

# CATHOLIC CALENDAR.

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## Abortion and the Christian Conscience: Thirty Years Since Roe v. Wade

**TIME** magazine had a magnificent cover story the week of November 11, 2002, when the Catholic Bishops of the United States were meeting in Washington, DC. The article, "Inside the Womb: An Amazing Look At How We All Begin," was accompanied by remarkable photographs and computer generated images of embryonic human life from conception to the time of birth. The article describes the reaction of a husband and wife as they look at a wall video monitor. As a crystal probe slides across her midsection, the mother is wide-eyed in amazement. "She can make out a head with a mouth and two eyes. She can see pairs of arms and legs that end in tiny hands and feet. She can see the curve of a backbone, the bridge of a nose. And best of all, she can see movement. The mouth of her "child-to-be" yawns. Its feet kick. Its hands wave. They can hear the gush of blood through the umbilical cord and the fast thump, thump, thump of a miniature heart."

Nowhere in the amazing account is the four month and one week old in the womb referred to as anything other than a fetus. The closest the article comes to calling this fetal life human, not to mention a human being, is when it says that the mouth of the "child-to-be" yawns. (The quotation marks are mine). The author feels constrained not to say "The child yawns." Or even "The child-to-be yawns." No, it is simply a mouth that yawns. Had the author written,

"The baby yawned." His editors might not have allowed it and, if they did, he might well have received angry letters saying his language implicitly supports an anti-abortion or a pro-life position which deprives a woman of her reproductive rights, her right to choose. However, if a woman seven-teen weeks pregnant who wants her child had a miscarriage, she and her comforters would almost certainly say she lost her baby, not her fetus.

With the possible exception of race, no issue divides Americans into opposing camps and heated, sometimes violent arguments as readily as the issue of abortion. The same week that the **TIME** article appeared, the American Bishops, issued the statement, "A Matter of the Heart: the Thirtieth Anniversary of Roe v. Wade." The media's exclusive interest in our revised "Essential Norms" concerning priests who sexually abuse children largely obscured our statement.

In our statement we noted that every year on January 22nd, the anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade, many people pause to recognize the date in some way. Some speak out, some march, some reach out, some educate, some just reflect. Many pray.

Our efforts on behalf of the unborn will not cease. Our firm conviction as Catholics that life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception has been a part

of the Church's constant witness since the Apostolic age and has inspired millions to defend human life from conception to natural death. Against the backdrop of a society in which many institutions of influence endorse legal abortion, the pro-life movement has grown year by year, in numbers and in vitality.

In the United States abortion is legal throughout pregnancy. Yet Catholics and many others believe that abortion is a violation of human rights incomparable in magnitude and an atrocity for the whole human family. While Roe v. Wade appeared to create a right with some limitations, Doe v. Bolton, which was decided the same day, erased those limitations by creating a "health" exception so broad that it effectively allows abortion for any reason at any time. The lack of any limits to legal abortion was never more clear than in the case of Stenberg v. Carhart in 2000, when the Supreme Court ruled that even the horrific partial-birth abortion procedure could not be restricted. Most Americans are surprised and shocked to learn about the lack of any meaningful legal limitations for abortion. Together with those from many other faith communities, Catholics must continue to work to bring about a society that recognizes abortion for what it truly is.



**Bishop  
Edward  
K.  
Braxton**

Many young people today comprehend the legacy of Roe. They look at thirty years of legal abortion and weep over the 40 million lives destroyed. They are aware that one in every four pregnancies ends in abortion, and they grieve for the world they will soon inherit. They mourn the fact that each year approximately 1.3 million abortions take place, and that thousands of them are done in the sixth month of pregnancy or later, when the child would likely survive if born.

Many who came of age at the time of Roe were hopeful about what it was said to promise: an end to poverty and abuse. Who would not hope for these things? But legal abortion promised what it could not give. It promised women a freedom to participate more fully in society. Many women have suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually because of abortion; some have even lost their lives. Many men, too, mourn the loss of their children, while others carry the heavy burden of having persuaded their daughter, wife, or girlfriend to have an abortion.

