

## IS THERE A CHOICE?



America is a country made great by the collective efforts of its governments, its communities and its citizens. The church and state respect and protect the rights of the individual, thus ensuring individual liberty (state) and human dignity (church). At the same time, the individual continues to live in community (as a U.S. citizen) and is called to be in community (church).

Community rights and individual rights are not at odds with each other. Community is not a euphemism for the government. What is “community” but a group of individuals who share interests, live in the same area, or share a covenant?

Each one of us is special and sacred and each is social. Applying the Catholic power of “and”, we offer hope not by focusing on one principle over another but in embracing both principles that are important to Catholics. Natural law demands that government recognizes the individual rights of its citizens. Natural law also dictates that the individual does not possess rights that necessarily take priority over the rights of society. In other words, there are times when the common good takes precedence over our right to make personal choices and behave as we choose.

Americans can never forget that at the core of its mythology is the power of the community and that essential to their responsibility as citizens is to defer their rights as individuals when the rights of community take priority. We see this lack of deference everywhere: people who can't be bothered to recycle *paper* though the office or home offers recycling services; folks walking through the park past the “Dogs Must Be On Leash” signs with their dog, off leash; drivers unlawfully talking into a hand-held cell phone.

We see this absolute prioritization of the individual when men and women demand the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion, which is commonly summed up as pro-choice equals women's rights. How has a country that flourished because of the unity of the community, guided by a constitution with natural law as its foundation, woven with the fibers of Judeo-Christian ethics devolved to a body where the right to choice takes precedence over the right to a life?

Life is about choices. Chocolate or vanilla is a choice. Romney or Obama is a choice. Fast food and a soft drink or salad and water is a choice. We can choose between Christ or not Christ. Life or death is not a legitimate choice.

The state abdicates its responsibility to protect the community and ensure the common good by granting the individual the unnatural right of the power of choice where the choice is between life and death. Individuals reject the history of their country, the natural law of the common good, and their responsibility to uphold the unwritten covenants of their community when they demand a personal right to decide life.

When this responsibility is breached where does it end? Where do we limit an individual's right to choose who lives and who dies? When a life for which we are responsible is near death? When someone is mentally or physically disabled and more of a taker of resources than a giver, a financial burden? When a loved one is no longer economically productive? When our community's elected representatives uphold the death penalty? Do we protect an individual's right to choose one week before delivery but not one week afterward? Two weeks before delivery? Eight weeks? A friend of mine delivered 15 weeks premature; the next four months weren't easy but the baby boy is now home and healthy.

This great country of ours is special when we protect the rights of all religions, when we protect the rights of classes of people historically discriminated against – blacks, women, disabled, undocumented immigrants, and laborers – and when we ensure that our environment and our fellow citizens who are poor, hungry and vulnerable have a chance to flourish. America is a country made great when we respect and protect human life over the right to choice.



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace