

Praise for Thorny Issues

I'M SURE YOU ARE HEARING this from all corners, but I have to chime in—the current issue of *Conscience* (Vol. XXXIII No. 1) is truly excellent! Just read it cover-to-cover—the articles are thought-provoking and together they really create a platform for new conversations. Wish everyone in our movement could read this issue.

Thanks for helping to push us forward.

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The Many Stories behind Abortion

IN “A PERSPECTIVE ON LATER Abortion... From Someone Who Does Them” (Vol. XXXIII No. 1), Dr. Parker’s call to his OB/GYN colleagues to begin or expand their abortion care could not be more timely amid the intense escalation of legislative attacks on these services, especially those performed after 20 weeks. Prochoicers often minimize the need for later abortions, since 90 percent of abortions occur before 12 weeks. It’s true that most patients choosing abortion are able, and prefer, to do so within the first trimester. However, those whose abortions are necessarily

Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

delayed—whether due to changed circumstances, lack of funds, ignorance of the pregnancy, diagnosis of fetal or maternal anomalies, and/or the human reality of ambivalence—equally deserve our compassion and safe medical care.

Like Dr. Parker, I am witness to the often desperate circumstances that surround women seeking abortions after 20 weeks, and the gratitude they express when the procedure is over. As an abortion counselor, I am proud to be part of their care. I am grateful that my clinic is available to patients who, at their stage of pregnancy, would have nowhere else in-state to go.

I am also witness to stories that don’t end in my clinic. I have been the one to tell a patient that she has passed our gestational limit. I have provided the alarmingly short list of later providers in other states, a list made ever shorter by the gaping hole left by the assassination of Dr. George Tiller three years ago. I’ve made calls to try to schedule appointments over 200 miles away, and I’ve strategized with patients about how to travel, fundraise, obtain childcare, miss work and potentially conceal everything from a partner or family. I never know how these stories end.

Dr. Parker is right that as reproductive justice advocates, there is an urgent need for us to normalize second trimester abortions. But perhaps more importantly, we need to normalize abortion without regard to the stage of pregnancy. Our rallying cries about trusting women so that they can maintain control over their bodies, as well as our steadfast belief that patients and healthcare providers alone should determine medical care, hold true for the patient who needs a 27-week abortion, too. It may be a difficult conversation, but it’s one worth having.

LILY SHIELD
*Co-Editor
The Provider Project*

An Atheist on Religious Freedom

TO MOST PEOPLE I AM THE worst kind of sinner; I am an atheist. Without the fear of God or acceptance of the teachings in the Bible they have no basis to argue with me. It drives them crazy and they hate me even more.

I understand and respect why people have faith and seek religion. My disconnect comes when people start attempting to convince others their god is the correct god or try to force their morality on other people. I do not care what people do in their private lives and do not want anybody trying to convince me that I am a bad man because of my beliefs.

With regard to abortion rights, I look at them like a lot of things in life: When

the lights are out and you are in bed you need to get to sleep. Only you can make that happen. Abortion is a very personal and hard choice and the reasons, regardless of what they are, should be up to the person who will be responsible for the happy life of the child.

Assuming I am not breaking any laws or hurting anyone, no one should have the audacity to tell me that my decisions that led up to my happiness were wrong. Rather, everyone should go find their own happiness.

TODD STAVE
*Director
Voice of Choice*

Bishops and the Defense of the Constitution

THROUGHOUT CHRISTIAN history, public oaths about important matters have been viewed as very serious by both the laity and hierarchy of the Catholic church. Marriage vows and ordination vows are examples of this.

The oath taken by the president of the United States reads: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.” (The Congressional oath is also to the Constitution of the United States. Most gubernatorial oaths model the presidential one.)

It is important to realize that the president does not swear to uphold his/her own (much less the bishops’) personal views on matters

that have been repeatedly reviewed by the Supreme Court. Rather, the president is expected to uphold *all* Supreme Court decisions. This includes *all* decisions related to the legality and availability of abortion. The same is true for members of Congress. We are a nation of *written* law and the oath of office is to uphold that *written* law.

Are the US Catholic bishops prepared to say that the oath is invalid? If so, then Catholics could not be elected to national office. If, however, the oath is valid, then it is a futile task to pressure Catholic lawmakers about court rulings.

By now, it should be apparent to the bishops that the *only* way to make abortion illegal is through an amendment to the Constitution. Why do they not turn themselves to the task of educating and evangelizing, instead of threatening Catholic lawmakers on the subject? Either the bishops do not understand the fundamental nature of our secular, democratic government, or they do not appreciate the freedom it assures them under that very same Constitution.

The bishops owe the country an answer: Is the oath valid?

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Bishops' Call for Civil Disobedience Doesn't Ring True

ON APRIL 12, 2012, THE nation's Roman Catholic bishops, all of whom are Vatican appointees, issued a

proclamation calling for Catholic laypersons to disobey laws with which the hierarchy disagrees. This subversive action accompanies recent statements by the bishops that their religious freedom is "under attack."

Surely it is time for the hierarchy to weigh the subsidies and other advantages Catholic institutions currently receive from state and federal governments:

1. Churches, church schools and religious broadcasters pay no property taxes.
2. The church pays no income tax.
3. Religious organizations do not have to apply for tax-exempt status; rather they receive it automatically.
4. Individuals are allowed to deduct contributions to churches, church schools, etc., from their individual income taxes.
5. Some church social service programs are funded in part by taxpayers.
6. Churches are routinely exempted from employment laws, anti-discrimination measures and even routine health and safety inspections.
7. Religious groups avoid the stringent reporting requirements imposed upon secular lobbies.

If the Catholic bishops were truly in favor of religious liberty, they would end their opposition to separation of church and state, which is the cornerstone of religious liberty in America. But the bishops also want taxpayer money for parochial schools, a clear

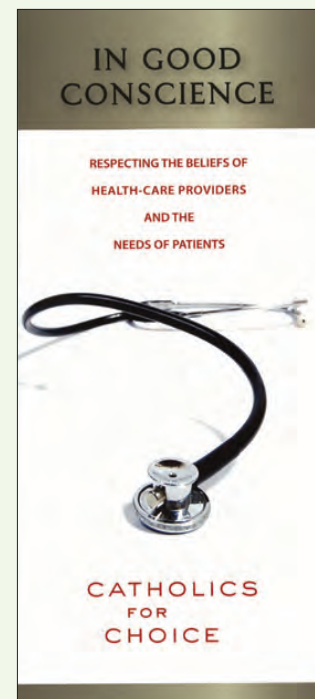
violation of this doctrine. Perhaps these gentlemen should be reminded that during the 19th century, in the period of German unification under the Prussian leader Otto von Bismarck, many German

Catholics emigrated to our shores precisely because of the then-novel concept of separation of church and state and its promise of religious liberty.

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Please e-mail letters to:
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