

Qualifying the Culture of Death

By William A. Donohue

In his encyclical letter, *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II warns against what he calls a “perverse freedom,” one that awards “*absolute power over others and against others*,” resulting, he says, in a “culture of death.” His concern is borne out of the reality that “broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of individual freedom.” The roots of this “perverse freedom” lay in a conception of liberty that “exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service to them.” In short, the Holy Father is saying that when radical individualism is interpreted as freedom, the consequences include a “culture of death.”

To make clear the association between radical individualism and the “culture of death,” it might help to consider how the killing of unborn children, as well as infants, has been justified in the name of liberty. And what better person to listen to than Frances Kissling, the infamous anti-Catholic baiter from Catholics for a Free Choice. When Pope John Paul II laid bare his thoughts on abortion infanticide, euthanasia, the death penalty, ecology and biological engineering in *Euangelium Vitae* Kissling responded by saying that “What he calls the ‘culture of death’ is really human freedom being able to make choices based on conscience.”

Kissling’s idea of freedom is the “perverse freedom” that the Pope advises us against. For her, the taking of innocent human life is “really human freedom” because it is a choice “based on conscience.” Such logic, of course, could be used to justify serial killing and genocide, both of which are presumably authorized by persons making choices “based on

conscience.” To regard this as “really human freedom” shows the depravity of Kissling’s conscience and the wisdom of the Pope’s concerns.

Those who counsel feticide and infanticide must know in their heart of hearts what it is they are counseling, and that is why this debate has become so intellectually dishonest.

The recent U.N. Conference on Women that was held in Beijing provided more evidence of how dishonest this debate has become. In the pages of the *New York Times*, an organization titled International Women’s Health Coalition placed an ad addressing its concerns about the Beijing Conference. It stood squarely for abortion rights, stating that “We are ensuring that reproductive and sexual health and rights are central in all programs and policies that affect our health.” But after having acknowledged its support for abortion, the organization decried the fact that “100 million women are not alive today due to discrimination that leads to malnutrition, poor health care and pre-natal sex selection.”

Notice the selective concern over “pre-natal sex selection.” It appears that the ladies who comprise the International Women’s Health. Coalition are bothered by the Third World practice of killing babies in the womb once it has been determined that they are female babies. But, of course, why should it matter to them, if in fact, human life isn’t present in the womb?

On September 16, the editorial board of the *New York Times* echoed the same fears when it approvingly noted that the final Beijing document warned of “discrimination against girls, even before birth in some countries all over the world.” Once again, those who claim that abortion doesn’t take innocent human life suddenly switch gears when female feticide is practiced. But isn’t it just “matter” that is being discarded? And if some abortions artificially reduce the population, then why don’t all abortions?

It is not just sexism that the pro-abortion advocates are guilty of, It's homosexism as well. According to the latest ideological fad, it is one thing to kill a heterosexual baby (or at least one that is male), quite another to kill a homosexual baby. If this sounds crazy, consider the following.

About a year and a half ago, I was watching some TV talk show hosted by Tom Snyder. Two gay guys were on the air talking about gay rights, etc. I didn't pay much attention until the discussion turned to the possibility that there might be some gay gene that determines homosexuality. Admittng that the book is open on this subject, the participants all expressed grave concern over what might happen if a gay gene really were discoverable. Wouldn't that lead many parents to opt for an abortion if they knew that their child would be gay? And wasn't that an awful thing to contemplate?

Well as it turns out that brave new world of aborting gay kids may never be upon us. In February 1994, the scientist who discovered a possible genetic marker for male homosexuality said that if his team finds the gene they'll hold the patent on its uses and "won't license it for use in amniocentesis" to screen fetuses. Whew!

So there we have it, folks, the pro-abort crowd goes bonkers at the thought that we might run out of homosexuals. Now it may not be comforting for straight guys to learn that affirmative action for women and homosexuals has now extended into the womb, but the reality is that even those who favor abortion- on-demand are beginning to have second thoughts. Now if we could only convince the pro-abortion activists that every child might be either a female or a homosexual-and a physically challenged person of color as well-we might very well end abortion altogether.

