



Mario Cuomo

*Religious Belief and Public Morality*



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**AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED:** Text version below transcribed directly from audio

Thank you very much, Father Hesburgh, Father McBrien, all the distinguished clergy who are present, ladies and gentlemen:

I am very pleased to be at Notre Dame and I feel very much at home, frankly -- not just because you have seven or eight hundred students from New York state, not just because -- not just because Father McBrien's mother's name is Catherine Botticelli -- a beautiful name -- not just because Father Hesburgh is a Syracuse native, but also because of your magnificent history of great football teams. Oh, the subway -- They mean a lot to us, the...great Fighting Irish. The subway alumni of New York City have always been enthralled. And for years and years all over the state, Syracuse north and south, out on Long Island, people on Saturday's would listen to their radio and now watch their television to watch the great Fighting Irish wearing the Gallic Green. It's marvelous. The names of your great players reverberate back from the years: Nick Buoniconti, Nick Pietrosante, Angelo Bertelli. How about Ralph Guglielmi? What a great player he is.

I want to begin this talk by drawing your attention to the title of the lecture: "Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective." I was not invited to speak on "church and state" generally, and certainly not to speak on "Mondale against Reagan." The subject assigned to me is difficult enough. I'll not try to do more than I've been asked.



I'm honored by the invitation, but the record shows that I'm not the first governor of New York State to appear at an event involving Notre Dame. One of my great predecessors, Al Smith, went to the Army-Notre Dame football game each time it was played in New York. His fellow Catholics expected Smith to sit with Notre Dame; protocol required him to sit with Army because it was the home team. Protocol prevailed. But not without Smith noting the dual demands on his affections: "I'll take my seat with Army," he said, "but I commend my soul to Notre Dame!"

Today, frankly, I'm happy I have no such problem: Both my seat and my soul are with Notre Dame. And as long as Father McBrien or Father Hesburgh doesn't invite me back to sit with him at the Notre Dame-St. John's basketball game, I'm confident my loyalties will remain undivided. And in a sense, it's a question of loyalty that Father McBrien has asked me here today to discuss. Specifically, must politics and religion in America divide our loyalties? Does the "separation between church and state" imply separation between religion and politics? Between morality and government? And are these different propositions? Even more specifically, what is the relationship of my Catholicism to my politics? Where does the one end and the other begin? Or are they divided at all? And if they're not, should they be?

These are hard questions. No wonder most of us in public life -- at least until recently -- preferred to stay away from them, heeding the biblical advice that if "hounded and pursued in one city," we should flee to another. Now, however, I think that it's too late to flee. The questions are all around us; the answers are coming from every quarter. Some of them have been simplistic; most of them fragmentary; and a few, spoken with a purely political intent, demagogic. There's been confusion and compounding of confusion, a blurring of the issue, entangling it in personalities and election strategies, instead of clarifying it for Catholics, as well as for others.

Today, I'd like to try -- just try -- to help correct that. And of course I can offer you no final truths, complete and unchallengeable. But it's possible that this one effort will provoke other efforts -- both in support and contradiction of my position -- that will help all of us to understand our differences and perhaps even discover some basic agreement. In the end, I am absolutely convinced that we will all benefit if suspicion is replaced by discussion, innuendo by dialogue, if the emphasis in our debate turns from a search for talismanic criteria and neat but simplistic answers to an honest, more intelligent attempt at describing the role that religion has in our public affairs, and the limits placed on that role. And if we do it right -- if we're not afraid of the truth even when the truth is complex -- this debate, by clarification, can bring relief to untold numbers of confused, even anguished Catholics, as well as to many others who want only to make our already great democracy even stronger than it is.

I believe the recent discussion in my own state has already produced some clearer definition. As you may know, in early summer an impression was created in some quarters that official Church spokespeople would ask Catholics to vote for or against specific candidates on the basis of their political position on the abortion issue alone. I was one of those that was given that impression. Thanks to the dialogue that ensued over the summer -- only partially reported by the media -- we learned that the impression was not accurate.



Confusion had presented an opportunity for clarification, and we seized it. Now all of us -- all of us are saying one thing, in chorus, reiterating the statement of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops that they will not take positions for or against specific political candidates, and that their stand -- the stand of the bishops and the cardinals -- on specific issues should not be perceived as an expression of political partisanship.

