

# Life Insight

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## Cardinal William H. Keeler: Statement on Respect Life Sunday – October 2, 2005

*On Respect Life Sunday we reflect on God's priceless gift of human life. We acknowledge with gratitude the many blessings we enjoy as creatures made in the image of God – our capacity to make moral choices, to know and love God and serve one another.*

*On this day we also take stock of our nation's progress in fostering a culture where every human life is respected and defended. Here, the outlook is decidedly mixed.*

*Advances in science and technology have added years to the average lifespan. Yet our Supreme Court will soon rule on whether Oregon physicians may demand access to federally-controlled drugs so they can assist the suicides of sick and elderly patients.*

*Researchers are unlocking the secrets of the human genome and human stem cells with promising therapeutic results. Stem cells from adult tissues and umbilical cord blood can now treat dozens of diseases and may soon treat many more. Still, some persist in pursuing immoral and speculative research using stem cells obtained by killing developing humans in their first week of life.*

*Reproductive medicine has allowed more couples to overcome barriers to having children of their own. But one reproductive technology, in vitro fertilization, is now best known for its tendency to produce "spare" embryos who are frozen and sometimes destroyed for research. And some fertility specialists today sort (and reject) embryonic humans to eliminate those with identifiable "defects" – or simply with traits the parents do not prefer.*

*A profitable niche of the pharmaceutical industry invents ever new ways to block human reproductive capacity, including drugs and devices that may interfere with the survival of a new human life after it has begun.*

*In short, the "healing arts" are moving beyond the field of healing and into an ethical minefield, where technical knowledge can be used as much to demean life as to serve it.*

*As Catholics we know that the truth of human life is infinitely greater than any narrow view that dismisses some lives as disposable. "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution," Pope Benedict pointed out at his Inaugural Mass. "Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."*

*The truth that human life has a purpose, given by its Creator, has been a bedrock of Western civilization. This conviction animated our country's founding documents.*

*God's creative and sustaining love for every human being is the one sure source of human dignity and freedom. His love for us is the fundamental reason why every human life must be valued and defended. It is not possible to maintain a community of justice, freedom, and solidarity built on any other foundation.*

*On October 2, 2005, Respect Life Sunday, please join me in thanking God for the great gift of life, and join me in pledging to do the utmost in the coming year to promote a culture which fully honors the dignity and right to life of every individual.*

## 2005-2006 Respect Life Program Honors the Pro-life Legacy of Pope John Paul II

Within days of the tenth anniversary of his encyclical letter *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II returned to the Father's house. On the strength of this encyclical alone, John Paul might have earned the title "Apostle of Life." In fact, *The Gospel of Life* crowned a half-century of speeches, writings and heroic personal witness testifying to the dignity and inviolability of every human life, no matter how old or young, healthy or sick, unformed or disabled. In the final decade of his life, his witness shone all the brighter as he conveyed the value of life even in suffering, frailty and imminent death. It is fitting that the 2005-2006 Respect Life Program of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is a tribute to this great Apostle of Life.

The program's theme is adapted from John Paul's December 8, 2004 prayer to the mother of God: "Help build a world where human life is always loved and defended, every form of violence banished." It is not enough to respect life in principle; each of us must translate that respect into caring acts and public advocacy.

This year's Respect Life flyer looks at certain cultural attitudes which put vulnerable lives at risk: extreme personal autonomy and moral relativism, the notion that there are lives unworthy of living (where have we heard that before?), and the desire to avoid suffering at all costs. We must remind the world that human beings have "a sublime dignity, based on the intimate bond which unites" us to our Creator. The antidote to this cultural malaise is to take up the cross in our own lives, "loving others to the point that we die to our pride and selfishness, our tendency to view others as obstacles or things to be used."

An article by Helen M. Alvare, Esq., professor at Catholic University's Columbus School of Law, revisits the central themes of the encyclical in "*The Gospel of Life* and

Its Great Exemplar.” In coining the term “culture of death,” John Paul drew attention to the relationship between a distorted notion of human freedom and the nature of modern attacks on human life. The very institutions whose purpose is to defend vulnerable human lives – the family, medical profession, and the state – are today, in the name of “freedom” and “choice,” colluding in killing those who lack the means of self-defense. “Achieving authentic freedom,” Professor Alvarez notes, “requires respecting the truth about human life,” including the inherently relational aspect of human nature. We cannot thrive in isolation, but find true meaning in our lives through giving and receiving love. Without solidarity, freedom ends up becoming the freedom of “the strong” against “the weak, who have no choice but to submit.” Every other person becomes a stranger, if not an enemy, an obstacle in the path of our self-realization.

