

Two Statements on 'Sanctity of Life'



Dear Parish Faithful & Friends in Christ,

It was a week ago Sunday, that we observed the "Sanctity of Life Sunday" within the Orthodox Church in America. We remind ourselves and reaffirm our commitment to life as a sacred gift from God on an annual basis on this designated day; and we do this in the context of "protesting" the Roe v. Wade decision of 1973 that legalized abortion in our country.

Abortion as a practice and legal right certainly seems as if it is here to stay; and this in turn can slacken our own sense of opposition or, more affirmatively, our own position concerning the sacred gift of life as "God-sourced." That position cannot be reconciled with a culture that promotes what essentially amounts to "abortion on demand." We need to be "counter-cultural" when the laws of Caesar clash with the Law of God. Thus, remaining vigilant and interiorly alert to the moral and ethical issues involved in the abortion debate still remains a moral imperative for us as Orthodox Christians.

With that in mind, I have attached two statements from two very different figures and written in two very divergent styles each with its own particular "tone." I just discovered a remarkable passage from Mother Teresa who cuts to the heart of the matter when she

raises the issue of love in relation to abortion in such a persuasive manner. This is an approach that stems directly from the Gospel proclamation that "God is love." She is trying to remind both mothers and fathers - together with any society that wants to consider itself a community of justice and ethical integrity - that love is not an emotion, but an overwhelmingly essential component of a moral life that demands sacrifice and which is meant to govern our "choices."

And it is this word and concept of "choice" that stands at the center of our second contribution from David Bentley Hart.

This is from his book *Atheist Delusions* and from the chapter entitled "The Age of Freedom." In a short paragraph I believe that Bentley Hart dissects with precision what he calls "an almost mystical supremacy" of "choice" that dominates our culture and perception of human life. That is, if you are convinced that there exists nothing greater than the autonomous individual and his or her "choices."

— **Mother Teresa** —

The greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child – a direct killing of the innocent child – murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? How do we persuade a woman not to have an abortion? As always, we must persuade her with love, and we remind ourselves that love means to be willing to give until it hurts. Jesus gave even his life to love us.

So the mother who is thinking of abortion, should be helped to love – that is, to give until it hurts her plans, or her free time, to respect the life of her child. The father of that child, whoever he is, must also give until it hurts.

By abortion, the mother does not learn to love, but kills even her own child to solve her problems. And by abortion, the father is told that he does not have to take any responsibility at all for the child he has brought into the world. That father is likely to put other women into the same trouble.

So abortion just leads to more abortion. Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching the people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. That is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion.

— **David Bentley Hart** —

...And even the majority of unbelievers are aware that human nature and human society place not merely necessary but desirable limits upon the will's free exercise. Nevertheless, we live in an age whose chief value has been determined, by overwhelming consensus, to be the inviolable liberty of personal volition, the right to decide for ourselves what we shall believe, want, need, own, or serve.

The will, we habitually assume, is sovereign to the degree that it is obedient to nothing else and is free to the degree that it is truly spontaneous and constrained by nothing greater than itself. This, for many of us, is the highest good imaginable. And a society

guided by such beliefs must, at least implicitly, embrace and subtly advocate a very particular 'moral metaphysics': that is, the nonexistence of any transcendent standard of the good that has the power (or the right) to order our desires toward a higher end. We are, first and foremost, heroic and insatiable consumers, and we must not allow the specters of transcendent law or personal guilt to render us indecisive.

For us, it is choice itself, and not what we choose, that is the first good, and this applies not only to such matters as what we shall purchase or how we shall live. In even our gravest political and ethical debates – regarding economic policy, abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, censorship, genetic engineering, and so on – “choice” is a principle not only frequently invoked, by one side or by both, but often seeming to exercise an almost mystical supremacy over all other concerns.

—From Atheist Delusions, p. 21-22

Two very different passages that converge in that both speak with eloquence and insight into the life-and-death issue of abortion. Please feel free to respond with any comments or questions.