Now, of course the bishops will teach -- they must teach -- more and more vigorously, and more and more extensively. But they have said they will not use the power of their position, and the great respect it receives from all Catholics, to give an imprimatur to individual politicians or parties. Not that they couldn't do it if they wished to -- some religious leaders, as you know, do it. Some are doing it at this very moment. And not that it would be a sin if they did. God does not insist on political neutrality. But because it is the judgment of the bishops, and most of us Catholic laypeople, that it is not wise for prelates and politicians to be too closely tied together.

Now, I think that getting this consensus in New York was an extraordinarily useful achievement. And now, with some trepidation, I take up your gracious invitation to continue the dialogue in the hope that it will lead to still further clarification.

Let me begin this part of the effort by underscoring the obvious. I do not speak as a theologian; I don't have that competence. I do not speak as a philosopher; to suggest that I could, would be to set a new record for false pride. I don't presume to speak as a "good" person, except in the ontological sense of that word. My principal credential is that I serve in a position that forces me to wrestle with the problems that you've come here to study and to debate.

I am by training a lawyer and by practice a politician. Now, both those professions make me suspect in many quarters, including -- including some of my own coreligionists. Maybe there's no better illustration of the public perception of how politicians unite their faith and their profession than the story they tell in New York about "Fishhooks" McCarthy, a famous Democratic leader. (He actually lived.) "Fish Hooks" McCarthy lived on the Lower East Side. He was right-hand man to Al Smith, the prototypical political person of his time. "Fishhooks," the story goes, was devout. So devout that every morning on his way to Tammany Hall to do his political work, he stopped into St. James Church on Oliver Street in downtown Manhattan, fell on his knees, and whispered every morning the same simple prayer: "O, Lord, give me health and strength. We'll steal the rest."

"Fishhooks" notwithstanding, I speak here as a politician; and also as a Catholic, a layperson baptized and raised in the pre-Vatican II Church, educated in Catholic schools, attached to the Church first by birth, then by choice, now by love; an old-fashioned Catholic who sins, regrets, struggles, worries, gets confused, and most of the time feels better after confession. The Catholic Church is my spiritual home. My heart is there, and my hope.



But there is, of course, more to being a Catholic than a sense of spiritual and emotional resonance. Catholicism is a religion of the head as well as the heart, and to be a Catholic is to say, "I believe," to the essential core of dogmas that distinguishes our faith. The acceptance of this faith requires a lifelong struggle to understand it more fully and to live it more truly, to translate truth into experience, to practice as well as to believe. That's not easy: applying religious belief to everyday life often presents difficult challenges. And it's always been that way. It certainly is today. The America of the late twentieth century is a consumer society, filled with endless distractions, where faith is more often dismissed than challenged, where the ethnic and other loyalties that once fastened us to our religion seem to be weakening.

In addition to all the weaknesses, all the dilemmas, all the temptations that impede every pilgrim's progress, the Catholic who holds political office in a pluralistic democracy, a Catholic who is elected to serve Jews and Muslims and atheists and Protestants, as well as Catholics, bears special responsibility. He or she undertakes to help create conditions under which all can live with a maximum of dignity and with a reasonable degree of freedom; where everyone who chooses may hold beliefs different from specifically Catholic ones, sometimes even contradictory to them; where the laws protect people's right to divorce, their right to use birth control devices, and even to choose abortion.

In fact, Catholic public officials take an oath to preserve the Constitution that guarantees this freedom. And they do so gladly, not because they love what others do with their freedom, but because they realize that in guaranteeing freedom for all, they guarantee our right to be Catholics: our right to pray, our right to use the sacraments, to refuse birth control devices, to reject abortion, not to divorce and remarry if we believe it to be wrong.

The Catholic public official lives the political truth that most Catholics through most of American history have accepted and insisted on: the truth that 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. I protect my right to be a Catholic by preserving your right to be a Jew, or a Protestant, or a nonbeliever, or anything else you choose. We know that the price of seeking to force our belief on others is that they might someday force their belief on us.

Now, this freedom is the fundamental strength of our unique experiment in government. In the complex interplay of forces and considerations that go into the making of our law and policies, its preservation, the preservation of freedom, must be a pervasive and dominant concern.

