the death penalty is not cost-effective. It costs the state less to imprison someone for the remainder of his natural life than to execute him. Given that it is irreversible, society has rightly provided that it be applied only after lengthy and expensive legal appeals. documented cases of wrongly convicted persons executed in the United States during the last century.

Willful murder is a heinous crime; it cries to God for justice. Yet, God did not require Cain's life for having spilt Abel's blood.

While God certainly punished history's first murderer, he nevertheless put a mark on him to protect Cain from those wishing to kill him to avenge Abel's murder (cf. Gn 4:15). Like Cain, the condemned prisoner on death row — for all the evil of his crimes — remains a person. Human dignity — that of the convicted as well as our own — is best served by not resorting to this extreme and unnecessary punishment. Modern society has the means to protect itself without the death penalty.

The commutation to life imprisonment would serve the common good of all by helping break our society's spiral of violence; for the "eye for an eye" mentality will just end up making us all blind.

Sample Prayers for Life

- For all women considering abortion at this time that they will have a change of heart.
- For the conversion of Pro-choice, pro-euthanasia, pro-capital punishment and pro-unethical stem cell research politicians and people.
- For people whose loved one have been murdered by other people. We especially pray for Stephen Taylor killed by Clarence Hill and Stella Salaman killed by Arthur Rutherford. May they now be enjoying everlasting life and may their families not see execution as a way to bring closure to a heinous act. May their hearts soon experience healing.

- For their families that the hope of resurrection and the truth of the Gospel of life might strengthen them in their time of need.
- For our Supreme Court as it judges issues pertaining to human life that it may be moved to always rule in favor of human life.

Have a blessed week

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