

Why Does MRL Focus Only on Abortion, Infanticide, Embryonic Stem Cell Research and Euthanasia? Aren't There Other Life Issues, Too?

Many good people have become convinced of the injustice of the law's failure to protect the most vulnerable persons in our society, especially the unborn and adults with profound brain injury or terminal illness. However, they also see many other injustices in our country. They ask why organizations such as Missouri Right to Life ("MRL") focus only on abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia, rather than addressing a broad spectrum of issues relating to human life and welfare. Such issues as the death penalty, welfare reform, and certain aspects of foreign policy are raised as examples of areas in which a pro-life witness is needed.

Because the inquiry is largely based on religious concerns, we want to post a response that also draws upon religious principles. We would invite those who support us and those who have further questions to continue a dialog with us by e-mail. We operate with a very small staff, so we cannot promise individual replies to everyone, but we will do our best.

The volunteers who work for Missouri Right to Life and its PACs believe from the bottom of their hearts that what happens with abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia will determine what happens with all other life issues around the world. Please do not misunderstand; we do not say that other life issues are unimportant. We say that they are important, but in the present time and circumstances, abortion, infanticide and euthanasia are the crucial issues upon which the other issues will rise or fall.

A recent, compelling statement of principles by forty-six leaders of Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant backgrounds lends support to our view. In [We Hold These Truths: A Statement Of Conscience And Citizenship](#), reprinted in [First Things](#), October 1997, at 51-54, such eminent leaders as Dr. Don Argue, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, Dr. Richard Land, President of Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, John Cardinal O'Connor, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York, Theodosius, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, and other lay and clerical church leaders in the United States joined in a call for Americans to take back their government from the rule of the unelected Supreme Court. In that statement, they said,

Our concern is by no means limited to the question of abortion, but [the judicially imposed abortion license is at the very core of the disordering of our liberty](#). The question of abortion is the question of who belongs to the community for which we accept common responsibility. . . . We believe . . . that democratic deliberation and decision would result in laws much more protective of the unborn and other vulnerable human lives. We are convinced that the Court was wrong, both morally and legally, to withdraw from a large part of the human community the constitutional guarantee of equal protection and due process of law. (Emphasis supplied.)

The leaders went on to say,

Questions of great moral moment for the ordering of our life together will continue to demand deliberation and decision. The Court's justification of the abortion license under its debased concept of liberty has brought us to the brink of endorsing new 'rights' to doctor-assisted suicide and euthanasia which threaten those at the end of life, the infirm, the handicapped, the unwanted.

A great many other religious leaders have urged that the issues of abortion and euthanasia are the most important of all the issues which require the work of committed people.

For example, the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church described many social wrongs as "crimes" in the Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes), at no. 27. However, the Council reserved special condemnation for abortion and infanticide as "abominable crimes." (Id. at no. 51. The Council's Decree is found in A. Flannery, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents (Northport, NY: Costello Publ. Co. 1981).)

Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical, Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life) stresses the greater importance of abortion, infanticide and euthanasia in comparison with other life-related issues. John Paul catalogs the multiple attacks against life in the present age (nos. 3-4, 10), but devotes the majority of the encyclical to abortion and euthanasia. Moreover, with special care, he delineates the limitations on the death penalty and on using lethal force in defending against aggression (including "just war" criteria). Immediately after this careful discussion, he stresses the fundamental importance of defending innocent lives:

If such great care must be taken to respect every life, even that of criminals and unjust aggressors, the commandment "You shall not kill" has absolute value when it refers to the innocent person. And all the more so in the case of weak and defenseless human beings, who find their ultimate defense against the arrogance and caprice of others only in the absolute binding force of God's commandment. (No. 57)

Evangelium Vitae describes the right to life as the first and foremost of all rights. (No. 28). As such, the first duty of government is to ensure legal protection of that right.

[C]ivil law must ensure that all members of society enjoy respect for certain fundamental rights which innately belong to the person, rights which every positive law must recognize and guarantee. First and fundamental among these is the inviolable right to life of every innocent human being. . . . 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. (No. 71, emphasis supplied.)

The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, has recently reaffirmed the importance of the right to life issue in the document, That They May Have Life, produced by the Synod President's Commission on the Sanctity of Life. As that report states,

Our debate regarding abortion and other life issues is a debate on the very nature and the future of our American society. . . . The protection of the unborn is the next noble step for a generous democracy. We pray that our countrymen will act in a manner worthy of our country and its history.

Finally, the political dimension of our work must be reaffirmed, especially in these times of public disgust with both the debased conduct of some public officials and also the unwarranted attention devoted by the media to lurid details. Changing society requires hard work along a number of fronts, including the political, legislative, and legal. This is serious business--literally life and death--and abandoning politics to the forces of death only increases the numbers of casualties. We do not have the luxury of retreating from the political arena.

Abortion law in the United States is mostly the creation of the federal courts legislating their ideas of correct behavior--that is, to restrain society from interfering with the killing of the unborn--under the guise of interpreting the Constitution. We Hold These Truths condemned the courts' usurpation of representative government on this and other moral issues. Yet the people cannot use the courts as an excuse for inaction.

A most particular responsibility belongs also to our elected officials in state and national government. Too often, legislators prefer to leave difficult and controverted questions to the courts. This must be called what it is, an abdication of their duty in our representative form of democratic government. Too often, too, Christian legislators separate their convictions from their public actions, thus depriving our politics of their informed moral judgment. The other side of judicial usurpation is legislative dereliction.

Therefore, if we are to retake our right to self-government from the federal courts, we have to take the responsibility to elect legislators who are willing to take action to limit the courts to their proper sphere. We must also elect executives who are willing to select judges who recognize a more limited role for the courts. And we must elect officials who are willing to enact the most protection possible under current jurisprudence.

It is obvious; it has often been said; but it still bears repeating: Unless the right to life is protected, no other rights are secure. Without life, there are no other rights to enjoy.

Missouri Right to Life and its PACs make the same assessment of the importance of the various life issues as the leaders from whom the foregoing quotations have been taken. We work for the election of officials who will respect the life of the most vulnerable in carrying out their own duties and in making appointments to unelected posts, especially to the judiciary. We will continue to work for attainable legislation and other governmental action that will increase the scope of legal protection for innocent human lives. We will continue to educate our fellow citizens on the paramount need to protect life if we are to protect any human rights at all. We invite all who are willing and able to support the cause of life to assist us in this work.