

BISHOPS RIP PRO-ABORTION POLS; DISPUTE OVER SANCTIONS

A growing number of bishops are speaking out on the subject of pro-abortion Catholic politicians. But there is disagreement over what should be done.

Fargo, North Dakota Bishop Samuel J. Aquila said in May that denying Communion to pro-abortion politicians is part of Catholic teaching. Portland, Oregon Archbishop John G. Vlazny said that "Catholics who publicly disagree with serious Church teaching on such matters as abortion or same-sex marriage should refrain from receiving Holy Communion." Orlando, Florida Coadjutor Bishop Thomas Wenski said, "It is totally within our competence to say that one cannot be complicit in the injustice of denying the right to life to an unborn child or invalid elder and still consider oneself a good Catholic."

New Jersey bishops elicited the greatest response from area Catholics. Newark Archbishop John Myers released a public letter saying that any elected official who was pro-abortion should not receive Communion. Trenton Bishop John Smith explicitly mentioned New Jersey Governor James McGreevey saying he was "not a devout Catholic." Newly installed Camden Bishop Joseph Galante said he would not give McGreevey Communion because the governor had remarried after his divorce without obtaining an annulment. McGreevey subsequently said he would no longer receive Communion. But State Senate Majority Leader Bernard Kenny decided to leave the Church rather than alter his views on abortion.

The most controversial position was advanced by Colorado Springs Bishop Michael Sheridan. He said that not only should Catholic politicians who are pro-abortion not present themselves for Communion, anyone who votes for such politicians should refrain from doing so. Bishop Sheridan also

included illicit stem cell research, euthanasia and same-sex marriage as disqualifying issues.

Some politicians are fighting back, saying that their conscience allows them to vote for abortion rights. Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi of California, the House Minority Leader, defended herself saying that the Catholic Church respects free will. William Donohue responded by saying that the Church insists on a "well-formed conscience," one that obliges Catholics "to acknowledge the central role of Catholic teaching in arriving at a just decision."

That this debate is taking place in an election year raises the stakes considerably.