

POPE OFFERS STRAIGHT TALK ON HOT TOPICS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on recent remarks made by Pope Francis:

Pope Francis had a busy Sunday, offering interviews aboard the papal plane and to Spanish television. As the media are wont to do, much of the conversation centered on their favorite topic: sex.

Referring to the sexual abuse of minors, the pope said, "The global scourge is great, but to say this is not understood without the spirit of evil."

He used this observation to criticize U.S. bishops who approach this subject by promoting new codes of conduct, and the like. For the pope, such proposals are "too much about organization, about methodologies," neglecting the "spiritual dimension."

We can understand why American bishops are concerned about the nuts and bolts issues—the laity are looking for specific reforms. But the pope is right to say that the spiritual dimension is often overlooked in such discussions. He is particularly right about the role of evil in sexual abuse, at least in its most grievous manifestations.

As with all sins, there is a range of gravity. A priest who inappropriately touches a minor may suffer from some sort of psycho-social disorder, but a priest who violates a minor in front of, or by using, sacred symbols, harbors something deeper. Such acts, which fortunately are very rare, cannot be understood without citing the role of evil. We don't hear enough about this dimension.

The pope was asked whether abortion was permissible in cases

of human trafficking, particularly where a woman is raped and becomes pregnant.

The Holy Father had a ready answer. "Is it permissible to eliminate a human life to solve a problem? Is it permissible to hire someone to eliminate [the child]?" He then went on to say that women in such dire straits should not be left "on the street," but should be helped.

The Catholic Church, unlike Planned Parenthood, reaches out to women who have had an abortion. It does not leave them "on the street." Instead, it services them through Project Rachel. This is one of the crown jewels of the Catholic Church, but it does not get the attention it deserves.

The bishops' conference explains that Project Rachel is a "diocesan-based network of specially trained priests, religious, counselors, and laypersons who provide a team response of care for those suffering in the aftermath of abortion. In addition to referring for Sacramental Reconciliation, the ministry provides an integrated network of services, including pastoral counseling, support groups, retreats and referral to licensed mental health practitioners."

The pope was also asked about his famous quip, "Who Am I to Judge?"

He emphasized that "sin is an act: of thought, word and deed, with freedom. Tendencies are not sin. If you have a tendency to anger, it is not sin." But he did not dodge the issue of homosexuality.

The pope advised parents who think their child might have homosexual tendencies to "go to a professional, to a psychologist," before making a "diagnosis." Regrettably, in today's world, the typical psychologist would not find anything to treat. Indeed, he may even exacerbate the problem. But the pope is not wrong to suggest that competent help is

still available.

Not surprisingly, some of the big media picked up on the pope's remarks on sexual abuse, but had nothing to say about his comments on abortion and homosexuality. They are bent on protecting the pope from liberal critics, thus skewing perceptions of him.

ABORTION LAWS REFLECT NATION'S DIVISIONS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on new state abortion laws:

There is a wave of new state abortion laws being introduced, or already passed, that reflect how divided the nation is on the subject. Most are quite restrictive but some are quite liberal.

Three abortion bills recently passed legislative committees in Texas, and have been sent to the full Senate. On March 27, a Senate panel passed a bill that would ensure protection for a child born alive following a botched abortion. Another bill is aimed at denying state and local funding of abortions. The third bill clarifies an existing statute on providing information to a woman contemplating an abortion.

Illinois went the other way. One proposed bill is an open-ended license to terminate all pregnancies right up until birth; there are zero restrictions. The other bill being considered would repeal a law requiring parental consent before a minor can abort her child. In other words, state lawmakers are weighing whether to allow children to authorize

the killing of their children without their parents knowing anything about it.

The Illinois Catholic Conference opposes both bills and Chicago Archbishop Blase Cupich has denounced them in harsh terms. Mary Beth Miller, nurse director at St. John's in Springfield, said, "The youngest baby in our hospital...was delivered at just 22 weeks and six days gestation...I am stunned at how the proposed legislation...flatly states that an embryo or fetus has no independent rights."

Illinois has not only become abortion crazy, legislators there are considering a bill that would force all private health insurance plans to cover abortion, making no exemption for religious organizations.

If they were to get their way, a requirement mandating Catholic hospitals to perform abortions would clearly be contested in the courts, with little likelihood that the U.S. Supreme Court would affirm such a drastic assault on the First Amendment. But it proves just how maniacal some are in the pro-abortion community.

Last week, a federal judge declared a North Carolina law banning abortion after 20 weeks, in most instances, to be unconstitutional. Yet in Utah, a bill was signed into law last week that bans abortions after 18 weeks.

In Ohio, Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers were put on notice that the state may no longer pay for elective abortions. Also in Ohio, a bill passed the Senate requiring women who have an abortion to choose either burial or cremation for the remains of their babies; the bill now goes to the House.

Protection for babies with Down syndrome may be underway in Pennsylvania as lawmakers consider a bill that would restrict abortions based solely on a diagnosis that there is a possibility that the baby carries this condition.

Mississippi and Kentucky recently outlawed most abortions once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, which is about 6 weeks into pregnancy. A similar bill passed the Georgia senate; the House will now take up this measure.

The bill in Georgia sparked a strong reaction from Hollywood celebrities who are active in the pro-abortion camp. The Writers Guild of America threatened to boycott the state if the "heartbeat" bill becomes law.

Ashley Bratcher, who lives in Georgia, and who stars in "Unplanned," the movie based on Abby Johnson's workplace experience at a Planned Parenthood clinic, responded to Alyssa Milano's support for Hollywood retaliation against Georgia. Bratcher told Milano "you're forgetting about the right of women within the womb. If feminism is all about equal rights, then where are her rights?"

Bratcher got personal. "I can't help but think how you would feel in my shoes. Having just learned months ago that my life was spared on an abortion table, it definitely put a few things in perspective for me. You had the privilege of being born in 1972. My generation was not so lucky. Over 61 million lives never reached their full potential."

While the nation is divided on abortion, the good news is that pro-life lawmakers are moving ahead faster than their abortion-happy colleagues. Moreover, they don't have to run from controversy the way New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has to. He championed a law this year that allows for selective infanticide, denying human rights to babies born as a result of a botched abortion.

The sonogram allows everyone to see the undeniable, and the pictures don't lie. Technology allowed for sanitized abortions; it may yet allow for its legal death.