

Our response to revealing Planned Parenthood videos

By Archbishop William E. Lori

Over the past couple weeks, a series of undercover videos posted online have shown leaders from Planned Parenthood discussing their abortion clinics' sale of fetal tissue from abortions and the altering of abortion methods for no reason other than to obtain more "intact" organs. In one of the videos, an official from Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the nation, is seen casually eating dinner while discussing how much it would cost a buyer for Planned Parenthood to harvest and donate valuable fetal organs and tissues, which would then be used for research.

All the videos confirm this unconscionable practice and have been posted in their entirety, along with written transcripts. Though not widely covered in the mainstream media, the videos have received much attention through social media and have elicited outrage, not over just the moral implications of such actions but also the fact that Planned Parenthood receives millions of dollars in government grants and reimbursements (\$528.4 million in FY 2014).

Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, said, "Pope Francis has called abortion the product of a 'widespread mentality of profit, the throwaway culture, which has today enslaved the hearts and minds of so many.' The recent news stories concerning Planned Parenthood direct our attention to two larger issues involving many institutions in our society. The first is abortion itself: a direct attack on human life in its most vulnerable condition. The second is the now standard practice of obtaining fetal organs and tissues through abortion. Both actions fail to respect the humanity and dignity of human life."

The cardinal is correct in directing our attention to the issue underlying the videos' revelation: the disregard for the sanctity and dignity of human life.

Many people speak of human dignity but do not agree that human dignity is inscribed in the human person by the Creator; they do not agree that there is a transcendent dignity at all stages of life. Instead of being inviolable, the right to life is seen as contingent on the ability of a human being to relate to other people and to live with a relative degree of independence. Human dignity is not “inbuilt” but rather is accorded by a mother who chose to have her baby. A child in the womb until later in the pregnancy cannot survive on the outside. This child is dependent on the mother for life and survival. He or she cannot reason, speak or relate non-verbally to others.

But pro-life convictions aren’t unreasonable; they are based on sound science and sound reasoning. The more one knows about the formation of the child in women, the less likely one is to dismiss the child in the womb as a mere mass of cells. The unmistakable signs of humanity are there, early on, such as brainwaves, DNA and a heartbeat. And ultrasound has helped many women contemplating an abortion truly to glimpse something of the humanity of their unborn children.

Those who favor abortion see the same scientific evidence that we see, but they reach other conclusions. The difference is this: the authentic pro-life view sees life as having inherent value and dignity throughout its whole spectrum, from the moment of conception until natural death. Our faith confirms that human dignity is given us by God, is transcendent and inviolable. St. John Paul II never tired of teaching not only the scientific and philosophical reasons for promoting and protecting life but indeed the deepest theological reasons for doing so, reasons that flow from the very heart of the Gospel. And he believed this so much so that he titled his encyclical on life, “The Gospel of Life.” So, how do we as Catholics responsibly bear witness to this Gospel of Life?

The new evangelization, of course, does not mean making up a new gospel that is supposedly more suited to the times in which we live. Rather, it means that the Gospel the church received from Christ is transmitted in its fullness with new ardor and new methods, and new urgency. And this ardor has nothing to do with partisan zealotry and cultural warrior-hood but rather with our having been overtaken by Christ’s love for us, and ready to teach the faith in a manner that manifests its connection with our lives. We do not eschew teaching Catholic doctrine but we bear

witness when we show how it changed our lives and gives people hope that their lives too might be changed for the better.

There is a new urgency as we recognize with clear-eyed honesty how many people have yet to hear the good news of human life and dignity. It is this that should animate and motivate our response to the sad and disturbing revelations in the recent Planned Parenthood videos.

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