Thirty years after Roe v. Wade, some may think that the pro-life movement's efforts have not accomplished much because Roe v. Wade still stands. But this is not true. Today, fewer abortions are being done each year

and fewer doctors are involved in performing abortions. More Americans identify themselves as pro-life, while the numbers of those saying they are "pro-choice" have declined significantly. As the description in the article from **TIME** makes clear, ultrasound and other medical advances have made possible a greater appreciation of the humanity of every unborn child. In these three decades thousands of pro-life groups, individual parishes, Catholic social service agencies and pregnancy resource centers have provided practical assistance and support to thousands of women facing difficult pregnancies. Most state legislatures have enacted measures to restrict or regulate the practice of abortion and reduce its incidence.

Among those who defend abortion, there are many who do so despite the pain abortion has brought into their lives, or even sometimes because of it. Many contemplating abortion believe they have no other choice. We listen to them, we understand their sense of isolation and despair. We must strive to know their hearts.

On this thirtieth anniversary the American Bishops renew our offer of assistance to anyone considering abortion. We will try to help those who feel overwhelmed by the decisions they face, those who cannot afford medical care, and those who are homeless or feel helpless. Inspired by the word and example of Jesus Christ,

I call upon the Catholic people of Southwest Louisiana to reach out to those contemplating abortion and those who have had abortions with compassion and without condemnation.

Through Project Rachel and other ministries, the Catholic Church continues to help those whose hearts have been broken by abortion. Those who resort to abortion out of a sense of desperation often find the cruel reality of abortion too difficult to bear. But it is too difficult only in a world without God and therefore without hope.

We, too, must not abandon hope. The extraordinary photographs in the **TIME** article make it obvious to many Americans that it is not simply a mouth that yawns. It is a developing human being that yawns. This is why we must continue to work, hope and pray, for the day when all Americans will accept this reality and respect the right of that developing human being to life. Certainly we Catholics whose consciences have been formed in the light of the Gospel of Life must do all we can to respect and protect fragile and developing human life in the womb.

As Pope John Paul II has written, "it is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop" (The Gospel of Life, no. 101).



### The Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Christ). Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

John 1:35-42

### Poverty underestimated

WASHINGTON — Most Americans believe that between 1 and 5 million people live in poverty in the United States when the actual number is nearly 33 million, according to results of the national "Poverty Pulse" survey released recently by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD).

The "Poverty Pulse" is commissioned annually by CCHD to determine public views on poverty. A total of 1,015 respondents were surveyed among the general adult population to highlight Americans' perceptions about what it means to be poor in the U.S. The public opinion poll is conducted as part of Poverty in America Awareness Month, which is observed in January.

This year's survey revealed that many Americans believe that it actually takes almost double the amount of money determined by the federal government to be the minimum income required to cover basic family needs. For example, almost half of the respondents (47 percent) believe that it takes almost \$35,000 annually to adequately house, clothe and feed a family of four. However, the federal government's official poverty threshold for that family is \$18,100.

"Poverty Pulse" results indicated a significant decline in the number of people who donated money to organizations helping the poor. The percent giving money dropped from 41 percent in 2001 to 32 percent in 2002.

## 2003 World Day of the Sick set February 9-11

WASHINGTON, DC - The Path to Solidarity: The Vocation of Health Care in America" is the theme for the 11th Annual World Day of the Sick, to be held here in February 2003.

Participants from around the world — particularly from the nations of the Americas, including bishops, health care leaders, and a delegation from the Vatican — will gather in the nation's capital February 9-11 for dialogue and study. The program will close with a Mass and anointing of the sick on February 11, 2:30 pm at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The Mass is open to the public.

The World Day of the Sick, under sponsorship of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, is celebrated each

February, culminating on the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes (February 11) to give thanks and recognition to those in the health care ministry, to provide an opportunity for reflection on the Church's teaching on health care, and to pray for those who are sick. Previous observances have been held recently in India and Australia. This will mark the first time the event is held in the United States.

Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington, is the host for World Day of the Sick and chair of the event's executive committee. Rev. Michael D. Place, STD, president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), is chairing the World Day of the Sick Administrative Steering Committee, which

includes representatives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

The three-day event will include a dialogue among bishops from the Americas at USCCB headquarters; a study day for all registered participants at the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center; and the anointing of the sick at the National Shrine. Because of limited space for the study day, attendance will be on a first-come, first-served registration basis.