But insistence on freedom is easier to accept as a general proposition than in its applications to specific situations because there are other valid general principles firmly embedded in our Constitution, which, operating at the same time, create interesting and occasionally troubling problems. Thus, the same amendment of the Constitution that forbids the establishment of a state church affirms my legal right to argue that my religious belief would serve well as an article of our universal public morality.



I may use the prescribed processes of government -- the legislative and executive and judicial processes -- to convince my fellow citizens, Jews and Protestants and Buddhists and nonbelievers, that what I propose is as beneficial for them as I believe it is for me. But it's not just parochial or narrowly sectarian but fulfills a human desire for order, for peace, for justice, for kindness, for love, for any of the values that most of us agree are desirable even apart from their specific religious base or context.

I'm free to argue for a governmental policy for a nuclear freeze not just to avoid sin, but because I think my democracy should regard it as a desirable goal. I can, if I wish, argue that the state should not fund the use of contraceptive devices not because the Pope demands it, but because I think that the whole community -- for the good of the whole community -- should not sever sex from an openness to the creation of life. And surely I can, if I am so inclined, demand some kind of law against abortion, not because my bishops say it is wrong, but because I think that the whole community, regardless of its religious beliefs, should agree on the importance of protecting life -- including life in the womb, which is at the very least potentially human and should not be extinguished casually.

Now, no law prevents us from advocating any of these things. I am free to do so. So are the bishops. So is Reverend Falwell. In fact, the Constitution guarantees my right to try. And theirs. And his.

But should I? Is it helpful? Is it essential to human dignity? Would it promote harmony and understanding? Or does it divide us so fundamentally that it threatens our ability to function as a pluralistic community? When should I argue to make my religious value your morality? My rule of conduct your limitation? What are the rules and policies that should influence the exercise of this right to argue and to promote?

Now, I believe I have a salvific mission as a Catholic. Does that mean I am in conscience required to do everything I can as governor to translate all of my religious values into the laws and regulations of the State of New York or of the United States? Or be branded a hypocrite if I don't? As a Catholic, I respect the teaching authority of my bishops. But must I agree with everything in the bishops' pastoral letter on peace and fight to include it in party platforms? And will I have to do the same for the forthcoming pastoral on economics even if I am an unrepentant supply-sider? Must I, having heard the pope once again renew the Church's ban on birth control devices as clearly as it's been done in modern times -- must I as governor veto the funding of contraceptive programs for non-Catholics or dissenting Catholics in my state? I accept the Church's teaching on abortion. Must I insist that you do by denying you Medicaid funding? By a constitutional amendment? And if by a constitutional amendment, which one? Would that be the best way to avoid abortions or to prevent them?

Now, these are only some of the questions for Catholics. People with other religious beliefs face similar problems. Let me try some answers.



Almost all Americans accept the religious values as a part of our public life. We are a religious people, many of us descended from ancestors who came here expressly to live their religious faith free from coercion or repression. But we are also a people of many religions, with no established church, who hold different beliefs on many matters. Our public morality, then -- the moral standards we maintain for everyone, not just the ones we insist on in our private lives -- depends on a consensus view of right and wrong. The values derived from religious belief will not -- and should not -- be accepted as part of the public morality unless they are shared by the pluralistic community at large, by consensus. So that the fact that values happen to be religious values does not deny them acceptability as part of this consensus. But it does not require their acceptability, either.

Think about it: The agnostics who joined the civil rights struggle were not deterred because that crusade's values had been nurtured and sustained in black Christian churches. And those on the political left are not perturbed today by the religious basis of the clergy and laypeople who join them in the protest against the arms race and hunger and exploitation.

The arguments start when religious values are used to support positions which would impose on other people restrictions that they find unacceptable. Some people do object to Catholic demands for an end to abortion, seeing it as a violation of the separation of church and state. And some others, while they have no compunction about invoking the authority of Catholic bishops in regard to birth control and abortion, might reject out of hand their teaching on war and peace and social policy.

Ultimately, therefore, what this means is that the question whether or not we admit religious values into our public affairs is too broad to yield to a single answer. Yes, we create our public morality through consensus and in this country that consensus reflects to some extent the religious values of a great majority of Americans. But no, all religiously based values don't have an a priori place in our public morality. The community must decide if what is being proposed would be better left to private discretion than public policy, whether it restricts freedoms, and if so to what end, to whose benefit, whether it will produce a good or bad result, whether overall it will help the community or merely divide it.

