

DOES “PRO-CHOICE” ALSO MEAN “ANTI-CATHOLIC”?

By Kenneth D. Whitehead

A well-known contemporary American playwright publicly claimed that Pope John Paul II “endorses murder” and accused him and other religious leaders of being “homicidal liars” after the brutal murder of an admitted gay man in Wyoming. Merely by continuing to champion the Catholic Church’s teachings, apparently, the pontiff can get branded as himself virtually a murderer, and most people apparently find little or nothing amiss about the use of such language; at any rate, few are found to protest when it is gratuitously applied to the pope.

A pro-abortion activist in New York similarly declared that New York archbishop Cardinal John O’Connor was responsible (along with Protestant minister James Dobson) for the murder of an abortion doctor in upstate New York, who was shot with a high-powered rifle by an unknown assailant. “Without these [religious] leaders spewing hate,” the pro-abortion activist said, “there would be no anti-abortion movement...Cardinal O’Connor is accountable for those religious followers who do pull the trigger.”

A *Washington Post* cartoonist saw nothing untoward in depicting an armed killer standing behind an anti-abortion protester holding an “abortion is murder” sign; the whole scene was captioned “What, me, an accomplice?” The assumption, again, was that protesting legalized abortion makes one an accomplice in the murder of abortion doctors.

Just before the recent November elections, the *New York Times* featured a story quoting the president of Planned Parenthood calmly taxing Cardinal O’Connor with attempting to send “an electoral message” merely because he wondered aloud

in a sermon at St. Patrick's Cathedral whether the accusation of murder that had been leveled against him was really aimed at him personally, or had reference to pro-life political candidates generally.

How is it that accusations labeling innocent people "murderers" are apparently considered acceptable in our public discourse when they are aimed at religious leaders opposing homosexual acts or abortion, but are suddenly found to be unacceptably "extremist" if spontaneously applied by average people reacting to the undeniable fact that every abortion performed actually does involve the killing of a baby? How can the violence and, yes, sadly, killing, always involved in an abortion ever be brought out if it can never be mentioned?

A question that may be more frequently asked as our current "culture wars" intensify is this: are Catholics even going to be allowed any longer by public opinion to express their opinions as Catholics on such public policy questions as legalized abortion? According to a widespread contemporary viewpoint which gets strong emphasis (and often virtual endorsement) in much of today's media, Catholics should not be allowed to oppose legalized abortion precisely because their opposition to it is presumably based on the Church's moral teachings, and hence must be considered an inadmissible "Church" interference in "state" affairs!

In view of the enormity of the evil of legalized abortion in America today—it claims more victims every year than have been killed in all the wars of American history (1.3 to 1.5 million abortions per year over the past quarter of a century, compared to 1.2 million total American deaths in all of our wars)—it is a tribute to the Church that the pro-life movement in the United States was begun primarily by Catholics. Since then, thanks be to God, many Protestants and Evangelicals, Jews, Muslims, and others have joined the pro-life ranks.

Nevertheless, it remains true that no other political position

except a pro-life position is even logically possible for a Catholic who properly understands and practices his faith. Moreover, the pro-life position is regularly articulated and re-enforced by such outstanding Catholic Church leaders as Pope John Paul II and Cardinal John O'Connor—rightly. No doubt this is exactly what the pro-abortionists find so galling and intolerable; these religious leaders thus become fair game to be branded as themselves “murderers.” “Pro-choice” does apparently also mean “anti-Catholic.”

The present writer has been proudly involved in the pro-life movement since around 1970, when I was one of the founders of the Maryland Human Life Committee, formed at that time to fight liberalized abortion in the Maryland General Assembly. In recent years, especially since my retirement from the federal government, I have been actively involved in the political campaigns of a number of pro-life political candidates.

In addition, since 1993, I have been regularly writing and publishing articles and commentary on the political aspects of legalized abortion and on the progress of the pro-life movement; these writings have been based in part on my knowledge of the Washington scene and of how Washington works—knowledge which came from many years as a federal official engaged in public policy questions, in testifying before congressional committees, and in monitoring and promoting legislation.

In October, 1998, New Hope Publications brought out as a quality paperback book a collection of my articles published between 1993 and 1998 dealing with the political aspects of legalized abortion and related topics. Entitled *Political Orphan? The Prolife Movement after 25 Years of Roe v. Wade*, this book contains chapters dealing with the abortion holocaust, Title X and other government-subsidized family planning and population control programs, U.S. government machinations against the pope and the Church in the

international arena, the pope's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the president's choices for surgeon general, partial-birth abortion, non-violence, and other topics—including especially the continuing efforts of the pro-life movement to deal with the enormous problem of legalized abortion in a climate in which even many declared “pro-life” politicians too often continue to try to run away from the issue.

The book also deals more seriously than almost any other current book with the volatile issue of the now well-established “linkage” between the abortion issue and the issue of government subsidized birth control. Anyone who has followed this knows how hard the pundits in the media have attempted to turn this into a purely “Catholic” issue, simply because of the Church's well-known teaching on the subject.

In general, *Political Orphan?* chronicles the fortunes of the pro-life movement during the Clinton years and lays out clearly where the pro-life movement needs to be going from here. In particular, the book makes a case—and a plea—for greater organized Catholic participation in the pro-life movement, this in spite of the opposition of bigots who would apparently deny Catholics any political voice on the most important political and moral questions of the day precisely because we are Catholics.

Kenneth D. Whitehead is a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, who now works as a writer, editor, and translator. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Catholic League.

You can obtain *Political Orphan? The Pro-life Movement after 25 Years of Roe v. Wade* for \$14.95 (+ \$3.00 s/h) from New Hope Publications, New Hope, 40052; or, telephone 1-800-764-8444.