

# CARDINAL O'CONNOR HAS RIGHTS, TOO

The following article by William Donohue appeared in the New York *Daily News* on April 21, and is reprinted with permission.

Imagine someone putting a needle into the brain of a baby and sucking out his brains. It's legal, as President Clinton affirmed last week when he vetoed a bill that would have barred this barbaric procedure. That's what happens in a partial-birth abortion: a doctor delivers 80 percent of a baby, leaving the head inside the woman's body, and then extracts the child's brains so that he or she can fit through the mother's birth canal. And when Cardinal O'Connor calls it an outrage, he is criticized not only for his position, but for merely exercising his free speech.

Cardinal O'Connor, like other priests, has every right not to check his First Amendment rights at the church door. To suggest otherwise betrays monumental ignorance of the First Amendment and is indeed suggestive of attempts to create dual citizenship—one set of rights for laypeople and another for clergy. The fact that this is an election year doesn't change a thing: constitutional rights are not seasonally conditioned.

The First Amendment not only guarantees Cardinal O'Connor's freedom of speech, it covers his right to freedom of religion. Integral to that exercise is his right to address issues of paramount moral and religious concern. That is why Cardinal O'Connor continues to talk about society's obligation to immigrants, the poor, the sick and the disabled. Yet the same people who applaud him in these efforts are bothered when he adds partially-born children to his list. The hypocrisy could not be more evident.

Separation of church and state, which nowhere appears in the

Constitution (it was a metaphor used by Thomas Jefferson in a letter he sent in 1802 to a group of Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut), is a rendering of the so-called establishment clause. When James Madison, the author of the First Amendment, was asked what he meant by this clause, he replied that it prohibited the establishment of a national church and governmental preference of one religion over another. It did not mean a gag rule for clerics.

It is amazing how those who would prefer Cardinal O'Connor to censor himself, or to have the state do it for him, never seem to complain when politicians campaign in Protestant churches. Indeed in 1988, Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rev. Pat Robertson both ran for president, and yet no one seemed to think that these ministers transgressed the First Amendment by doing so. In the case of Rev. Jackson, campaign contributions were actually solicited in some churches. Perhaps the Cardinal should run for president and really test the waters.

From the abolitionists to Rev. Martin Luther King to John Cardinal O'Connor, there is a long and honorable tradition in this nation of priests, ministers and rabbis engaging in public discourse. They have a legal right and a moral obligation to do so. Those who think otherwise need a fast lesson in elementary civics.

Cardinal O'Connor's critics want it both ways: they want him to continue to service the public without commenting on public policy. So it is okay when the Cardinal authorizes private funds for servicing AIDS patients, the homeless, hospitals, schools, women who need money to carry their baby to term and women who have had abortions and need counseling (yes, that is what the Church's Project Rachel is all about), but it is not okay for him to pass judgment on public policy. In other words, they want him to put up and shut up.

President Clinton said when he was elected that he would make abortion "safe, legal and rare." That he would not oppose a

procedure that aborts a child mostly born (that is why the Bishops have properly labeled it "infanticide"), shows what he really means by "rare." So hurrah for Cardinal O'Connor, once again he has shown that he is the preeminent voice of moral suasion in our society.