Now, the right answers to these terribly subtle and complex questions can be elusive. Some of the wrong answers, however, are quite clear. For example, there are those who say there is a simple answer to all these questions; they say that by history and by the practice of our people we were intended from the beginning to be -- and should be today -- a Christian country in law. But where would that leave the nonbelievers? And whose Christianity would be law, yours or mine? This "Christian nation" argument should concern -- even frighten -- two groups in this society: non-Christians and thinking Christians. And I believe it does.

I think it's already apparent that a good part of this nation understands -- if only instinctively -- that anything which seems to suggest that God favors a political party or the establishment of a state church is wrong and dangerous. Way down deep the American people are afraid of an entangling relationship between formal religions -- or whole bodies of religious belief -- and government. Apart from the constitutional law and apart from religious doctrine, there's a sense that tells us it's wrong to presume to speak for God or to claim God's sanction of our





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particular legislation and his rejection of all other positions. Most of us are offended when we see religion being trivialized by its appearance in political throwaway pamphlets. The American people need no course in philosophy or political science or Church history to know that God should not be made into a celestial party chairman.

To most of us, the manipulative invoking of religion to advance a politician or a party is frightening and divisive. The American public will tolerate religious leaders taking positions for or against candidates, although I think the Catholic bishops are right in avoiding that position. But the American people are leery about large religious organizations, powerful churches, or synagogue groups engaging in such activities -- again, not as a matter of law or doctrine, but because our innate wisdom and our democratic instinct teaches us these things are dangerous for both sides -- dangerous for the religious institution, dangerous for the rest of our society.

Now, today there are a number of issues involving life and death that raise questions of public morality. And they are also questions of concern to most religions. Pick up a newspaper -- almost any newspaper -- and you're almost certain to find a bitter controversy over any one of these questions: Baby Jane Doe, the right to die, artificial insemination, embryos in vitro, abortion, birth control -- not to mention nuclear war and the shadow that it throws across all of existence.

Now, some of these issues touch the most intimate recesses of our lives, our roles as someone's mother or child or husband; some affect women in a unique way. But they are also public questions, for all of us -- public questions, not just religious one[s]. Put aside what God expects. Assume, if you like, that there is no God. Say that the Supreme Court has taken God entirely out of our civics. Then the greatest thing still left to us, the greatest value available to us, would be life -- life itself. Even a radically secular world must struggle with the questions of when life begins, under what circumstances it can be ended, when it must be protected, by what authority; it, too, must decide what protection to extend to the helpless and the dying, to the aged and the unborn, to life in all of its phases.

Now, as a Catholic, I have accepted certain answers as the right ones for myself and for my family, and because I have, they have influenced me in special ways, as Matilda's husband, as a father of five children, as a son who stood next to his own father's deathbed trying to decide if the tubes and the needles no longer served a purpose. As a governor, however, I am involved in defining policies that determine other people's rights in these same areas of life and death. Abortion is one of these issues, and while it is only one issue among many, it is one of the most controversial and affects me in a special way as a Catholic public official. So let me spend a little time considering it.

I should start, I believe, by noting that the Catholic Church's actions with respect to the interplay of religious values and public policy make clear that there is no inflexible moral principle which determines what our political conduct should be. Think about it. On divorce and birth control, without changing its moral teaching, the Church abides the civil law as it now stands, thereby accepting -- without making much of a point of it -- that in our pluralistic society we are not required to insist that all our religious values be the law of the land.



The bishops are not demanding a constitutional amendment for birth control or on adultery.

Abortion is treated differently.

Of course there are differences both in degree and quality between abortion and some of the other religious positions that the Church takes: Abortion is a matter of life and death and degree counts. But the differences in approach reveal a truth, I think, that is not well enough perceived by Catholics and therefore still further complicates the process for us. That is, while we always owe our bishops' words respectful attention and careful consideration, the question whether to engage the political system in a struggle to have it adopt certain articles of our belief as part of the public morality is not a matter of doctrine. It is a matter of prudential political judgment. Recently, Michael Novak put it succinctly. "Religious judgment and political judgment are both needed," he wrote, "but they are not identical."

