

Mourning for the Victims: An Open Letter

IF THE PAST is any precedent, the controversy over the decision of Notre Dame to award an honorary doctorate of law to Barack Obama will soon fade entirely from view. The scene is all too familiar. As Catholic theologians, however, we perceive something unfamiliar in this familiar scene. Namely, “Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not” (Jer 31:15). We are weeping because the law approves the view that might makes right: under American law, our young may be killed when they are the weakest and most dependent; indeed for those of us with birth defects, our mothers would often have been urged to kill us. We had become accustomed to such violence; when we see the dying, we “pass by on the other side” (Lk 10:31) of the road. In the face of this violence, we have not been a neighbor; we have no answer to the Lord when he tells us, “I was a stranger and you did not welcome me” (Mt 25:43).

We are Catholic theologians under the shadow of abortion. The practices of our nation, our practices, inscribe violence against the weak into our very life together.

There is something fundamental about refusing to kill others when they are in the womb of their mothers. At the heart of law is the commitment not to kill innocent human life at any stage. To reject this fundamental principle is to rend the bond of human communion. Of course there are the familiar efforts to change the subject, to speak about the good that is being done despite differences of opinion over the vexing abortion issue. But an honorary doctorate in law, when given to a powerful leader who defends the legality of killing human life in the womb, signals an admission that in fact any violence can receive a blessing when approved by the powerful. As Pope John Paul II taught in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, “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” (§101).

The recent controversy has unwittingly uncovered the generation of Catholics who have aborted our children, who have seen our friends abort their children, but who know at the bottom of our hearts that we—all of us—are more than the choice of our parents or our government. The future belongs to those who weep with the vulnerable. “There is hope for the future, says the Lord, and your children shall come back to their own country” (Jer 31:17). N V

Signed

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