

Abortion and its Impact on the Black Community **Bishop Joseph N. Perry**

A January 3, 2010 Chicago Sun Times cover page article reported that the number of abortions performed in Illinois reached a 10-year high in 2008. The article surmises these trends are due to the state's flagging economy and to the first full year of operation of a new Planned Parenthood clinic located in Aurora.

The Illinois Public Health Department reports that 47,717 abortions were performed statewide. That represents a 5 percent increase from 2007. And it's the most abortions in Illinois in a year since 1998 when 49,403 women were reported to have had abortions.

The newspaper article goes on to state that on a percentage basis, the age group with the largest increase in abortions from 2007 to 2008 was those 14 and under. In 2008, 299 girls in that group obtained abortions, up 16 percent from 2007, state records show. The group with the next largest percentage increase was women 20 to 24 years old. Abortions for that group reached 13,130 in 2008, up 11 percent from the year before.

Nationwide, close to 50 million babies have been aborted since *Roe vs. Wade* legalized abortion in 1973, according to the National Right to Life Committee.

These numbers are astounding.

Robert Gilligan of the Illinois Catholic Conference comments that Catholic lobbyists have pushed for changes in the law to require women to witness ultrasound images of their fetuses before abortion and to impose mandatory waiting periods. He cites also the long-stalled parental notification law that is tied up in litigation despite having passed the Illinois General Assembly in 1995. But these approaches aimed at limiting abortion have not gained legislative interest.

The Catholic Church attempts to be a moral voice in our society, not a political voice, as some might think relative to the recent presidential elections and the ensuing health care debate. The debate centered on the topic of abortion, unfortunately, is highly politicized in our society.

Let's look at abortion and the black community:

CNSNews.com –*Catholic News Service* reports that abortion kills more black Americans than the seven leading causes of death combined, according to data collected by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for 2005, the latest year for which the abortion numbers are available nationwide. Abortion killed at least 203,991 blacks in the 36 states and two cities (New York City and the District of Columbia) that reported abortions by race in 2005, according to the CDC. During that same year, according to the CDC, a total of 198,385 blacks nationwide died from heart disease, cancer, strokes,

accidents, diabetes, homicide and chronic lower respiratory diseases combined. These were the seven leading causes of death charted for black Americans that year.

The hot-button moral questions of the day are often argued within the framework of civil rights. African Americans have a keen understanding of civil rights and are often hard-pressed to be found on the opposite side of an argument for, let's say, stem cell research, same sex marriage, abortion, gay rights, etc., as soon as someone hollers "civil rights". But, what are civil rights? What are the right rights? What are the wrong rights? In a society of ever expanding personal and civil rights, where is the line to be drawn across which we ignite our society's peril. Is it possible to have a popular consensus about what is right and what is wrong in a democracy like ours?

Civil Rights, as they came to be known for blacks and other disenfranchised groups in America, entail certain moral presuppositions inclusive of an understanding of human rights everyone enjoys simply because they are human. Judeo-Christian principles espouse an understanding of human rights that is respected practically globally and are found contained in many a civic charter the world over explicating rights of the citizenry. The Church's social teaching is a source for this explication as well.

When the Church presents a moral argument about an issue it is with an understanding that man has a destiny in God for which every significant human behavior is a factor. A moral issue like abortion, therefore, is not neutral or inconsequential, nor does it belong to merely subjective or personal determination. Abortion, the direct killing of life in the womb, is an objective moral evil reasoned under the rubric of the commandment of the Decalogue, "*thou shalt not kill*". Under this principle, the Church understands, universally, that life begins at conception and, therefore, must be respected and protected until its natural demise.

An article by Karen Schuberg, 10/23/09 notes that according to the CDC, the total of 203,991 blacks killed by abortion in 2005 (35.5 percent of all abortions reported for that year) does not include those aborted by private physicians' procedures. Every year since 1969, the CDC has amassed abortion data by state or area of occurrence, requesting information each year from the 50 states, and the District of Columbia and New York City.

As required by Congress, the CDC attempts to collect data on abortions by the age, race and marital status of the women who undergo them as well as the type of abortion procedure. In 2005, a total of 820,151 legal abortions were performed in the 49 jurisdictions that reported abortions to the CDC, according to the "Abortion Surveillance" report, which is published in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), for November 28, 2008. The report states: "Approximately 1 in 5 U.S. pregnancies have ended in abortion," and also notes some limitations on the data: "The overall number, ratio, and rate of abortions are conservative estimates, the total numbers of legal induced abortions provided by central health agencies and reported to the CDC for 2005 were probably lower than the numbers actually performed."

Clenard H. Childress, Jr., founder of blackgenocide.org told CNSNews.com that according to numbers gleaned from statistics provided by the Guttmacher Institute, a pro-abortion group, 1,784 blacks are aborted every day. Also, he notes on his web site that three out of five African-American women will obtain an abortion. Childress said the information and sources on his web site have never been challenged by abortion-access supporters. "This is because they can see that themselves, and they know them probably to be far worse than we're reporting. The facts come from the pro-abortion/pro-choice community," he said. "You want to go to a reliable source where people can't dismiss what you're saying... yet, the Congressional Black Caucus, NAACP, Urban League and the National Action Committee of Al Sharpton fail abysmally to report not only the decimation but the health ramifications which are questionably very pertinent and provable... we simply want the health issues of abortion to be discussed," Childress said.