Now, my Church and my conscience require me to believe certain things about divorce, about birth control, about abortion. My Church does not order me -- under pain of sin or expulsion -- to pursue my salvific mission according to a precisely defined political plan. As a Catholic I accept the Church's teaching authority. And while in the past some Catholic theologians may appear to have disagreed on the morality of some abortions -- It wasn't, I think, until 1869 that excommunication was attached to all abortions without distinction -- and while some theologians may still disagree, I accept the bishops' position that abortion is to be avoided.

As Catholics, my wife and I were enjoined never to use abortion to destroy the life we created, and we never have. We thought Church doctrine was clear on this. And more than that, both of us felt it in full agreement with what our own hearts and our own consciences told us. For me, for Matilda, 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. A fetus is different from an appendix or a set of tonsils. At the very least, even if the argument is made by some scientists or theologians that in the early stages of fetal development we can't discern human life, the full potential of human life is indisputably there. That, to my less subtle mind, by itself is enough to demand respect, and caution, indeed reverence.

But not everyone in our society agrees with me and Matilda. And those who don't -- those who endorse legalized abortions -- aren't a ruthless, callous alliance of anti-Christians determined to overthrow our moral standards. In many cases, the proponents of legal abortion are the very people who have worked with Catholics to realize the goals of social justice set out by popes in encyclicals: the American Lutheran Church, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, B'nai B'rith Women, the Women of the Episcopal Church. And these are just a few of the religious organizations that don't share the Catholic Church's position on abortion.

Now, certainly, we should not be forced to mold Catholic morality to conform to disagreement by non-Catholics, however sincere they are, however severe their disagreement. Our bishops should be teachers, not pollsters. They should not change what we Catholics believe in order to ease our consciences or please our friends or protect the Church from criticism.





But if the breadth and intensity and sincerity of opposition to Church teaching shouldn't be allowed to shape our Catholic morality, it can't help but determine our ability -- our realistic, political ability -- to translate our Catholic morality into civil law, a law not for the believers who don't need it but for the disbelievers who reject it.

And it's here, in our attempt to find a political answer to abortion -- an answer beyond our private observance of Catholic morality -- that we encounter controversy within and without the Church over how and in what degree to press the case that our morality should be everybody else's morality. I repeat, there is no Church teaching that mandates the best political course for making our belief everyone's rule, for spreading this part of our Catholicism. There is neither an encyclical nor a catechism that spells out a political strategy for achieving legislative goals. And so the Catholic trying to make moral and prudent judgments in the political realm must discern which, if any, of the actions one could take would be best.

This latitude of judgment is not something new in our Catholic Church. It's not a development that has arisen only with the abortion issue. Take, for example, a very popular illustration -- and I heard about again tonight two or three times, and I'm told about often: the question of slavery. It has been argued that the failure to endorse a legal ban on abortions is equivalent to refusing to support the cause of abolition before the Civil War. This analogy has been advanced by bishops of my own state.

But the truth of the matter is, as I'm sure you know, few, if any, Catholic bishops spoke for abolition in the years before the Civil War. And it wasn't, I believe, that the bishops endorsed the idea of some humans owning and exploiting other humans. Not at all. Pope Gregory XVI, in 1840, had condemned the slave trade. Instead it was a practical political judgment that the bishops made. And they weren't hypocrites; they were realists. Remember, at the time, the Catholics were a small minority, mostly immigrants, despised by much of the population, often vilified and the object even of sporadic violence. In the face of a public controversy that aroused tremendous passions and threatened to break the country apart, the bishops made a pragmatic decision. They believed their opinion would not change people's minds. Moreover, they knew that there were Southern Catholics, even some priests, who owned slaves. They concluded that under the circumstances arguing for a constitutional amendment against slavery would do more harm than good, so they were silent -- as they have been, generally, in recent years, on the question of birth control, and as the Church has been on even more controversial issues in the past, even ones that dealt with life and death.

Now, what is relevant to this discussion is that the bishops were making judgments about translating Catholic teaching into public policy, not about the moral validity of the teachings. In so doing they grappled with the unique political complexities of their time. The decision they made to remain silent on a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery or on the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law wasn't a mark of their moral indifference. It was a measured attempt to balance moral truths against political realities. Their decision reflected their sense of complexity, not their diffidence. And as history reveals, Lincoln behaved with similar discretion.



