

AN OPEN LETTER TO SENATOR JOSEPH BIDEN



KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR LIFE

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Dear Senator Biden:

I write to you today as a fellow Catholic layman, on a subject that has become a major topic of concern in this year's presidential campaign.

The bishops who have taken public issue with your remarks on the Church's historical position on abortion are far from alone. Senator Obama stressed your Catholic identity repeatedly when he introduced you as his running mate, and so your statements carry considerable weight, whether they are correct or not. You now have a unique responsibility when you make public statements about Catholic teaching.

On NBC's *Meet the Press*, you appealed to the 13th Century writings of St. Thomas Aquinas to cast doubt on the consistent teaching of the Catholic Church on abortion.

There are several problems with this.

First, Aquinas obviously had only a medieval understanding of biology, and thus could only speculate about how an unborn child develops in the womb. I doubt that there is any other area of public policy where you would appeal to a 13th Century knowledge of biology as the basis for modern law.

Second, Aquinas' *theological* view is in any case entirely consistent with the long history of Catholic Church teaching in this area, holding that abortion is a grave sin to be avoided at any time during pregnancy.

This teaching dates all the way back to the Didache, written in the second century. It is found in the writings of Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine and Aquinas, and was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which described abortion as "an unspeakable crime" and held that the right to life must be protected from the "moment of conception." This consistent teaching was restated most recently last month in the response of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to remarks by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Statements that suggest that our Church has anything less than a consistent teaching on abortion are not merely incorrect; they may lead Catholic women facing crisis pregnancies to misunderstand the moral gravity of an abortion decision.

Neither should a discussion about a medieval understanding of the first few days or weeks of life be allowed to draw attention away from the remaining portion of an unborn child's life. In those months, even ancient and medieval doctors agreed that a child is developing in the womb.

And as you are well aware, *Roe v. Wade* allows for abortion at *any* point during a pregnancy. While you voted for the ban on partial birth abortions, your unconditional support for *Roe* is a *de facto* endorsement of permitting all other late term abortions, and thus calls into question your appeal to Aquinas.

I recognize that you struggle with your conscience on the issue, and have said that you accept the Church's teaching that life begins at conception – as a matter of *faith*. But modern medical science leaves no doubt about the fact that each person's life begins at conception. It is not a matter of personal religious belief, but of *science*.

Finally, your unwillingness to bring your Catholic moral views into the public policy arena *on this issue alone* is troubling.

There were several remarkable ironies in your first appearance as Senator Obama's running mate on the steps of the old state capitol in Springfield, Illinois.

His selection as the first black American to be the nominee of a major party for president of the United States owes an incalculable debt to two movements that were led by people whose religious convictions motivated them to confront the moral evils of their day – the abolitionist movement of the 19th Century, and the civil rights movement of the 20th Century.

Your rally in Springfield took place just a mile or so from the tomb of Abraham Lincoln, who in April 1859 wrote these words in a letter to Henry Pierce:

"This is a world of compensations; and he who would *be* no slave, must consent to *have* no slave. Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, cannot long retain it."

Lincoln fought slavery in the name of "a just God" without embarrassment or apology. He confronted an America in which black Americans were not considered "persons" under the law, and were thus not entitled to fundamental Constitutional rights. Today, children of all races who are fully viable and only minutes from being born are also denied recognition as "persons" because of the *Roe v. Wade* regime that you so strongly support. Lincoln's reasoning regarding slavery applies with equal force to children who are minutes, hours or days away from birth.

The American founders began our great national quest for liberty by declaring that we are all "created equal." It took nearly a century to transform that bold statement into the letter of the law, and another century still to make it a reality. The founders believed that we are "endowed by [our] Creator with certain unalienable rights," and that first among these is "life."

You have a choice: you can listen to your conscience and work to secure the rights of the unborn to share in the fruits of our hard-won liberty, or you can choose to turn your back on them.

On behalf of the 1.28 million members of the Knights of Columbus and their families in the United States, I appeal to you, as a Catholic who acknowledges that life begins at conception, to resolve to protect this unalienable right. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues personally with you in greater detail during the weeks between now and November 4.

Respectfully,

Carl A. Anderson

Carl A. Anderson
Supreme Knight