Director of government affairs at the Guttmacher Institute, Susan Cohen, reports: "because black women experience so many more unintended pregnancies than any other group – sharply disproportionate to their numbers in the general population – they are more likely to seek out and obtain abortion services than any other group."

And added to the discussion is a comment by Dr. Freda Bush, an obstetrician and gynecologist in private practice in Jackson, Mississippi, "I would just like them to explain why there's such a significant proportion of their clinics that are located in minority communities," said Bush, who is black. Dr. Alveda King, niece of slain Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is a pro-life activist. In August 2007, she told a meeting of *Priests for Life* "those abortionists plant their killing centers in minority neighborhoods and prey upon women who think they have no hope... the great irony is that abortion has done what the Klan only dreamed of."

What are the consequences of a culture of abortion on a free society like ours or any society for that matter? We hesitate to imagine the spiral of outcomes perceptible. African American Auxiliary Bishop Martin D. Holley of Washington D.C. notes that "*since the Roe v. Wade decision, the number one cause of death in the African American community is abortion. We have lost over 13 million lives. To put that in perspective, that is one third of our present black population. 1,452 black children are lost each day to abortion!*"

These numbers are alarming.

We can become numb in the hearing of the statistics until impact no longer registers with us. But these statistics often represent suffering women struggling to do the right thing under difficult circumstances. The violence of abortion involves each time a number of casualties, the fetus-child, the mother, the man involved, to name just several. One can easily see the urgency for catechesis and evangelization in our black churches and the wider community. It is a topic essentially kept hush-hush in the black community defying the often quoted mantra that black families are welcoming of their children, all children, anybody's children, legitimate and illegitimate.

The right to abortion is quietly spelling the decimation of the black community in our society. The Church's voice backed up by a number of official statements of the popes and the bishops of our country is clear and articulate. Our parish councils are served well by having a pro-life committee that assists the pastor educate the congregation with printed materials and programs with approved speakers in this area. The Ladies of Peter Claver routinely counsel women to choose life in a moment of crisis pregnancy. The Women's Centers under Catholic auspices in our city are designed to do the same kind of ministry to women in trouble and specifically to unwed pregnant teens, women and families in the black and Hispanic and white communities, both Catholic and non-Catholic.

Our approach to our local and state lawmakers must argue for government sponsored programs to assist the poor, assist families and thus reduce the incidence of abortion in poor communities so that women don't feel so often alone and helpless while in dire circumstances.

Bishop Holley further notes that *"in addition to caring for those wounded by abortion through the Church's Project Rachel Ministry, greater emphasis must be placed on helping the Christian family through better catechesis on the Sacrament of Marriage, the gift of children and the resources of Natural Family Planning. As long as American culture persists in viewing sexual activity as recreational, marriage as optional and children as burdens, it will be very difficult to build a Culture of Life."*

We run up against public protest that abortion is a right, a choice, a medical procedure like any other for which women should not be deprived of their reproductive freedom and their right to health care in this vein. These protestations attempt to deter people from the fundamental truth that a human life is murdered by abortion and based upon conscientious considerations, let alone Christian belief, every life, even one conceived under difficult circumstances deserves a chance.

The Church's articulation offers Catholics and other sympathetic individuals a higher consciousness, one grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ in the gospels. Notions of freedom in the secular city are simply inadequate at framing a proper moral analysis of this great evil. Human life is sacred. When we dismantle life at its source, nothing can stop one from reasoning to dismantling life at any stage of development.

Bishop William E. Lori of the Diocese of Bridgeport, speaking about private conscience in these matters, notes: *"We've all heard the saying, 'let your conscience be your guide.' This is true as far as it goes (but) conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere 'feeling' about what we should or should not do. Instead, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us, conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. CCC, no. 1796. The human conscience does not create right and wrong, but rather perceives it. Conscience has to be properly formed, and what really forms our consciences is truth – above all, the truth about the human person of whom, by whom and for whom governments exist and function... yet in the absence of shared truth and values,*

the views of prominent opinion leaders dominate our society, often at the expense of the vulnerable. If no one has the truth, politics becomes a matter of who has the most power. Power politics devoid of truth 'the dictatorship of relativism' in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, cannot unify the nation or protect the common good... The moral order protects and fosters human dignity. In turn, human freedom is given us so we may choose what is true and good. In other words, to choose what is evil is a misuse of our God-given freedom. Such misuse of freedom is sin.

Considering the gun violence that plagues the black community in many of our urban areas as well as the violence of abortion and pervasive breakdown of marriage and family life, religious and community leaders are trying to get the community to stop and reflect upon the cultural and moral disintegration that is evident in our communities.

In churches all over, prayer is constantly raised for a change of heart on part of persons considering abortion and especially on part of our lawmakers. In parishes and in dioceses all over the country Catholics consider the subject of abortion one of the chief witnesses of our modern times for which we are pledged to continue to raise awareness about alternatives to abortion, particularly, to let women in trouble be aware that they have other options.

In the final analysis, there are certain things we can never do and certain things we can never be simply because we love and admire Jesus Christ. And once we have handed over our lives to Him, the playing field suddenly shrinks and options are few. One option remains and that is, to do that which is good and to hold the good above every expediency.

see: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities
www.usccb.org/prolife
www.hopeafterabortion.com
www.menandabortion.info