

FROM THE PRESIDENT

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POPULAR MOVEMENTS, PUBLIC POLICY, AND PATIENCE



lessons are in store for those who pursue a multi-issue agenda.) One can not be an effective pro-lifer unless one comes to terms with slow progress. Service in the pro-life cause means signing up for the duration.

The common tendency of new recruits to the cause is to succumb to the "angelic fallacy." Having been educated about the biological facts and the legal, moral, and ethical principles that dictate a pro-life stance, they became pro-lifers. Is it then not reasonable for them to expect that an intensive education campaign will *quickly* lead to mass conversions to the right to life cause? Unfortunately, it won't. If people were angels they would quickly proceed from learning the facts and principles to action and behavior consistent with them. But people can stubbornly refuse to act as truth would dictate. They are not angels; and it is a fallacy to expect them to act like angels. (Hence the term "angelic fallacy.")

To adhere to the "angelic fallacy" is a straight road to disappointment, burnout, and withdrawal from the public arena to the personal or local sphere: If people are shown the right way and refuse to follow it, what is the point? If years of struggle show so little progress, why continue? If they won't listen to the truth, of what use is all my talking to them? I'll wash my hands of them. I'm through trying to change public policy and someone else's private conduct. I'm going home. Haven't you—in moments of fatigue or disappointment—been tempted to feel this way?

Of course, being a pro-lifer is not like being a player in a game. You can't just take your ball and go home. This is real life, not a game. You are in this not for personal amusement; you are in this for

something else. You saw God's image in the unborn child and you joined the cause; you can't desert now. There is no way back from engaged struggle to detached comfort without abandoning the just cause. That's why you hang in there; that's why you are patient. Besides, victory will be ours!

CHANGING HEARTS AND SAVING LIVES WITH PUBLIC POLICY

Since the debate about abortion is about right and wrong, it is tempting to consider the change of "public" morality through changes of public policy and laws as secondary to a change in "personal" morality. In reality, changes in public policy and law play a fundamental role for the success of the right to life movement.

First, if public policy and laws were so unimportant for personal conduct, our pro-abortion opponents wouldn't so frantically resist *every* effort on our part to bend public policy in the pro-life direction. Our opponents know that "the law teaches." And, currently, abortion on demand is legal and hence in the eyes of many also "moral"—or at least "O.K." Rational public policy and sound law, however, would recognize that abortion is the killing of an innocent human being and must be suppressed like any other crime.

This is the reason why our opponents keep repeating the false claim that abortion is "intensely personal" and, therefore, beyond the reach of public policy and law. Thus if pro-lifers were to withdraw from the formulation of public policy they would not only abandon the powerful tool of "teaching through law" but come close to agreeing with the pro-abortionists that abortion is a

purely personal matter. This would be very bad strategy.

In the eyes of some weary and impatient pro-lifers, our efforts to change public policy and law have had only modest success. Not so in the eyes of the pro-abortionists! They know that our educational efforts in the pursuit of rational public policy and sound law have had a profound effect: Abortion rates are down, public support for abortion on demand has declined (especially as a result of our partial-birth abortion campaign), and the credibility of the pro-abortionists has collapsed. The "conflicted middle" in the public opinion spectrum is more and more leaning in our direction. That is why the pro-abortionists want to cut off the debate about laws and public policy by endlessly repeating that abortion is "intensely personal."

Second, far from being purely personal, abortion is at a minimum a matter between *two* people—one of whom ends up dead. Thus, even if public policy and the law failed to change the mother's heart, there is still the need for the law to save the life of the innocent child. The law not only teaches, it also *restrains* those who reject its moral teachings. While it is desirable that those who want to abort the child (or participate in or even profit from the abortion) have a change of heart, restraining and impeding them in order to save the child is the foremost goal.

The pro-lifer's goal is to do both: change hearts and minds and protect the lives of the innocent. Establishing pro-life public policies and laws is the foremost tool to reach that goal. Stay the course!

For the pro-life movement to be successful it must be a popular movement. Beyond strongly committed pro-lifers, it must attract enough support from the middle of the popular spectrum so that the legal protection of human life becomes national policy once again. To build as large a base of support as possible the movement must focus on the right to life as a single issue and be nonpartisan and ecumenical. (A diffuse, multi-issue "focus" invites disagreement and infighting, etc.) To make the movement effective, individual action and energy at the grassroots level must be coordinated and amplified with a national strategy. For the strategy to succeed in the face of determined and powerful opposition, it must include carefully designed intermediate steps that overcome and outflank the opposition on the way toward the ultimate goal. Adhering to these very principles has made NRLC successful in the service of the right to life cause.

HARD LESSONS AND THE "ANGELIC FALLACY"

The hard lesson most pro-lifers had to learn was that reversals (such as *Roe v. Wade*) can come quickly while progress can be discouragingly slow. (But just think how many more hard