

False liberty offers a diminished, wretched freedom

Canada's most infamous abortionist died last month. It would be unseemly to magnify his name by mentioning him too often in public, so my preference is simply to refer to him here as "the Wretch."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper did the right thing by greeting the death of the Wretch with silence. I found it strange to read of condolences, offered to the family and friends of the Wretch, from those who recognized that his life was marked by wretched deeds.

"I am sorry for your loss; but I am also sorry for the multitude of lives lost because of the wretched political cause supported by your dearly departed." Surely it is wise that people usually never say such things at funerals. Surely such remarks would come across, not as magnanimous or consoling, but rather as insincere and tasteless.

I suspect that saying similar things only hardens hearts against the pro-life cause, no matter how the words are intended. Further, I doubt that atheists and secularists are much impressed when religious believers make a point



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of telling them that they pray for their souls, both in life and after death. Believers usually talk this way because they are trying to express their good will and to cultivate a charitable love in their hearts for all people. But to unbelievers it sounds like stuffing pins into voodoo dolls.

And when it is inserted into the context of a political debate, I can understand why it comes across to some people as articulating a worldview founded on magical thinking and superstition. (For the most part, I prefer a dignified public silence about the name of any Wretch, and to offer private daily prayer that employs only these words of decorous and unsurpassed restraint: "Lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of thy mercy.") For the most part, when a secularist hears public declarations of prayer intentions, they are interpreted as the ravings of crazy people who, on the basis of irrational mythologies, only want to take away the freedoms of others.

The challenge of the abortion debate is for pro-lifers to offer a serious and comprehensive political argument about the meaning of human freedom. It is certainly true that the legacy of the Wretch is a "culture of death." The "culture of death" is John Paul II's apposite phrase for referring to the dehumanization in our culture accomplished by the activities of people like the Wretch. It refers to everything dehumanizing: aborted babies; exploited women; irresponsible males; abortion as an instrument of birth control; abortion as a tool for eugenics and genocide. Pro-lifers were entirely correct to lament the cultivation of death as that to which the Wretch devoted his life.

But it is also true that the legacy of the Wretch, in addition to his key role in the Canadian version of the "culture of death," is his key role in fostering the Canadian version of the "dictatorship of relativism." This "dictatorship of relativism" is Benedict XVI's apposite phrase for those who live by a weird bipolar notion of freedom: They declare, on the one hand, that in some areas of life (like the bedroom)

there are no absolute moral standards. (And thus their politics defends a hedonistic moral "relativism" that focuses mainly on an individual's right to the individualistic practice of maximum sexual freedom.) But then, on the other hand, they impose a "dictatorship" that curtails religious freedom, intellectual freedom, and freedom of conscience. (And thus their politics intolerantly and prematurely shuts down as "hate speech" and "religious bigotry" whatever might conceivably threaten the hedonistic liberties that democratic voters usually prefer to the more ennobling liberties.)

Therefore it is important to note that, in addition to the "culture of death," the legacy of the Wretch is also a regime of diminished liberty. By diminished liberty, I mean that false conception of liberty that characterizes the "dictatorship of relativism."

Without a proper understanding of liberty, there can be no common ground between those who argue for the false liberty that would include the individual right to an abortion, and those who argue that true liberty is not simply about individual rights,



National Portrait Gallery, London

Irish statesman Edmund Burke is depicted in a 1769 portrait by Joshua Reynolds. C.S. Morrissey writes that Burke was correct in saying false liberty is the "greatest of all evils."

because right order in a society can be secured through self-government only if free debate about moral truth is pursued.

For this reason, the pro-life cause needs not only to oppose the "culture of death," the manifest legacy of the Wretch. It also needs to oppose the diminished liberty in Canada that is invariably consequent upon a false notion of liberty, such as the notion held by those who view the Wretch as a hero. Otherwise, the tyranny of "the dictatorship of relativism" will ensure that the pro-life cause will never make any political progress.

The pro-life cause needs to rally around the true conception of liberty, which goes by the name of "ordered liberty."

The Irish statesman Edmund Burke articulated this true vision of ordered liberty: "The only liberty I mean is a liberty connected with order, that not only exists along with order and virtue, but which cannot exist at all without them," said Burke.

Burke criticized the false notion of liberty that animates the dictatorship of relativism: "As to the right of men to act anywhere according to their

pleasure, without any moral tie, no such right exists. Men are never in a state of *total* independence of each other."

Burke thus insisted that true liberty is "social freedom. It is that state of things in which liberty is secured by the equality of restraint." The individual right to abortion is therefore highly questionable and worthy of sober political debate and discussion, because it exalts the freedom of an individual in an unrestrained way that recognizes no claim of social restraint, such as the right of the child to live and the right for serious debates about moral truth to be part of a fair and open political process.

Burke warned that false liberty, the liberty without wisdom and virtue, "is the greatest of all evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition and restraint." The legacy of this false liberty is truly a wretched legacy.

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Letters to the Editor

Thankful for Man Alive

I went to the Man Alive Catholic Men's Conference in Vancouver last year.

At one point, a man came up on stage and spoke about his past addiction with pornography. His testimony hit a nerve. I had been praying to God beforehand to direct me to a cleaner and healthier relationship with my wife, family, and Him.

After the presentation, I went up to meet the man in the lobby, but felt embarrassed to talk in public, so I walked away.

At lunch, I prayed to God again, and prepared for confession. During confession, I told the priest that I had a pornography problem. I needed help. I knew right then that something was changing. I poured out everything to God. I was close to tears.

Thankfully the priest made me feel comfortable. He told me that pornography is like drugs or alcohol: you will be tempted in the future, but with faith and a strong relationship with God you will

smooth the rocky roads.

After Mass I went home and prayed again. Over the next few days I removed all pornography from my computer, and got rid of pornographic magazines and movies. I thought, "How can I set an example to my children if I am not being honest myself?"

I told my wife I had removed pornography from my life. She was very pleased. My intimate relationship with my wife is now better than ever. When we are in a private moment, the experience is real. In the past, our time alone was just another routine chore. It was like setting up an appointment on the calendar with no meaning.

If my wife wasn't interested in being intimate, I felt it was my right to be able to turn to pornography to satisfy my needs. I felt it was okay to choose my computer over my wife.

This doesn't happen anymore. It's like a honeymoon all year round. I have fallen in love with my wife again. She has noticed a differ-

ence.

I now realize how important my father role is. Thanks to the man who spoke up (see bccatholic.ca for the story of that man, Jake Khym) and addressed our group, my life has changed.

If you feel you have an addiction, talk to somebody you trust, like a close friend, family member, or priest. If you feel uncomfortable talking to your own parish priest, talk to a priest from a different parish. Talk about all the past, and you will be forgiven.

Words can't explain the feeling of being free of sin. Do it for your wife, your children, and most important, God.

A.C.

Maple Ridge

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