Now, the parallel I want to draw here is not between or among what we Catholics believe to be moral wrongs. It is in the Catholic political response to those wrongs. Church teaching on abortion and slavery is clear. But in the application of those teachings -- the exact way we translate them into political action, the specific laws we propose, the exact legal sanctions we seek -- there was and is no one, clear, absolute route that the Church says, as a matter of doctrine, we must follow.

The bishops' pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace," speaks directly to this point. Quote: "We recognize," they wrote, "that the Church's teaching authority does not carry the same force when it deals with technical solutions involving particular means as it does when it speaks of principles or ends." With regard to abortion, the American bishops have had to weigh Catholic moral teaching against the fact of a pluralistic country where our view is in the minority, acknowledging that what is ideally desirable isn't always feasible, that there can be different political approaches to abortion beside unyielding adherence to an absolute prohibition.

This is in the American-Catholic tradition of political realism. In supporting or opposing specific legislation the Church in this country has never retreated into a moral fundamentalism that will settle for nothing less than total acceptance of its views. Indeed, the bishops have already confronted the fact that an absolute ban on abortion doesn't have the support necessary to be placed in the Constitution. The bishops agreed to that. In 1981, they put aside their earlier efforts to describe a law that they could accept and get passed, and supported the Hatch amendment instead. They changed their view. Some Catholics felt that the bishops had gone too far. You remember the discussion. Some Catholics felt that the bishops had not gone far enough. Such judgments weren't a rejection of the bishops' teaching authority. The bishops even disagreed among themselves about how to proceed. Catholics are allowed to disagree on their technical political questions without having to confess.

And so very respectfully, and after careful consideration of the position and the arguments of the bishops for a long time, I've concluded that the approach of a constitutional amendment is not the best way for us to seek to deal with abortion.

I believe that the legal interdicting of abortion by either the federal government or the individual states is not a plausible possibility and, even if it could be obtained, it wouldn't work. Given present attitudes, it would be Prohibition revisited, legislating what couldn't be enforced and in the process creating a disrespect for law in general. And as much as I admire the bishops' hope that a constitutional amendment against abortion would be the basis for a full, new bill of rights for mothers and children, I disagree, very respectfully, that that would be the result. I believe that, more likely, a constitutional prohibition -- which you can't get, but if you could -- would allow people to ignore the causes of many abortions instead of addressing them, addressing the causes much the way the death penalty is used to escape dealing more fundamentally and more rationally with the problem of violent crime.



Now, other legal options that have been proposed are, in my view, equally ineffective. The Hatch amendment, by returning the question of abortion to the various states, would have given us a checkerboard of permissive and restrictive jurisdictions. In some cases people might have been forced to go elsewhere to have abortions and that might have eased a few consciences here and there, but it would not have done what the Church wants to do -- it would not have created a deep-seated respect for life. Abortions would have gone on, millions of them.

Nor would a denial of Medicaid funding for abortion achieve our objectives. Given Roe against Wade, it would be nothing more than an attempt to do indirectly what the law says cannot be done directly; and worse than that, it would do it in a way that would burden only the already disadvantaged. Removing funding from the Medicaid program would not prevent the rich and middle classes from having abortions. It would not even assure that the disadvantaged wouldn't have them; it would only impose financial burdens on poor women who want abortions.

And apart from that unevenness, there's a more basic question. Medicaid is designed to deal with health and medical needs. But the arguments for the cutoff of Medicaid abortion funds are not related to those needs: They're moral arguments. If we assume that there are health and medical needs, our personal view of morality ought not to be considered a relevant basis for discrimination.

We must keep in mind always that we are a nation of laws -- when we like those laws and when we don't. The Supreme Court has established a woman's constitutional right to abortion -- whether we like it or not. The Congress has decided that the federal government doesn't have to provide federal funding, but that doesn't bind the states in the allocation of their own state funds. Under the law, the individual states need not follow the federal lead. And in New York -- I will speak only for New York, not for Indiana or any other state -- in New York I believe we cannot follow the federal lead. The equal protection clause in New York's constitution has been interpreted by courts as a standard of fairness that would preclude us from denying only the poor -- indirectly, by a cutoff of funds -- of the practical use of the constitutional right that's given to all women in Roe against Wade.

