

ANTI-ABORTION POLITICS AND THE VICTIMS' ARMY

A Fourth of July Oration

by

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“And Justice for All” Rally

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This Fourth of July comes upon us with unexpected recognition that the obligation to fight for liberty outpaces the temptation to celebrate liberty. Our nation promises security for the rights of persons and property. That is the portion our forebears willed to us at the cost of enormous personal sacrifice. They resisted the implications of tyranny, not out of ideological fervor, but as the duty imposed by God on those who would justify themselves in His eyes. Their efforts conceived a political life dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, endowed by our Creator with rights to life and liberty.

Today the healthy growth and development of the political life created by the founders is undergoing a severe test. A growing army of victims to the systematic and legally enforced denial of the right to life accusingly present mute testimony that we are but political bastards and not true flesh of the founding flesh, blood of the providential blood that watered the tree of liberty.

Legions of unborn children, assassinated in the name of personal liberty, condemn us for what we have become—the prodigal heirs of an unmerited political salvation. Today we can redeem ourselves, and merit the blessings of liberty, only to the extent that we participate with that army of victims in a holy crusade to restore the right to life as the first foundation of political liberty. Our own lives may not be considered secure in guiltless reliance upon the rule of law, until we shall have completely and effectively prohibited the wanton destruction of innocent life. No people are free to celebrate liberty, among whom innocent life is a cheap commodity to be wasted in transactions of pleasure.

Thus far we surely stand together, we who gather here in solemn in re-dedication to justice for all. But let us not stop here. Let us inquire further how we may lead on this victims' army to victory.

A wise field marshal once observed that “an army marches on its belly,” meaning that soldiers will last out a campaign only as long as they can be fed. This is still more true of the victims' army, which is an army of foot soldiers feeding on the bread of life.

It has often seemed paradoxical to many that this massive movement in defense of the unborn seems to have no bona fide general—no Martin Luther King—at the head of its advancing columns. To me that is no paradox. The generals in this war are the departed children themselves, who lead us on with a certain tread. They point out the way for us, toward a heavenly reunion. The strategy is theirs—ever mounting witness to the sanctity of life. The tactics are theirs—infantry marching straight into a nation's heart, to turn it around.

We who fight from this side of heaven can only be infantrymen, but we could not have better generals. When we listen to the children we hear the purity of purpose Christ recognized in their voices. When we follow the children, we follow unselfish motives. We can arrive at the fathers' place, the victory of liberty, only through the children.

Let us say, then, onward good foot soldiers. Let none turn back. Sup first on the bread of life, then march without ceasing.

Acknowledge also that there are cooks and waiters who must rely upon material means in order to serve up each day our diet of devotion. For Operation Rescue National, for Missionaries to the Pre-Born, Turn the Hearts, and all other efforts that are steady and faithful, you must contribute money and do so regularly.

Further, if we can expect to prevail in this war, it must be by means of such moral force as will deserve success. Foot soldiers who pray as they go are more likely to understand their generals' commands. But we may not confuse our prayers with God's wishes. Let us remember Abraham Lincoln's wisdom: in a great war of no less moral significance Lincoln recognized the brother in the enemy. We pray to the same God, he said. We cannot predict the outcome of the war from the fervency of our prayers. We must rather have faith that right will make might.

It is not sufficient to be right; we must embrace right. That was Lincoln's wisdom. Returning into the bosom of the Founding, re-embracing its principles wholly, and not just in part, Lincoln prepared his compatriots to embrace right and thus to invoke the judgment of heaven in their behalf.

Equality is the universal solvent for every moral dilemma in American political life. A crusade to save the unborn in which the re-dedication to equality is not plainly stated marches into battle half-prepared, or perhaps unprepared.

They are not fellow-soldiers in this crusade, who cannot embrace the full promise of equality. They are a fifth column, doubtless solicitous of life (or perhaps fearful of death) but unable to derive its moral basis.

Not only can such allies not provide the strength needed to defend life. More importantly, they retard the effort to speak to the needs of American politics. Yes, I say, in order to advance the serious work of this crusade, we require absolutely to raise up voices steeped in true American principles—and not mere conservative resentments—voices squarely committed to embrace equality.

The anti-abortion movement long resisted conscription into political campaigns for reasons such as these. It was right to do so, for as long as any joint campaign would have meant subordinating the anti-abortion movement to a mere political agenda.