John Paul assures us that, through both reason and faith, we can know that the common good is served by upholding the good of every individual. History has shown that no human life is secure in a society that considers some lives less than human. John Paul concludes *The Gospel of Life* by urging us to help build a culture that respects and protects human life by the witness of our lives, through public advocacy and, above all, prayer.

Rev. J. Daniel Mindling, O.F.M. Cap., academic dean at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, recapitulates John Paul’s teachings on end of life issues in “Pope John Paul II: Dying with Dignity.” The late pontiff spoke eloquently and often on the dignity and value of human life in its final stage. He spoke against assisted suicide and euthanasia, including the denial of food and water to those who are not imminently dying. At the same time, he defended the right of the dying to forego aggressive treatment that “is ineffective or obviously disproportionate to the aims of sustaining life or recovering health.” Above all, John Paul urged us to show true compassion to the dying, which means sharing another’s pain, not killing the person whose suffering we cannot bear. “The terminally ill in particular deserve the solidarity, communion and affection of those around them.”

In *The Gospel of Life*, John Paul broke new ground by deepening our understanding of why the Church opposes use of the death penalty whenever society can be protected without resorting to such lethal measures. Drawing on the story of Cain and Abel, John Paul reminded us that God spared Cain’s life and marked him so others would do the same. The Archbishop of Denver, Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., in an article entitled “Justice, Mercy and Capital Punishment,” explains that it is more in keeping with the dignity of the human person and the common good that the state refrain from using the death penalty under all but the most extreme (practically nonexistent) circumstances. Archbishop Chaput writes:

*“Killing the guilty is still the wrong choice for a civilized nation. Why? It accomplishes nothing. It does not bring back or even honor the dead. It does not ennoble the living. And while it may satisfy society’s anger for awhile,*

*it cannot even release the murder victim’s loved ones from their sorrow. Only forgiveness can do that.”*

Archbishop Chaput adds that “punishment should not only seek to redress wrong and protect society. It should also encourage the possibility of repentance, restitution and rehabilitation on the part of the criminal.”

In “Contraception and Abortion: The Underlying Link,” Rev. Walter J. Schu, L.C. debunks the fallacy that increased contraceptive use lowers abortion rates. He then explores the anthropological, physical and social links between contraceptive use and abortion.

*“Behind the contraceptive mentality,”* he writes, *“looms a materialistic concept of the human body as an object that can be manipulated. ... Sexual intercourse tends to be reduced from an act of personal self-giving to one of mutual sensual gratification freed from any tie to responsibility to new life.”*

Is it any wonder, then, that when contraception fails, abortion often follows?

The physical links between contraception and abortion are particularly clear in the case of “morning after pills.” The scientific literature lists eleven possible modes of action for emergency contraception, seven of which can be abortifacient, that is, designed to prevent the implantation or survival of the embryo. [H. Croxatto, *et al.*, *Mechanism of action of hormonal preparations used for emergency contraception: a review of the literature*, 63 *Contraception* 111-21 (2001) at 111.]

The availability of contraception has had a profound social impact. According to a Nobel-prize winning economist cited by Fr. Schu, “the sexual revolution left traditional and moderate women ... unable to compete with women who had no serious objection to premarital sex. If a woman did get pregnant, she could no longer elicit a promise of marriage.” Her only alternatives at that point were bearing a child out of wedlock, or abortion.

John Paul II gave us an antidote to the contraceptive mentality, and defended the truth of natural family planning, through his theology of the body. This *“total vision of the human person ... makes it possible to understand in all their depth and beauty the Church’s teachings on marital love and procreation. Every act of conjugal union is an expression of the spouses’ complete self-giving to one another and acceptance of each other in their fullness as persons. This self-giving love is fruitful, both in the union of the couple in ‘one flesh’ and in its openness to new life. It images the fruitful love of the Trinity,”* Fr. Schu writes.