Look, in the end, even if after a long and divisive struggle we were able to remove all Medicaid funding for abortion and restore the law to what it was, even if we could put most abortions out of our sight, return them to the backrooms where they were performed for so long, I don't believe that our responsibility as Catholics would be any closer to being fulfilled than it is now, with abortion guaranteed as a right for women. The hard truth is that abortion is not a failure of government. No agency, no department of government forces women to have abortion[s], but abortions go on. Catholics, the statistics show, support the right to abortion in equal proportion to the rest of the population. Despite the teaching we've tried in our homes and our schools and our pulpits, despite the sermons and pleadings of parents and priests and prelates, despite all the efforts we've so far made at defining our opposition to what we call the "sin of abortion," collectively we Catholics apparently believe -- and perhaps act -- little differently from those who don't share our commitment.



Are we asking government to make criminal what we believe to be sinful because we ourselves can't stop committing the sin? The failure here is not Caesar's. The failure is our failure, the failure of the entire people of God.

Nobody has expressed this better than a bishop in my own state, \_\_\_\_\_, a man who works with the poor in New York City, a man who is resolutely opposed to abortion, and argues, with his fellow bishops, for a change of law. "The major problem the Church has is internal," the bishop said last month in reference to abortion. "How do we teach? As much as I think we're responsible for advocating public policy issues, our primary responsibility is to teach our own people. We have not done that. We are asking politicians to do what we have not done effectively ourselves."

I agree with bishop Sullivan. I think our moral and social mission as Catholics must begin with the wisdom contained in the words: "Physician, heal thyself." Unless we Catholics educate ourselves better to the values that define -- and can ennoble -- our lives, following those teachings better than we do now, unless we set an example that is clear and compelling, then we will never convince this society to change the civil laws to protect what we preach is precious human life. Better than any law, better than any rule, better than any threat of punishment would be the moving strength of our own good example, demonstrating our lack of hypocrisy, proving the beauty and worth of our instruction. We must work to find ways to avoid abortions without otherwise violating our faith. We should provide funds and opportunity for young women to bring their child to term, knowing both of them will be taken care of if that is necessary; we should teach our young men better than we do now their responsibilities in creating and caring for human life.

It is this duty of the Church to teach through its practice of love that Pope John Paul II has proclaimed so magnificently to all peoples. "The Church," he wrote in *Redemptor Hominis* [1979], "which has no weapons at her disposal apart from those of the Spirit, of the Word and of love, cannot renounce her proclamation of 'the word in season and out of season.' For this reason she does not cease to implore everybody in the name of God and in the name of man: Do not kill! Do not prepare destruction and extermination for each other! Think of your brothers and sisters who are suffering hunger and misery! Respect each one's dignity and freedom!" The weapons of the Word and of love are already available to us; we need no statute to provide them.

Now, I am not implying that we should stand by and pretend indifference to whether a woman takes a pregnancy to its conclusion or aborts it. I believe we should in all cases try to teach a respect for life. And I believe with regard to abortion that, despite *Roe against Wade*, we can, in practical, meaningful ways.

And here, in fact, it seems to me that all of us can agree. Without lessening their insistence on a woman's right to an abortion, the people who call themselves "pro-choice" can support the development of government programs that present an impoverished mother with the full range of support that she needs to bear and raise her children, to have a real choice.



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And without dropping their campaign to ban abortion, those who banner -- gather under the banner of "pro-life" can join in developing and enacting a legislative bill of rights for mothers and children, as the bishops have already proposed.

Remember this: While we argue over abortion, the United States' infant mortality rate places us sixteenth among the nations of the world. The United States, sixteenth among the nations of the world. Thousands of infants die each year because of inadequate medical care. Some are born with birth defects that, with proper treatment, could be prevented. Some are stunted in their physical and mental growth because of improper nutrition. If we want to prove our regard for life in the womb, for the helpless infant, if we care about women having real choices in their lives and not being driven to abortions by a sense of helplessness and despair about the future of their child, then there is work enough for all of us -- lifetimes of it.

In New York, we've put in place a number of programs to begin this work, assisting women in giving birth to healthy babies. This year we doubled Medicaid funding to private-care physicians for prenatal and delivery services. We already spend 20 million dollars a year for prenatal care in outpatient clinics and for inpatient hospital care. One program is a favorite of mine. We call it "New Avenues to Dignity." And it seeks to provide a teenage mother with the special services she needs to continue with her education, to train for a job, to become capable of standing on her own, to provide for herself and the child that she wants to bring into the world.

