

WEEKLY COLUMN – CATHOLIC STAR HERALD CLINTON, ABORTION, AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

I thought I had said as much as necessary about President Clinton's veto of the partial birth abortion ban, but the president's latest temper tantrum brings me back once again. It's not that I expected Mr. Clinton to change his mind, but the graphic picture of his clenched fist, his angry outburst and his loss of self-control is scary. It is the picture of an arrogant dictator, not the president of the United States. His statements are simply outrageous, and they make it painfully clear that he will distort any fact, confuse any truth and resort to the worst type of insult to justify himself.

It's not simply his intemperance that troubles me. It's the blatant insult to the Catholic Church and to every individual Catholic. I am outraged that Mr. Clinton, president of the United States, has singled out the religious identity of 2 of 5 women – the two who he claims are Catholic. What is the meaning of this? No one else's religion is mentioned. Does this mean that Catholic teaching is to be dismissed or ridiculed because Mr. Clinton says that some Catholic women have had some type of late-term abortion? If they did, and this is very unclear from the emotion-laden press conference Mr. Clinton held, does that make Catholic teaching (or the moral convictions of millions of non-Catholics) incorrect and/or irrelevant? Who appointed President Clinton the sole judge of what is moral or immoral, or worse, the final judge on the moral validity of Catholic teaching on abortion? Granted that Mr. Clinton used the power of the presidency to decide the legal issue, where does he get the authority to establish his viewpoint on a moral issue as conclusive by dragging the religious identity of anyone into a public debate?

Mr. Clinton is not a journalist, an academic or a talk-show host. He is the president of the United States—at every moment of his life until he finishes his term of office. As president, he cannot establish himself as the compelling authority on the acceptability or validity of issues of religious teaching. But that is precisely what Mr. Clinton is doing, and our constitutional protection of religious freedom is endangered

Bill Clinton has not only proclaimed again his absolute subservience to the pro-abortion forces, but he has set himself up as the paramount authority on the moral validity of a women's absolute freedom to have an abortion at any stage of pregnancy, by any method, without any qualification and, paid for by government funds. Mr. Clinton has made himself the protector of every pro-abortion group in the United States. And he has made it abundantly clear that he will give no consideration to, recognize no claims for the life of the unborn child even in the latest stages of pregnancy when the child's viability is beyond question. Mr. Clinton's faulty reasoning leads to justification of infanticide.

But Mr. Clinton goes on and instructs us on his perception of the unique role of the president. "The president is the only place in this system of ours where there's only one person who can stand up for people with no voice, no power, who are going to be eviscerated." Again, Mr. Clinton has it all wrong. It's the millions of unborn aborted children—victims of "a woman's choice"—who have no voice and no power. If his veto stands, it's the 500 or 1000 late term infants, most of whom the doctors say are perfectly healthy but unwanted, that will be eviscerated with the full approval of the president of the United States and his promise to those who destroy them that he, President William Clinton, will defend them. Is Mr. Clinton living in some type of dreamland? He is telling us that he has weighed the decision of five women—not all of whom clearly underwent the partial-birth abortion procedure—against

the lives and safety of all unborn children. He has said that his presidential obligation is to ensure easy abortion at every stage of pregnancy for any woman who wants it, even at the cost of devaluing the life of all unborn children – healthy and viable, sick or at risk. What kind of compassion, what kind of ethical sensitivity, what kind of presidential integrity is this?

But the president is also wrong about his unique power. In our system of government the president is not the only place to go for protection of human life or human rights. Congress has the power to protect—as it did in this case—until overridden by the president. And as the history of slavery reminds us, the judiciary also has the power—considerably stronger than the president's—to stand up for those with no voice, no power....

Up until now I have had many questions about President Clinton. But after this episode and having seen the irrational emotional outburst, I am truly frightened, not only for unborn children, but for the religious freedom the Constitution promises all of us.

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May 31, 1996