

PRO-LIFE & PRO-CHOICE CATHOLICS

Spiritual reflections by Fr. Dave Heney

Are we single issue voters? What about separation of church and state? Should we get involved in politics at all? Well, we know God got personally involved in our troubled world by sending His Son for our happiness and salvation, which means we also get involved for good causes and are never just “spectators” of our world ...we take action to make it better!

We vote as our informed conscience tells us and use a simple three step system to make sure it is informed well. We **study** issues from reliable sources so that we have true information. We then weigh the pros and cons and **judge** what is right and wrong. (Yes, we make judgments, but never jump to conclusions by being *pre-judgmental* or *prejudiced*). After all, we would never be neutral or non-judgmental about murder and certainly judge it a serious crime. Finally, we courageously **act**. Catholics get involved by study, judgment, and action. We are never just spectators. We get involved to make a difference for good!

Most moral issues are highly complicated, and they involve real people who can also be quite defensive about how they live their lives. Can we ever say anything is *always* right or wrong? Are there objective truths, always and everywhere true ...and for every single person?

Noble Goals and Practical Solutions

Fortunately, most people support helping the poor or fighting terror as good things. The Church usually supports only general goals for most moral issues. *HOW they are accomplished is your call*. For example, we all want to help the poor, but we can sincerely differ on *methods*, e.g. whether high or low taxes create more jobs. We all want peace, but can honestly differ whether diplomatic or military action best secure it. These are your judgment calls on how best to achieve goals we all want. The Church hopes we all share these general goals but will intelligently study, judge wisely, and courageously act to discover and vote for effective and practical ways to actually achieve them.



Most moral issues are highly complicated...

Yet how do we prioritize so many complex issues like the economy, drugs, immigration, terrorism, capital punishment, world hunger, poverty, global warming, health care, abortion, divorce, same-sex marriage, child abuse, euthanasia, and physician assisted suicide? The facts about each one could easily fill an entire book ...perhaps the image of a book might actually help.

Balancing a Moral Bookshelf

Imagine each moral issue as a “book” that includes all ideas about it. Now imagine each book taking its place in some kind of order on a “moral issues bookshelf.” Depending on how you view each issue you might rearrange the shelf, putting this or that book ahead of others because you feel it is more important.

Good people might honestly agree or disagree with your order and say this issue should precede that one or this one is more important than the other. Much of the moral debate in this country has been like this. While everyone agrees all these issues are worthy of attention and deserving of intelligent discussion, there is sincere debate about the precise order of importance. How can you best decide the right order?

An especially harsh debate right now is between *pro-choice* and *pro-life* groups. Both sides fight hard for sympathetic Supreme Court Judges and both sides make compelling points on this issue. Where do you put the “*pro-life book*” on your imaginary moral bookshelf? We know the book that defines when life begins is in the *science* section because science, not faith, verifies human life begins at conception. Where does this book about protecting the dignity of innocent human life from conception go?

Perhaps it does not belong on the shelf at all...

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that pro-life ideas of protecting the dignity of innocent human life at every age is actually *...the shelf itself*, and therefore “holds” all the others up. That means we cannot fully grasp *any* of the other issues without knowing first what it means to be a *dignified, innocent, and human* life from the moment of *conception to natural death*.

We can more thoughtfully appreciate what it means to take human life in capital punishment or declare a “Just War” when we first grasp what it really means to be innocent. We can more authentically feel what it means to be a victim of discrimination, or unemployment, or treated as an “object,” when we first recognize what it means to have dignity from the very first moment of conception to natural death.

A pro-life position is the shelf upon which all moral issues stand and guides our understanding of all of them. It is not a single issue at all ...it is the ground on which everything rests.

Common sense tells me to study as many sources as I can. However, I do have expertise in one area. At Mass I say these words of Jesus Christ, “This is my **BODY & BLOOD** (*my entire self*) given for you!” Jesus does not qualify His words. They are not “I am for famous people, or rich, poor, young, or old.” He says, “I am for you!” God is no spectator and so became personally involved with people of every culture and age by sending His Son into our world precisely for our happiness and salvation.