"This will be a rare opportunity for us to hear from church and health care leaders from other nations in the Americas, to see our similar challenges, and to learn from our common experiences," Father Place said.

World Day of the Sick begins at 9:00 am, Sunday, February 9, with a Mass at the

Basilica, celebrated by Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, USCCB president. A keynote address will be given by Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragan, president of the Pontifical Council, later that day.

The February 10 study day includes a pair of keynote addresses: "The Call to Justice, Globalization, and Catholic Health Care in the Americas," given by Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ, chairman of the USCCB International Policy Committee, and "The Call to Fidelity: Bioethical Issues and Catholic Health Care in the Americas," given by Bishop John C. Nienstedt, STD, of New Ulm, MN. The day will conclude with a liturgy celebrated by Cardinal McCarrick.

## Best Films of 2002 told by Bishops' Film Office

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Bishops' Office of Film and Broadcasting (OFB) recently announced its 2002 Ten Best Films List. "The past year saw an abundance of Hollywood films that were "safe" franchise films, prequels or sequels," OFB Director Gerri Pare said. "But happily, there were a healthy number of fine films released during 2002," added Pare.

Supported by the U.S. Bishops' Catholic Communication Campaign (CCC), the Office for Film and Broadcasting is responsible for reviewing and rating theatrical motion pictures, previewing and evaluating television programming as well as providing the Catholic public with information about the role of the entertainment and news media in influencing societal and personal values.

Weekly movie reviews, brief capsules, and film classifications of new film releases can be heard on the office's toll-free movieline at 1-800-311-4222, sponsored by the CCC.

The U.S. Bishops' film classifications are A-I - general patronage; A-II - adults and adolescents; A-III -

adults; A-IV - adults, with reservations (an A-IV classification designates problematic films that, while not morally offensive in themselves, require caution and some analysis and explanation as a safeguard against wrong interpretations and false conclusions); and O - morally offensive.

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings are G - general audiences; PG - parental guidance suggested; PG-13 - parents strongly cautioned; R - restricted, and NC-17 - no one 17 and under admitted.

The 2002 Ten Best Films List, in alphabetical order, is as follows:

*About Schmidt*, a poignant tale of a newly retired and newly-widowed 66-year-old (Jack Nicholson) coming to terms with his unexceptional life and finding peace in tolerance, forgiveness and generosity of spirit. A-III - adults. (R)

*Antwone Fisher*, the inspirational true-life story of a troubled naval recruit (Derek Luke) who with the help of a Navy psychiatrist (Denzel Washington) learns to cope with the emotional devastation wreaked by childhood rejection and

physical abuse. A-III - adults. (PG-13)

*The Emperor's Club*, an ethics-centered drama about a compromised teacher (Kevin Kline) exploring the crucial importance of personal and professional integrity and its lifelong consequences. A-II - adults and adolescents. (PG-13)

*Evelyn*, the human story behind a 1950's Irish child custody battle a father (Pierce Brosnan) wages and the faith in God the characters have that justice will prevail against staggering odds. A-III - adults. (PG)

*The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, the visually spectacular second installment of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic fantasy, as humble hobbit Frodo and his companions continue their perilous quest to destroy the seductive, evil Ring. A-III - adults. (PG-13)

*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, an amusing comedy which gently pokes fun at absurd familial situations, yet reveals the rewards in accepting and loving one's family, warts and all. A-II - adults and adolescents. (PG)

*Nicholas Nickleby*, a genial adaptation of the 1839 Charles Dickens classic, the tale of a young man's hard-won triumph over adversity. A-II - adults and adolescents. (PG)

*Road to Perdition*, an evocative, Depression-era moral tale examining complex father-son relationships, smoothly weaving in themes of betrayal, redemption, filial love and responsibility. A-III - adults and adolescents. (R)

*The Rookie*, a fact-based family film about a small-town Texas teacher and baseball coach (Dennis Quaid) who gets a second chance at the big leagues, charms and inspires without resorting to discernible violence, sex or crude language. A-I - general patronage. (G)

*Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, a rousing animated tale set on the 1880's American frontier, whose themes of respect for life, nature, and the preciousness of freedom come across in painterly visuals and a minimum of spoken dialogue. AI - general patronage. (G)

**Next Catholic Calendar  
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