

The Great Achievement of Christianity

by Donald DeMarco

COMMENTARY: Christianity will prevail in the final analysis because it recognizes the supreme importance of the spiritual, the true meaning of liberty, and its moral obligations to people in the present world.

An Illinois bill that threatens crisis pregnancy centers with a \$50,000 fine for deceptive acts or practices is waiting for the governor's approval. State Rep. Terra Costa-Howard, D-Glen Ellyn, the bill's sponsor, dodged answering whether identifying abortion as a sin would break the law. Several pregnancy centers that offer a woman assistance in carrying her pregnancy to term have been vandalized in recent months. The pro-choice brigade does not look fondly on women who choose life.

According to Illinois Right to Life, the bill singles out pro-life pregnancy resource centers, placing a target on their backs and violating their right to free speech. Democratic lawmakers claim that pregnancy centers that serve both the woman who wants an abortion and women who do not are infringing on the "rights" of women to abort.

This is but one example among many of the attempt that is going on in the United States to abolish ethics in favor of politics. It represents a movement toward a totalitarian state in which a pro-life view is not regarded as legitimate. It also represents an unlawful empowerment of the state over religion.

Jacques Maritain opens his book *The Things That Are Not Caesar's* with these triumphal words:

Nothing is more important for the freedom of souls and the good of mankind than properly to distinguish between these two powers: nothing, in the language of the day, has so great a cultural value. It is common knowledge that the distinction is the achievement of the Christian centuries and their glory.

The two powers to which Maritain refers are the "spiritual" and the "temporal." Christianity is and always has been, the great defender of personal freedom. Secular culture consistently tries to suppress the spiritual order which involves ethics and aspirations to the Kingdom of God. Christ made the distinction between these two powers clear when he instructed us to "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's: and to render to God, the things that are God's" (Matthew, 22:21). In so saying, he honored the freedom (or liberty) of the human soul.

Atheistic communism does not honor the spiritual order. As a consequence, its aim is to deny that order and stifle the human soul. Catholic churches are being vandalized because certain pro-abortion advocates do not recognize the legitimacy of a pro-life ethic. They believe only in the temporal order where everyone holds to the same political views. They deny that the Kingdom of God could dwell within (*regnum Dei intra vos*).

It is important to understand the liberty that Christianity defends. It is the liberty to choose one's proper end, which, ultimately is heaven. But it is not the liberty (or freedom) to choose evil. Such a choice would not be consistent with the spiritual order but would result from some alien impulse that urges us not to be our true selves.

When St. Augustine asked, "Is there any worse death for soul than liberty to go astray?" he was pointing out that true liberty is directed to the good and not to something that is evil. Those who advocate for the "freedom of choice" to abort an unborn child are misusing their freedom and, at the same time, damaging their soul. It is inherently unethical, therefore, to place truth and falsehood, good and evil, justice and injustice on a par with each other as if choosing evil and choosing what is good are of equal moral value.

In his encyclical, *Immortale Dei*, Pope Leo XIII states that the possibility of choosing an evil is not of the essence of liberty, that "The faculty of committing a sin is not a liberty, but a servitude." Liberty must be protected so that it does not stray from what is good.

"Nothing more absurd or perverse could be said or imagined," writes Maritain, "than the statement that man, being naturally free, ought to be exempt from all law; if it were so, the consequence would be that it is necessary for liberty not to be in accordance with reason ... Human liberty implies the necessity of obedience to a supreme eternal rule, which is no other than the authority of God in His commandments or prohibitions to us."

A common and persistent objection that secularists have against Christians leading a spiritual life that leads to heaven is that their preoccupation with another world causes them to neglect this one. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

Pope Leo XIII, also in *Immortale Dei*, answered this objection with both candor and clarity:

The Catholic Church, that imperishable handiwork of our all-merciful God, has for her immediate and natural purpose the saving of souls. Yet, in regard to things temporal, she is the source of benefits as manifold and great as if the chief end of her existence were to ensure the prospering of our earthly lives.

It may be said that the true path to heaven is established by how well one cares for his neighbor in this world. A good life in this world is in continuity with a blessed one in the next. The two worlds are not discordant.

The secular world is in error on three major points. It fails to appreciate the spiritual order, believes that liberty can rightly choose evil and that Christians neglect their moral responsibilities in this world because of their preoccupation with the next.

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