An article entitled “Genetic Enhancement: Custom Kids and Chimeras,” authored by Marilyn E. Coors, Ph.D., demonstrates that John Paul was ahead of his time in exploring the potential benefits and ethical pitfalls in the field of genetic enhancement. In 1983 “he endorsed therapeutic interventions such as those affecting ‘chromosomal deficiencies’ when the intervention promotes well-being, and does not harm the biological integrity of the human person or cause increased suffering.” At the same time, he warned about interventions that might so alter human traits that they compromise the integrity of

humans and cause greater marginalization of genetic “have-nots.” He warned against reducing human beings to a materialist “Genes-R-Us” mentality – treating children like commodities one can reject if genetically imperfect, or like custom products one can design.

Lastly, in “*Roe v. Reason*,” Richard Stith, J.D., Ph.D., a Valparaiso University law professor, condemns the *Roe v. Wade* decision for its abandonment of *reason* as much as its abandonment of constitutional law. Professor Stith reminds us that the *Roe* Court claimed agnosticism (and ignored scientific evidence) regarding the beginning of each human life at fertilization. Instead, the Court stipulated that we couldn’t know, before the bright line of birth, if we are dealing with a human being entitled to the protection of law. Professor Stith notes the irony in the Supreme Court’s 2000 decision upholding partial-birth abortion (*Stenberg v. Carhart*). Justices Ginsburg and Stevens declared it “simply irrational” to think the location of the child (inside or outside the womb) when he or she is killed should matter, yet this distinction was central to *Roe*.

Respect Life flyers, articles, clip art, liturgy guide, and poster can be purchased separately or in an attractive kit folder by calling toll free: (866) 582-0943. Materials in English and Spanish also can be downloaded at [www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/rlp0506.htm](http://www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/rlp0506.htm).

## Pro-Choice Pundits Take a Second Look

What’s going on at *The Washington Post*? Recently this predictable well-spring of pro-choice thinking ran an op-ed by longtime *Post* columnist Richard Cohen questioning the legitimacy of the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision. This is the third time since January that *Post* commentators have taken on *Roe* and its flaws.

Appearing as they do in a newspaper known for its staunch support of the abortion license, recent *Post* op-eds seem to reflect a dramatic shift in cultural attitudes.

A nation that has more or less acquiesced in *Roe* – out of ignorance of its extremism, respect for federal courts, and a desire to be nonjudgmental – has awakened in recent years to three realities. If *Roe* means that partial-birth abortion must be legal, *Roe* is far worse than once thought. If abortion cheapens life and hurts women, maybe it’s not a “tolerable evil,” but just plain evil. If the Supreme Court’s adherence to *Roe* prevents restricting abortion in ways that 70% of Americans favor, maybe *Roe* has to go.

Thanks to the Internet and several effective media campaigns, the constitutional objections to *Roe* have finally made the leap from scholarly journals and pro-life literature to widely read websites, the great blogosphere, and even the mainstream media. Three campaigns by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops – *Roe* Reality Checks, the Second Look Project (“Abortion: Have we gone too far?”), and End the *Roe* Litmus Test – have no doubt prompted some to consider abortion in a new light.

[Note: *Roe* Reality Checks can be found at [www.usccb.org/prolife/realitycheck.htm](http://www.usccb.org/prolife/realitycheck.htm) and will soon be available from the Pro-Life Secretariat, compiled in an

attractive booklet for easy distribution in parishes and elsewhere; phone (866) 582-0943. Visit [www.secondlookproject.org](http://www.secondlookproject.org) and [www.EndRoe.org](http://www.EndRoe.org) for more information on these initiatives.]

After 32 years, pro-choice commentators like Benjamin Wittes (*Washington Post* legal affairs analyst), Charles Krauthammer and Richard Cohen are taking a second look at *Roe*.

The thesis of Wittes’ article, “Letting Go of *Roe*” (*The Atlantic Monthly*, Jan. 2005), is: “The Democratic Party’s commitment to preserving *Roe v. Wade* has been deeply unhealthy for abortion rights, for liberalism more generally, and ultimately for American democracy.”