The Catholic Church is also happily out of step with the radical animal rights movement. Citing the Bible, Catholic doctrine understands the right of humans to exercise dominion

over animals. Yet those who want to protect all animals at all cost from extinction typically have no problem with killing unborn children. Ingrid Newkirk, co-founder and chairman of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, once summed up the sentiments of her ilk by saying, "A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." Now wouldn't that make you nervous if your kid was invited to her house for dinner?

Every spring, the residents of Stuart, Florida, are warned that loggerhead turtles are an endangered species and that anyone who disturbs their eggs is in violation of the law. But it is not just those animals that are accorded special protection, even animals that have been downgraded to a "threatened" status (e.g., the Bald Eagle) have their nesting sites protected by law. It says something sinister about our "culture of death" that the nesting site for humans isn't accorded the same protection.

Women, homosexuals, endangered and threatened species-these are the ones that give pause to the pro-abortion crowd, and that is why their support for a "culture of death" is qualified. Unfortunately, some in this crowd show less interest in preserving infants than birds and turtles. And it is not just handicapped infants that I am talking about.

The founder of the animal rights movement is an Australian philosopher, Peter Singer. In a book he wrote in the 1970s, *Animal Liberation*, he argued that some animals are more self-aware than infants and should be given due recognition in society. This same man admitted in the 1980s that the pro-life people had a good point when they maintained that it was impossible to mount a moral argument in favor of feticide that couldn't also be used to justify infanticide. After all, Singer reasoned, there really was no moral distinction between killing a child in the womb and killing a child out of the womb. But "the solution," as he called it, was "to abandon the idea that all human life is of equal worth," thereby coming to the perverse conclusion that if it is okay to kill unborn

kids, it was okay to kill them once they were born.

Singer is not alone. The theologian Joseph Fletcher once said that infants may properly be killed if they didn't measure up to his fifteen "indicators of personhood" (one of which was I.Q.) Newborns, he said, were not "persons," only "human lives." Fletcher, it should be known, had previously won the Humanist of the Year award.

Speaking of children with birth defects, James Watson opined in the 1970s that "If a child were not declared alive until three days after birth, then all parents could be allowed the choice...the doctor could allow the child to die if the parents so chose and save a lot of misery and suffering." Dr. Watson was the scientist who cracked the genetic code and won a Nobel prize for his work.

Philosopher Michael Tooley takes an even bolder stand when he argues that to have a right to life it is necessary to be able to desire to continue living, and this in turn requires a degree of self-awareness no newborn infant possesses. Thus, the Jeffersonian ideal of inalienable rights is now given a new twist: there can be no rights until humans are able to see themselves as separate beings with a past and a future. This position, shared by historian Mary Anne Warren, is an open assault on the natural rights doctrines that have informed both the Catholic and the American traditions.

It is little wonder why the Catholic Church is targeted for abuse by so many in our society. Against this "culture of death" stands a 2,000 year old institution that continues to preach the dignity of the human person. Unlike its adversaries, it does not tailor its teachings to trendy ideological paradigms or to selfish and base motives. Those who champion the "culture of death" know who the enemy is and that is why they continue to rail against the Catholic Church. But it is precisely for reasons like this that this is a great time to be a Catholic.

Testimony on Jersey City Voucher Program

October 12, 1995

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, is grateful for the opportunity to testify on the proposed voucher program for Jersey City. For the record, it should be known that the Catholic League is politically non-partisan, having no interest whatsoever in furthering the political objectives of any political party. Our sole interest is in defending the right of Catholics to participate in American society without defamation or discrimination.

From the time Mayor Bret Schundler announced his innovative program for choice in education, the Catholic League has had strong interest in supporting this effort. Unlike some other educational choice programs, this one offers parents maximum freedom in determining what school they prefer their children to attend. And unlike other models, this one allows educators the liberty to establish academic standards and assessment techniques that best suit their professional interests.

By promoting public schools, alternative public schools, charter public schools and grant schools, the "Children First" Education Act not only puts children first, it puts parents and teachers first as well. For that reason alone, we recommend passage of the bill.

No one seriously doubts that there are plenty of public schools that are currently doing an outstanding job of educating our young people. But, on balance, it is also true

to say that the present system has not met acceptable standards of academic achievement. We do not need to recount all the studies that have been released on this subject. Suffice it to say that if any other sector of our society had a performance level equal to that of our educational system, it would be targeted for drastic overhaul. Why we are still debating the merits of competition, after all that we know about the consequences of near-monopolistic practices, is itself mind-boggling.

