

MARIO CUOMO'S LESSONS ON LIFE



Bill Donohue comments on the passing of Mario Cuomo:

Mario Cuomo will be buried tomorrow. The former governor of New York is remembered for many things, but as a Catholic he is most remembered for his 1984 speech at the University of Notre Dame.

In his address, "Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective," Cuomo explained why his personal opposition to abortion could not be his public position as governor. Invoking the principle of separation of church and state, he said that in order for Catholic public officials "to assure our freedom we must allow others the same freedom, even if occasionally it produces conduct by them which we would hold to be sinful."

While most of Cuomo's remarks framed abortion as a religious issue, he also recognized the humanity of the unborn child. "For me life or fetal life in the womb should be protected, even if five of nine Justices of the Supreme Court and my neighbor disagree with me." Indeed, he said it demanded "reverence." However, he noted that "not everyone in our society agrees with me and Matilda [his wife]."

In his lengthy speech, Cuomo made only one passing reference to the death penalty. On that subject, which Catholic teaching presumptively opposes, he had no problem adopting the Church's position: he strongly opposed the death penalty and as governor he consistently vetoed legislation that allowed for it. In 2011, he defended his position by saying, "Capital punishment raises important questions about how, as a society,

we view human beings.”

Cuomo never explained why abortion did not raise the same societal questions about how we treat human beings that capital punishment does. Nor did he explain why it was okay for him to “impose” his Catholic teachings on others when it came to capital punishment but not abortion. Nor did he say why the intentional killing of innocent children should not summon the same legal safeguards that are extended to convicted serial murderers. But these were his lessons on life.

The Catholic League extends its condolences to the Cuomo family.