If God is for life, then so am I, even if *really* young, like a cluster of unborn cells, or *really* old, or even dying. As God affirms us, so we affirm all people. While God did not create poverty, crime, or other world problems, He offers the wisdom and grace of His Son so we can fix them. We believe Jesus is that wise, respectful, and authentic answer to every human problem. Following the Lord leads to a much happier life here and makes eternal life possible in the next.

There are so many serious issues today. Our responses to any of them come from our attitude to life itself.

Promoting the dignity of human life is something that is always right everywhere and for everyone on the planet because life everywhere is from God.

We can feel His dedication to our life at Mass or contemplate His continuous presence in our prayer every day. If Jesus is for life, then so am I!



The First Amendment and Catholicism ensure that both will guide each other.

Separation of Church and State

The Church strongly supports separation, as Jesus did (*Matthew 22:21*), and so never endorses politicians and only speaks to affirm the faith received from Our Lord.

Catholics profess our faith while living alongside people who don't. American democracy and Catholicism

are both designed to help neighbors with different beliefs stay neighbors *peacefully and lawfully*. Freedom, reason, and respect are central to both faith and country.

While our faith protects innocent life, affirms marriage of a man and woman, encourages adult stem cell research, opposes euthanasia, cloning, and embryonic stem cell production, (*and polls show that most agree*), our Catholic ideals are never an unfair imposition on anyone else. Speaking our faith is both the lawful exercise of our First Amendment right to free speech and free exercise

of religion, and a search for the common good based on reason. Again, most people are also opposed to murder too, and would state so clearly no matter what others say, and believe they are not imposing anything on anyone but rather

affirming a good thing, *even though it comes from the Ten Commandments*. It turns out that faith is already the foundation of our laws. We believe all Americans must sincerely speak in a respectful way, as their informed conscience tells them.

While no politician ever matches Our Lord in protecting the dignity of innocent human life from conception to natural death, common sense simply says we should support those politicians who are closest. We try to stay authentic both while voting and before God.

**If God is for life,
...then so am I!**

Pro Choice or Pro-Life?

Since we believe *taking* innocent human life is the most serious issue of all, what about pro-choice Catholics? Is a Pro-Choice stance *neutral* on abortion or does it actually *promote* it? Some affirm a legal opinion that the unborn, while truly human, do not have civil rights, or that the mother's rights supersede the child. Some pro-choice politicians also endorse other important Catholic moral ideals, such as helping the poor....can you still support them?

Some personally oppose abortion but would not stop others from having it. I am sure they would also personally oppose slavery, rape, or racism and *never* allow others to commit those crimes, no matter what. If they will firmly stand on those issues, why allow abortion?

What about Sin?

Sin is a highly charged word that often just stops conversation. However, it is not complicated. All sin is simply choosing self over God. That's it. Sin becomes "mortal" when our choice "kills" our relationship with God or others by some intrinsic evil.

We commit mortal sin either by our own action or by directly helping another do so. But we can **indirectly** help others commit sin too. For example, when we pay taxes that promote abortion, the direct ending of an innocent life, our taxes are **indirect** or **remote cooperation** in an intrinsic evil. If we work at a company that makes immoral products, our work is remote cooperation. *Our vote for a politician who promotes immoral laws may or may not be remote cooperation;* it all depends on why we are supporting that politician.

Our faith does not consider remote cooperation a mortal sin if we publicly oppose those intrinsic evils and affirm that our vote only supports a politician's other good moral issues.
(Pope Benedict)

If our choice is *precisely to promote abortion*, now at over one million a year, (a serious number!) then it would be our direct help, and certainly our mortal sin. In Confession, God asks us to state that truth about ourselves, pledge to change, and accept His forgiveness.

You cannot be Catholic on Sunday and something else on Monday. Integrity expects that your life and words match every day as they did for Our Lord. The life of an unborn child, young pregnant mother, poor family, or elderly person all deserve the same courageous public support from us that Jesus gives to each of us everyday of the week. It is the truth that will set us free. (Jn. 8:32)



Can we respectfully disagree?