By way of analogy, take our economic system. Despite some obvious flaws, our economy is still the world's envy. It is envied because it works and it works because it is based on market principles. Sadly, our educational system rejects the very model that has worked so well in other areas of our society. Instead, we have adopted a model-it is called statism-that has failed miserably all over the world. It is not logic that dictates this outcome, rather it is special interests.

Change is always painful but it makes little sense to resist it purely on that basis. Change that abets progress is worthwhile and that is why "Children First" needs to be supported: it allows the specter of progress in the midst of despair. Those who maintain that the proposed changes might actually make things worse carry a burden so heavy as to be untenable.

When large portions-including even a majority-of public school teachers in urban school districts send their own children to private schools, it speaks volumes about the current system and makes indefensible calls to maintain business as usual. Yet that is exactly the condition we face. If most business persons, or butchers or bakers for that matter, patronized their competitors but not their own enterprise, it would be a national scandal. That is why it is outrageous that those who themselves have lost confidence in the very system they work in continue to recommend it as acceptable for someone

else's child.

It is no secret that Catholic schools-to name one option available under this plan-have done a remarkable job of educating our children. And nowhere is this less denied than in considering the performance of parochial schools in the inner cities. To deny these children, and their parents, the right to choose the kind of school that offers the best hope of upward mobility is to condemn them to suffer the inequities of the current system. That is not only immoral, it is sickening to hear those who claim to champion the best interests of minorities now stand stubbornly in their way.

"Children First" is a pilot program. If it fails, no school district will want to mimic it. But if it succeeds, as we believe it will, no school district will want to avoid adopting it. That is the choice that is before us today. To resist change, at this late hour, is to brand acceptable a school system that every reasonable person knows no longer works. The Catholic League recommends that we give school choice a chance and that is why we vigorously support Mayor Schundler in this cause.

William A. Donohue, Ph.D. President presented by Terence Kenny, North-Central New Jersey Chapter

Statement Before the Transportation Committee of the City of New York

September 11, 1995

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, is grateful for the opportunity to testify on the need for a revised MTA policy on advertisements. The Catholic League is proud of its track record in opposing offensive ads placed by the MTA. In September 1993, we ignited a storm of protest aimed at the VH-1 "Madonna" ad. This ad, which was displayed on buses and phone booths throughout the city, featured a picture of the pop star Madonna on one side and a picture of Our Blessed Lady and Infant Jesus on the other; the inscription "The Difference Between You and Your Parents" was placed squarely in the middle. As a result of the Catholic League's protest, VH-1 pulled the ads and issued an apology.

In August 1995, the Catholic League joined with Councilman Noach Dear in calling for a boycott of Calvin Klein in response to the company's "kiddie porn" jeans ads, some of which were placed by the MTA. As with the "Madonna" ad, the Catholic League was successful in getting the offending advertiser to withdraw the ads.

The Catholic League is pleased that in both instances it was able to mobilize sufficient public pressure that it proved victorious in the end. But it is not pleased with the MTA's intransigence on this matter: what we need is an ad policy that is reasonable and comprehensive. The proposed MTA policy that we are considering has the merit of being reasonable but falls short of being comprehensive.

The proposed policy seeks to protect minors from ads deemed harmful. The definition of "harmful to minors" is in accord with the language of those U.S. Supreme Court decisions that have governed the obscenity rulings for the past four decades and is thus suitable for inclusion in the MTA policy. Determinations of what constitutes "harm to minors" might still be objected to on the grounds that such judgments are inevitably subjective, but much the same could be said about judgments governing sexual harassment, yet few seem prepared

to make them. In short, the reality of making tough decisions is hardly a reason for not making them at all.

It is well known that commercial speech does not enjoy the same First Amendment protections as political discourse. As such, the MTA is not tied to a legal straightjacket, and we say this knowing that the MTA lost in 1984 in a suit brought by *Penthouse*. It is not certain what would have happened had that case been brought before the U.S. Supreme Court, but in light of the many cities that have successfully adopted restrictive ad policies since that time, it is not likely that the City of New York would lose today. And in any event, that loss did not stop the MTA from adopting a policy that bans the advertisement of cigarettes.