Now that has all changed. The anti-abortion movement is frequently involved with political campaigns, often victoriously. In raising new standards for cooperation with candidates, the movement has properly recognized that ultimate moral victory will come only with rooting the principle of the movement in the political soul of the nation.

Unfortunately, however, the anti-abortion movement has not been as careful as needed in stating in advance terms of relationship with political candidates. That casual approach has opened doors for political leaders with no more than a rhetorical relationship with the movement

to colonize its resources, draft its volunteers, and speak in its name without advancing the anti-abortion movement.

Further, the political leaders who have taken greatest advantage of the anti-abortion movement have carried the movement into alliances wholly incompatible with the movement. When, for example, political leaders who reject equality are identified as “pro-life spokesmen,” the anti-abortion movement comes also to be seen as opposed to equality.

Many of the most thoughtful leaders of the anti-abortion movement have frequently compared their labors to those of the civil rights movement. That constitutes an embarrassment for political leaders who still have not accepted the goals of the civil rights movement—who still in fact harbor prejudices and attitudes that make skin color the fundamental basis of their political decisions.

When such politicians become spokesmen for the pro-life movement they compromise the movement and undermine the comparison to the civil rights movement. In order for the anti-abortion movement to make that comparison valid, it must itself embrace the goals of the civil rights movement from the 1960s—the goal of common citizenship illuminated by common rights derived from God.

The anti-abortion movement must concentrate its work on saving the unborn, but it must *actively* demonstrate no less concern for eradicating bigotry and discrimination in the life and politics of our nation. It must prove itself committed to justice for all.

In the future, therefore, the anti-abortion movement must adhere to clear standards determining its cooperation or alliances with politicians. It will not be good enough to find a silver tongue that line speeches with the golden images of holy writ or speak vaguely of a Judeo-Christian heritage.

Armies advance with manpower and ammunition. Politicians who can bring neither to the holy crusade of anti-abortion should not be raised up as spokesmen for the movement. I believe that no candidate who has not stood or marched with the victims' army should ever again receive the official support of that army's soldiers.

Nor, in the second place, should this army ever again support any political pretender who does not make clear in word and deed his embrace of the goals of the civil rights movement. Politicians who cannot recognize the brother in the enemy's face cannot sustain brothers and sisters who have prepared themselves for every sacrifice. The language of “us and them” is not the language of redemption. Let us put it off from ourselves.

These two guidelines for political involvement by the anti-abortion movement would provide a sure foundation for Christ-like submission to a purpose worthier than self. They would enable the movement more effectively to aim its blows at those souls where victory ultimately will be won.

One of the dangers of early reliance on political power to clear the stain of abortion from our nation's garment was precisely the temptation to substitute the expression of political will for that reformation—that regeneration—or moral conscience, which is the true goal.

In the aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision in the Casey case we see dramatic evidence that many have been seduced by that temptation. They long so passionately to hear those few words, “*Roe v. Wade* is overturned,” that they are blind to the reality that *Roe* has long since

been voided of moral meaning. The cries of despair over Justices O'Connor, Kennedy, and Souter as traitors to the cause ignore the truth that, however incoherent their statements about precedents, they have succeeded to bring to the surface the very same internal contradictions of *Roe* which many of us pointed out nineteen years ago—leaving the contradictions, and not the moral principle, all that remains of *Roe*.

That is a victory, and ought to be recognized as such. The victory was not granted by the Court but won by the victims' army. It is not a final victory. It is but one of the stages on the way to redemption. Nevertheless, it is vital to see it for what it is and not to be counseled by despair. Despair has led good people to prefer the lurking "don't care" nihilism of Justice Scalia's dissent, to the model slowly emerging from the majority—namely, gradually building the power to regulate abortion, anticipating the day of outright prohibition. This is clearly a case where despair leads, not only to rejecting the good in hope of the better, but pursuing the worst for lack of the best.

Let us be clear: There is not in our future some resurrection proclamation that will restore the victims' army to life here and now. No Supreme Court decision, no Executive Order, no Act of Congress will constitute the ultimate victory, for the ultimate victory is a people reclaimed for a providential mission on earth—a nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, and in which liberty is the expression, not of our personal preferences, but our moral power.