My dissent, then, from the contention that we can have effective and enforceable legal prohibitions on abortion is by no means an argument for religious quietism, for accepting the world's wrongs because that is our fate as "the poor banished children of Eve." I don't accept that.

Let me make another point. Abortion has a unique significance, but not a preemptive significance. Apart from the question of efficacy of using legal weapons to make people stop having abortions, we know that our Christian responsibility doesn't end with any one law or amendment. It doesn't end with abortion. Because it involves life and death, abortion will always be central in our -- in our concern, but so will nuclear weapons and hunger and homelessness and joblessness, all the forces diminishing human life and threatening to destroy it. The "seamless garment" that Cardinal Bernardin has spoken of is a challenge to all Catholics in public office, conservatives as well as liberals.

We cannot justify our aspiration to goodness as Catholics simply on the basis of the vigor of our demand for an elusive and questionable civil law declaring what we already know, that abortion is wrong. Approval or rejection of legal restrictions on abortion should not be the exclusive litmus test of Catholic loyalty. We should understand that whether abortion is outlawed or not, our work has barely begun: the work of creating a society where the right to life doesn't end at the moment of birth, where an infant isn't helped into a world that doesn't care if it's fed properly and housed decently and educated adequately, where the blind or retarded child isn't condemned to exist rather than empowered to live.



The bishops stated this duty clearly in 1974. They said that a constitutional amendment was only the beginning of what we had to do, and they were right. The bishops reaffirmed that view in 1976, in 1980, and again this year when the United States Catholic Committee asked Catholics to judge candidates on a wide range of issues -- not just abortion, but also on food policy, on the arms race, on human rights, on education, on social justice, and military expenditures. That's the bishops teaching us: "Consider all things." The bishops have been consistently pro-life and I respect them for that.

Ladies and gentlemen, the problems created by the matter of abortion are obviously complex and confounding. Nothing is clearer to me than my personal inadequacy to find compelling solutions to all of their moral, legal, and social implications. I, and many others like me, are eager for enlightenment, eager to learn new and better ways to manifest respect for the deep reverence for life, that deep reverence that is our religion and our instinct.

I hope that this public attempt to describe the problems as I understand them will give impetus to the dialogue in the Catholic community. I'm delighted to hear Father Hesburgh speak of an ongoing effort. However, it would be tragic if we let this dialogue over abortion become a prolonged, divisive argument that destroys or impairs our ability to practice any part of the morality given to us in the Sermon on the Mount, to touch, to heal, to affirm the human life that surrounds us. We Catholic citizens of the richest, most powerful nation that has ever existed are like the stewards made responsible over a great household: from those to whom so much has been given, much shall be required.

It is worth repeating that ours is not a faith that encourages its believers to stand apart from the world, seeking their salvation alone, separate from the salvation of those around them. We speak of ourselves as a body. We come together in worship as companions, in the ancient sense of that word, those who break bread together, and who are obliged by the commitment that we share to help one another, everywhere, in all that we do and, in the process, to help the whole human family. We see our mission to be "the completion of the work of creation."

And this is difficult work today. It presents us with many hard choices. The Catholic Church has come of age in America. The ghetto walls are gone, our religion is no longer a badge of irredeemable foreignness. And our newfound status is both an opportunity and a temptation. If we choose, we can give in to the temptation to become more and more assimilated into a larger, blander culture, abandoning the practice of the specific values that made us different, worshiping whatever gods the marketplace has to sell while we seek to rationalize our own laxity by urging the political system to legislate upon others a morality that we no longer practice ourselves.

Or we have another choice: We can remember where we come from, the journey of two millennia. We can cling to our personal faith, to its insistence on constancy and service and example and hope. We can live and practice the morality that Christ gave us, maintaining His truth in this world, struggling to embody His love, practicing it especially where that love is most needed, among the poor and the weak and the dispossessed -- not just by trying to make laws for other people to live by, but by living the laws already written for us by God, in our minds and in our hearts.





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We can be fully Catholic, proudly, totally at ease with ourselves, a people in the world, transforming it, a light to this nation, appealing to the best in our people and not the worst. Persuading, not coercing. Leading people to truth by love. And still, all the while, respecting and enjoying our unique pluralistic democracy. And we can do it even as politicians.

Thank you for listening.