Wittes remains strongly committed to legal abortion, but he candidly notes *Roe*’s detrimental effects on the sociopolitical life of our nation, and predicted that the judicial “nomination process will become an ugly spectacle in which a single narrow issue pushes to the sidelines discussion of the broad array of other important legal questions the Supreme Court handles.” Abortion supporters define “fitness” for the bench as pledging allegiance to the *Roe* litmus test. Any nominee seen as a likely threat to that woeful case is branded “unfit,” “out of the mainstream,” “extremist.”

Wittes concedes that *Roe*, by striking down 50 state laws on abortion and taking the issue out of the hands of legislatures, is a profoundly anti-democratic decision. The disenfranchisement of millions of pro-life Americans has led to a distrust of the courts, and a permanent aggrieved constituency which refuses to accept as settled an immoral and over-reaching decision.

Wittes boldly attacks the heart of *Roe*:  
“*Since its inception Roe has had a deep legitimacy problem, stemming from its weakness as a legal opinion. Conservatives who fulminate that the Court made up the right to abortion, which appears explicitly nowhere in the Constitution, are ... not entirely wrong. In the years since the decision an enormous body of academic literature has tried to put the right to an abortion on firmer legal ground. But thousands of pages of scholarship notwithstanding, the right to abortion remains constitutionally shaky; abortion policy is a question that the Constitution—even broadly construed—cannot convincingly be read to resolve.*”

Charles Krauthammer, a syndicated columnist carried in *The Washington Post*, reiterated his pro-choice convictions in a May 13, 2005 column attacking the “historically unprecedented” filibuster of judicial nominees. He added that “*Roe v. Wade* is a travesty – an extreme case of judicial arrogance and constitutional invention – worthy of repeal.”

In a July 8, 2005 column, Krauthammer critiques Justice O’Connor’s predilection for unpredictable and “pragmatic” adjudication. He argues that the Court, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, abandoned *Roe*’s flawed “privacy” basis for abortion for something even worse: “a supremely infelicitous definition of the liberty clause that is not just comically cosmic but infinitely elastic.” This was the infamous formula: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the

universe, and of the mystery of human life.” Taken at face value, this means any law can be trumped by actions based on one’s personal concept of existence, life meaning, etc. Yet I am fairly certain that a state trooper will still ticket me for going 80 mph even if I sweetly explain that speed gives my life meaning.

In an October 7 column (“Retreat”), Krauthammer again cited “the most egregious example” of the Court’s exercising “raw super-legislative power,” “the court’s most intellectually bankrupt ruling, *Roe v. Wade*.”

Richard Cohen, the latest *Post* writer to comment unfavorably on *Roe*, now acknowledges that abortion is not just “a matter of personal privacy. ... It entails questions about life.” Seriously, the angels in heaven rejoice, and so should we, when minds and hearts open up (at least partially) to the truth about abortion and unborn life.

And Mr. Cohen is not the only one in his circle of friends and colleagues who has evolved:

*“I know plenty of people who no longer think of it [abortion] as a minor procedure that only prudes and right-wingers oppose. The anti-abortion movement has made headway.*

*“The shift in sentiment is not apparent in polls because they do not measure doubt, only position: for or against. But between one and the other, black or white, is a vast gray area where ... yes or no, fades to questions about circumstance: Why, what month, etc.? ... [The] very basis of the Roe v. Wade decision – the one that grounds abortion rights in the Constitution – strikes many people now as faintly ridiculous. Whatever abortion may be, it cannot simply be a matter of privacy.”*

Cohen himself recently saw the folly of a “privacy” right large enough to encompass abortion, due to Princeton

professor Robert George’s argument that such an ill-defined right would also have to encompass recreational drug use and prostitution.

Mainstream pro-choice commentators have also noticed, if somewhat belatedly, that the Constitution vests legislative powers in the states and Congress, *not* in the Supreme Court. So they suggest that the matter of abortion should be returned to the States, where it would better reflect the will of the American people. But we know the American people do not support the virtually unlimited abortion license demanded by *Roe*.

Be encouraged that such prominent members of the pundit class have grown weary of defending the morally and constitutionally indefensible abortion decisions. Be encouraged that *The Washington Post* calculated it would lose little by running these commentaries. Let’s keep reminding people how wrong and how flawed *Roe* is, until it is no more.

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