If the MTA has the right to ban some ads, it seems incongruous to maintain that it doesn't have the right to ban other ads as well. According to MTA spokesman Tito Davila, the ban on cigarette advertisement was passed because the MTA considers cigarettes a "health hazard." Indeed they are, and that is why the MTA was acting responsibly by banning cigarette advertisement. But why is it that ads that are patently offensive to reasonable persons not considered a "social hazard"? Are not sexually explicit ads harmful to minors (if not to others as well), especially when the ads are thrust upon young people in the manner of a captive audience? And are not ads that appeal to the most debased and prurient appetites worthy of the same degree of public policing as cigarette advertisements?

The proposed MTA policy, while a dramatic improvement over current policy, does not go far enough. The Catholic League would like to see the MTA bar any ad that defames any race, ethnic group or religion. To give one example, it is simply indefensible for a government agency to make a profit off of Catholic bashing. Those who think otherwise ought to defend their case in public. Our society already suffers from too much strife and incivility without government agencies adding

to the problem by acceding to the demands of bigots.

The Catholic League would like to recommend that the MTA review the ad policies that currently govern other municipalities. Washington, D.C., for example, has been able to establish restrictive transportation ad policies that do not contravene the First Amendment. No doubt the New York City Council could do likewise.

On behalf of the Catholic League, I would like to thank the City Council for the opportunity to pre- sent our views. We stand ready to work with you in any capacity you request.

-William A. Donohue, Ph.D. President

Catholic League Review

The debut of the Catholic League's cable television show, *Catholic League Review*, occurred on October 3 on Long Island's Telicare channel. The first guest was Frank De Rosa, Director of Public Information for the Diocese of Brooklyn. Mr. De Rosa spoke about the months of planning that went into the preparations for the papal visit. Host Bill Donohue introduced a discussion on the planned protests against the Pope and the Catholic bashing that had already begun prior to the arrival of the Holy Father. Also discussed was the Catholic League's survey of American Catholics and how different its conclusions were from many other surveys.

The show that aired on October 10 featured a discussion of the recently concluded U.N. Conference on Women that was held in Beijing. Guest Ellen Lukas provided many interesting insights

into what happened in Beijing. Lukas spent more than ten years working in the U.N. (half of her tenure was as a correspondent for *Newsweek*) and attended the Beijing Conference as part of a non-governmental organization. She related how out of touch many of the Western nations were with the sentiments of the developing world.

Both shows dealt with the issue that is the heart and soul of the Catholic League, namely anti-Catholicism. It is hoped that those who are critical of the Catholic Church will accept invitations to appear on the show.

Massachusetts Chapter Forms New Group

C. Joseph Doyle has resigned as Operations Director of the Catholic League so that he can establish a new organization, the Catholic Action League of Massachusetts. Doyle said that the increased Catholic bashing that is evident in Massachusetts requires a full-time commitment to the problem. Unfortunately, the constraints of his job as Operations Director (overseeing the development of the new volunteer chapters of the Catholic League) did not enable him to make the kind of commitment he wanted.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented on Doyle's resignation saying, 'Joe did a great job for the Catholic League and his absence will surely be missed. I know that Joe has long been interested in tackling anti-Catholicism full-time in Massachusetts, and this will now give him that opportunity. We wish him well.'

Doyle's departure means that League vice president Bernadette

Brady will oversee chapter development.

Dr. Donohue Wins Cardinal Mindszenty Award

On September 23, Catholic League president William Donohue was awarded the 1995 Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation Freedom Award. Donohue spoke at the Cardinal Mindszenty Faith, Family and Freedom conference at the Rye Town Hilton in Rye, New York; he spoke on the subject of "Anti-Catholicism in the 1990s," and was presented the award at the luncheon.

Future engagements at Cardinal Mindszenty conferences include one in Dallas on February 24 and one in Anaheim, California, on March 23. Those who would like to learn more about the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation should contact the president, Eleanor Schlafly, at P.O. Box 11321, St. Louis, MO 63105-0121, or call at (314) 727- 6279.

Neiman Marcus Withdraws Ad

When Neiman Marcus ran an advertisement featuring a woman wearing Rosary beads around her neck – as if it were merely a necklace – the Catholic League took action. Vice President Bernadette Brady wrote a letter to Ann Richardson of the store's Creative Advertising Department, requesting that the ad be withdrawn. Professing concern, Richardson informed the League that Neiman Marcus was withdrawing the ad and was sorry

for having inadvertently offended Catholics.