

CORRECTIVE STATEMENT

US bishops versus pro-abortion Catholic politicians: an exemplary stance

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

02_07_2023



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An event of great interest has occurred in the United States: the bishops have corrected a group of Catholic Congressmen who have taken a position in favour of abortion. The episcopal intervention has clarified some fundamental points of the political question

about Catholics and abortion: from the role of conscience to the task of the lay faithful, to the authentic meaning of secularism and freedom of religion. It has also written an important new chapter in the relationship between the US bishops and Pope Francis: on this point, as is well known, there was and is no convergence between the two.

In a statement of principles written on 24 June, the first anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade* on the right to abortion, on Congressional letterhead, some thirty Congressmen, including the current chief whip Rosa L. DeLauro and veteran Nancy Pelosi, once again listed the reasons why they, as Catholics, are fighting to promote the right to abortion.

Their argument is based on four points, all of which - according to the petitioners - follow the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church. The first point concerns the duty to help the disadvantaged, and women who have abortions would fall into the categories of the poor, the discriminated against, and victims of racism. The second is that the informed conscience must be left free to make decisions about one's own body, citing the *Catechism* when it says that conscience must always be obeyed even when it is erroneous. The third is the separation of Church and State with the impossibility of imposing by law one's own religious beliefs on those who do not share them. The fourth even references John Paul II's *Christifideles laici*, according to which the task of the laity is only one of general ethical animation.

The weakness of these arguments is very evident. Going in order: 1) Women who have abortions are not always victims of social injustice, while aborted children certainly are; 2) The invincible ignorance of the erroneousness of one's conscience that frees us from moral responsibility is very difficult to prove; 3) Catholics oppose the regulation of abortion for religious motives, but also for (secular) motives of reason, and therefore it is not a matter of imposing one's faith on anyone, but of calling everyone back to a natural truth; 4) Finally, on the reckless step of using the *Christifideles laici* it is better to draw a pious veil.

Things could have gone the way it have done before, every man for himself and God for all. Instead, on 28 June, the newly appointed president of the American bishops, Timothy Broglio, former military ordinary, together with the bishops of Arlington (Virginia) and Brownsville (Texas), issued a **corrective statement** on behalf of the entire episcopate. They were very clear in their condemnation of the position of the Catholic Democrats: "Members of Congress who have recently invoked the teachings of the Catholic faith to justify abortion or support an alleged right to abortion gravely distort the faith. It is wrong and inconsistent to claim that the suppression of innocent

human life at its *most* vulnerable stage can ever be consistent with the values of upholding the dignity and well-being of those in need". After recalling the clear teaching of the Catechism (nos. 2270 and 2273), the bishops say, "Abortion violates this respect for preborn children and brings unspeakable suffering to countless women".

As for conscience, precisely because of the high regard it deserves,

"policymakers should uphold the freedom of Catholics and others to serve the common good in accordance with their convictions in a wide range of areas (...) However, conscience is not a license to commit evil and take innocent lives. Conscience cannot and does not justify the act or support of abortion. Indeed, conscience 'must be informed and moral judgement enlightened' by the Word of God in faith and prayer, and 'guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church' [CCC 1783, 1785]. Moreover, the reality that the unborn are our living brothers and sisters is not only a matter of faith, but is attested by science and sound reason".

This intervention is of considerable importance. First of all, it is addressed to American Democratic Catholics, but it also applies to European ones and to all those who hide behind the same arguments. It is therefore also a stimulus for other episcopates to take the same stance. Moreover, the 'corrective statement' confirms that, despite the changes at the top of the US bishops' conference and despite the disturbing actions of the Holy See and Francis himself, the American Church's line continues to be the protection of natural law. Finally, indirectly, the 'declaration' re-proposes the unresolved issue of Catholics in favour of abortion receiving Communion. And in this case too, it is Pope Francis' firmly open position that suffers.