



**A STATEMENT OF LOUISIANA'S CATHOLIC BISHOPS
ON
ANTI-ABORTION LEGISLATION
1991 SESSION**

The witness of Holy Scripture and the ringing words of the Declaration of Independence converge on this abiding truth: Human life is a precious gift from God.

The book of Genesis tells us that creation becomes “very good” with God’s loving creation of the human person. Furthermore, the human person is unique in dignity because the very life breath of God is present in the being made in His Divine image and likeness. Human life is sacred because all life originates in God and is destined to be united with Him for all eternity.

Science, too, recognizes, as the Church does, that life begins at the point of conception, not after nine months when natural birth occurs. The California Medical Association Journal said in 1970 – three years before the United States Supreme Court’s abortion-on-demand decision – that it is a “scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous whether intra- or extra- uterine until death.”

The dignity of the human person is recognized in the Declaration of Independence as an “unalienable right” with which “all men are endowed by their Creator.” Government, said Thomas Jefferson, has the responsibility to protect and enhance life: “The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government.”

Today, the primary life issue is abortion, which takes the lives of 1.6 million unborn children annually in the United States, 15,000 of them in Louisiana. Professional polls indicate that a clear majority of Americans are opposed to abortion on demand, and a national consensus has developed that restrictions on abortion are in order. Court decisions indicate that states now have the authority to enact such restrictions.

The Catholic community and those of all faiths who oppose abortion – indeed, all persons of good will who are concerned for the protection of human life – must act immediately on legislation which will pass through the window of opportunity which has been opened by the courts. We believe it is imperative that the Louisiana Legislature pass anti-abortion legislation at its 1991 session, even if a passable, though imperfect, bill must contain limited exceptions in the case of rape and incest, as well as to protect the life of the mother.

It should be noted that in the last annual report of the State of Louisiana (1988) only two cases cited rape or incest as the reason for the abortion. We would have saved 15,365 lives in 1988 even with an imperfect law.

The question of a less than perfect law was addressed this past summer by Cardinal John J. O’Connor, one of the leading pro-life voices in the United States. He said:

“The conflict over imperfect law has definitely been divisive to the pro-life movement. It seems to me that our goal must always be to advance protection for the unborn child to the maximum degree possible. It certainly seems to me, however, that in cases in which perfect legislation is clearly impossible, it is morally acceptable to support a pro-life bill, however reluctantly, that contains exceptions if the following conditions prevail:

(continued)

“A. There is no other feasible bill restricting existing permissive abortion laws to a greater degree than the proposed bill;

“B. The proposed bill is more restrictive than existing law, that is, the bill does not weaken the current law’s restraints on abortion; and

“C. The proposed bill does not negate the responsibility of future, more restrictive laws.”

We agree with Cardinal O’Connor’s analysis and believe that the three conditions cited for support of an imperfect law exist at the present time in Louisiana. We will support legislation which contains limited exceptions for rape and incest and for protection of the life of the mother in order to save the maximum number of children who otherwise would be aborted.

The position we take today is the same as it was last July 9 when we supported a limited exceptions bill after the more restrictive bill of the 1990 session failed. A year ago we commended all who worked on the two major pieces of legislation of 1990, a commendation we now reiterate as the fight-for-life continues.

We must unite, in the name of life, to protect as many unborn children as possible while continuing, through the legislative process and in the courts where necessary, to win, ultimately, the right to life for every child.

We pledge ourselves to work to that end as we reaffirm our total commitment to the dignity of the human person and the sovereignty of God as the Lord of all life. We pledge further to work on behalf of life to change those cultural values and structures which attack this gift of life, with which “all men are endowed by their Creator.”

Finally, we once again call attention to the fact that Louisiana is a “pro-life” state, having taken numerous steps since 1973 to stem the tide of abortions. As we said a year ago:

“Legislators (in Louisiana) have recognized that there is no moral or constitutional ‘right’ to abort a child, though compassion and understanding must be exercised toward those driven to such a dreadful decision. We also must provide all appropriate assistance to women so that they may avail themselves of alternatives to abortion.”

ARCHBISHOP FRANCIS B. SCHULTE
ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW ORLEANS

BISHOP WILLIAM B. FRIEND
DIOCESE OF SHREVEPORT

BISHOP SAM JACOBS
DIOCESE OF ALEXANDRIA

BISHOP WARREN L. BOUDREAUX
DIOCESE OF HOUMA-THIBODAUX

BISHOP HARRY J. FLYNN
DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE

BISHOP JUDE SPEYRER
DIOCESE OF LAKE CHARLES

BISHOP ROBERT W. MUENCH, AUXILIARY
ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW ORLEANS

BISHOP STANLEY J. OTT
DIOCESE OF BATON ROUGE

ARCHBISHOP PHILIP M. HANNAN (RET.)
ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW ORLEANS

LOUISIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
1991