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Addresses

**ON THE SEPARATION OF SENSE AND STATE:  
A CLARIFICATION FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH  
IN NORTHERN COLORADO**

*Denver, CO - Monday, August 25, 2008*

*To Catholics of the Archdiocese of Denver:*

Catholic public leaders inconvenienced by the abortion debate tend to take a hard line in talking about the "separation of Church and state." But their idea of separation often seems to work one way. In fact, some officials also seem comfortable in the role of theologian. And that warrants some interest, not as a "political" issue, but as a matter of accuracy and justice.

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi is a gifted public servant of strong convictions and many professional skills. Regrettably, knowledge of Catholic history and teaching does not seem to be one of them.

Interviewed on *Meet the Press* August 24, Speaker Pelosi was asked when human life begins. She said the following:

*"I would say that as an ardent, practicing Catholic, this is an issue that I have studied for a long time. And what I know is over the centuries, the doctors of the church have not been able to make that definition . . . St. Augustine said at three months. We don't know. The point is, is that it shouldn't have an impact on the woman's right to choose."*

Since Speaker Pelosi has, in her words, studied the issue "for a long time," she must know very well one of the premier works on the subject, Jesuit John Connery's *Abortion: The Development of the Roman Catholic Perspective* (Loyola, 1977). Here's how Connery concludes his study:

*"The Christian tradition from the earliest days reveals a firm antiabortion attitude . . . The condemnation of abortion did not depend on and was not limited in any way by theories regarding the time of fetal animation. Even during the many centuries when Church penal and penitential practice was based on the theory of delayed animation, the condemnation of abortion was never affected by it. Whatever one would want to hold about the time of animation, or when the fetus became a human being in the strict sense of the term, abortion from the time of conception was considered wrong, and the time of animation was never looked on as a moral dividing line between permissible and impermissible abortion."*

Or to put it in the blunter words of the great Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

*"Destruction of the embryo in the mother's womb is a violation of the right to live which God has bestowed on this nascent life. To raise the question whether we are here concerned already with a human being or not is merely to confuse the issue. The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being and that this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life. And that is nothing but murder."*

Ardent, practicing Catholics will quickly learn from the historical record that from apostolic times, the Christian tradition *overwhelmingly* held that abortion was grievously evil. In the absence of modern medical knowledge, some of the Early Fathers held that abortion was homicide; others that it was tantamount to homicide; and various scholars theorized about when and how the unborn child might be animated or "ensouled." But *none* diminished the unique evil of abortion as an attack on life itself, and the early Church closely associated abortion with infanticide. In short, *from the beginning*, the believing Christian community held that abortion was always, gravely wrong.

Of course, we now know with biological certainty exactly when human life begins. Thus, today's religious alibis for abortion and a so-called "right to choose" are nothing more than that - *alibis* that break radically with historic Christian and Catholic belief.

Abortion kills an unborn, developing human life. It is always gravely evil, and so are the evasions employed to justify it. Catholics who make excuses for it - whether they're famous or not - fool only themselves and abuse the fidelity of those Catholics who do sincerely seek to follow the Gospel and live their Catholic faith.

The duty of the Church and other religious communities is moral witness. The duty of the state and its officials is to serve the common good, which is always rooted in moral truth. A proper understanding of the "separation of Church and state" does not imply a separation of faith from political life. But of course, it's always important to know what our faith *actually teaches*.

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