Jesus wisely joins the command to lawfully fight social injustice with the command to love our neighbor. (*perhaps needed now more than ever!*)

We can never stand by and watch others being hurt, so we get involved to protect all innocent human life knowing that others might oppose us. We protect their dignity too ...*but respect and tolerance are never an excuse for silence.*

Tolerance is not silence, and respect is not passivity. True love pro-actively seeks the good of others so love demands that we study, judge, and then act. We can never let sin stand. We must always speak out, we must always speak respectfully ...*but we must always speak!*

Truth can never be "relative." It either is or is not the truth about things. While good people often disagree about what it is, we can all agree that, at least, it is "objective," to be discovered "out there" and not just something we create in our own mind. A "personal truth" has no accountability or openness to debate. Ironically, those who say, "all truth is relative and there's no absolute truth" have just spoken something they ironically believe to be, well, ...*absolutely true!*

It is the truth that will set us free... Jn. 8:32

Science affirms good mental health is having an accurate connection to objective reality. In other words, we open our eyes and see what is really going on. We must go where the truth takes us and not where we might wish or prefer. We affirm that the dignity of all innocent human life is both a reasonable and true understanding of God's will that *anyone with reason* can understand. Even our Declaration of Independence lists life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as "inalienable rights" that are "endowed by our Creator" as "*self-evident truths.*"

Abortion, same-sex marriage, and even Communion are again hot topics and good people argue for change. But protecting innocent life and affirming marriage of a man and woman and the especially the Eucharist are not ours to change. They belong to God who designed them for our happiness. **The Church just does not have the authority to make changes there even if it wanted to.**

We believe that truth is both objectively discovered through scientific observation and revealed by God in His divine revelation. *They always agree. After all, the universe God created cannot contradict its own creator!* Again, those who say there is no absolute truth have just said something they ironically believe to be *...absolutely true!*

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This is an important time for our nation and each of us as well. Let us pray and ask for God’s grace as we study the facts for accurate information, judge carefully with wisdom, and then act courageously. *This is our Catholic way to make the world a better place through love.* Loving as Christ loves makes us happier here and ensures happiness in the next.

We believe God created the universe and all life within it. While science wonderfully discovers *how* it happened, we know *by whom* it happened and *why*. Genesis affirms we have a dual purpose of both mastering the world and caring for it. (*Gen. 1:26 & 2:15*) We are called to unite these purposes in rational action to make the world a better place.



We act to make our world better

In calling us to both master and care for creation, God affirms we have the *power* to make good things happen and to *love* all life as He does. Both come together in the very person of Jesus. The God and master of the universe arrived in Bethlehem as a vulnerable and innocent child, in desperate need of care. Unless Jesus, Mary, and Joseph received some help, it was entirely possible that the Holy Family might have come to a bad end. How wonderful that angels, shepherds, and even Kings from the East came to their aid.

When our life matches our convictions we live with integrity, and God designed us in such a way that we feel happier and more at peace when what we believe is expressed in real and effective action.

You might consider supporting a new retreat program in Los Angeles called **Rachel’s Vineyard**, that provides on-going spiritual support for mother’s who have had an abortion. The trauma of abortion itself is just beginning to be understood by the medical and mental health communities as well. Check out their website at **RACHELSVINEYARD.ORG**

You might even consider reading my own book on Catholic moral issues: “**Don’t tell me what to do!**” It presents concise non-Church jargon summaries of about 30 modern moral issues, and is available at **AMAZON.COM**

You might consider joining your parish **Respect Life Committee**. They research and discover pro-life resources in the community, such as noted speakers, pro-life events, seminars, or articles, and help make them available.

You might consider supporting any of the **Crisis Pregnancy Centers** in Los Angeles. They are mainly counseling offices but many offer professional medical services as well. Their website is: **RTLLSC.org**.

Catholics are the kind of people who come to the aid of a whole world in crisis. We step up to speak out on all moral issues facing us today, and affirm the foundation for our response is the dignity of all innocent human life from the first moment of conception to the end of natural life.

We can be proud to be Baptized into this Catholic community that takes the care and happiness of the entire planet so seriously. I can’t wait for tomorrow to get involved in moral issues even more. I hope you feel God’s call as well. The words of the consecration at Mass bring us the total unconditional commitment of God for our life. The final words reveal what we do next...

“Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord!”

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(see daveheney.com for more articles)
