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A Politician's Promise: No Right to Life! No Freedom!

After committing a murder in Rome, the famous 17th century Italian painter Caravaggio went to Malta to avoid the death penalty. While there, the Great Master of the Order of the Knights of Malta commissioned him to do a painting for the chapel of the Co-Cathedral of St. John in Valletta. Caravaggio chose as his theme the martyrdom of John the Baptist. He produced *The Beheading of St. John*, his largest work, the only one he ever signed. No doubt the scene touched him personally.

Herod was married to Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Because John the Baptist preached against this sin, he incurred the hatred of Herod's wife. The day her daughter Salome delighted Herod with her seductive dance, Herodias had her make Herod promise to kill John the Baptist. Within the severe architecture of a 16th century prison, Caravaggio vividly depicts the grisly moment when Herod kept his promise.

Caravaggio's work, considered his greatest masterpiece, immortalizes the misguided fidelity of a ruler to his gruesome promise. With the stroke of the soldier's sword, John dies and so does freedom. Freedom is based on the truth of the human person as created by God and protected by his law.

When a ruler can decide against God's law, true freedom is sentenced to death.

Recently, a politician made a promise. Politicians usually do. If this politician fulfills his promise, not only will many of our freedoms as Americans be taken from us, but the innocent and vulnerable will spill their blood.

On April 18, 2007, in *Gonzales v. Carhart*, *The Supreme Court upheld the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban*. *The very next day prominent Democratic members of Congress reintroduced the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA)*. *The bill is misleadingly packaged as a freedom bill. It is not! It is a clear act of unreasoned bias to end abruptly and brutally the debate on the pressing and fundamental moral issue of the right to life.*

For thirty-five years, Americans have been wrestling with The Supreme Court's decision legalizing abortion in *Roe v. Wade*. Most Americans now favor some kind of a ban on abortion. Most who allow abortion would do so only in very rare cases. In fact, in January, 2008, the Guttmacher Institute published its 14th census of abortion providers in the country. Its statistics showed that the abortion rate continues to decline. Abortions have reached their lowest level since 1974. There is truly a deep sensitivity to life in the soul of America.

The Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) would mortally wound this sensitivity. In effect, it would dismantle the freedom of choice to do all that is necessary to respect and protect human life at its most vulnerable stage. FOCA goes far beyond guaranteeing the right to an abortion throughout the nine months of pregnancy. It arrogantly prohibits any law or policy

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interfering with that right. While advocates trumpet this law as the triumph of the freedom of choice, they hide the dark reality that the law would actually inhibit choice.

Laws protecting the rights of nurses, doctors and hospitals with moral objections to abortion would no longer stand. Health and safety regulations for abortion clinics would also vanish. Gone the freedom of health care professionals to be faithful to the Hippocratic Oath "to prescribe regimens for the good of ...patients...and never do harm to anyone, to please no one [by prescribing] a deadly drug nor [by giving] advice which may cause his death." Gone the freedom of conscience so essential for a civil society!

If a minority of avid abortionists succeed to impose this law because of the ignorance or apathy of the majority, the law would force taxpayers to fund abortions. Gone the freedom of taxation with representation!

In its 1992 *Casey* decision, The Supreme Court ruled as constitutional state laws requiring that women and young girls who seek an abortion receive information on the development of the child in the womb as well as alternatives to abortion. The ruling also determined that a period of waiting, usually 24 or 48 hours before making a decision about an abortion is not an undue burden. The Freedom of Choice Act would nullify these laws immediately. Gone the freedom of women and young girls to have all the information they need to make their own choices!

In about half of the States, there are parental notification or consent laws in effect for minors seeking an abortion. The Supreme Court has ruled that these laws are permitted under *Roe v. Wade*. With the stroke of a pen, these laws would be abolished. Gone the freedom of parents to care for and protect their children and grandchildren!

Advocates of FOCA redefine a woman's "health" so as to expressly permit post-viability abortions. Thus, a child who survives an abortion can be left to die for the health of the mother. No politically correct word can mask this reality for what it is. This is infanticide. Gone the freedom for a baby, once born, to live!

Science does not dispute that the child in the womb already has all the characteristics that he or she will develop after birth. Notwithstanding, abortionists obstinately refuse the right of the child within the womb to live as a fundamental human right. They are not happy that Americans have not swallowed their distorted propaganda that denies the dignity of the human person from the first moment of conception.

Pro-abortion advocates close their eyes to the fact that abortion even hurts women as it undermines the very fabric of our society. Their zeal for the Freedom of Choice Act sounds the alarm for decent Americans to wake up! The more the right to life is denied, the more we lose our freedoms. The "pro-choice" movement is not pro-choice. It stands against the freedom to choose what is right according to the truth of the human person.

In 2002, as an Illinois legislator, the present democratic candidate voted against the Induced Infant Liability Act. This law was meant to protect a baby that survived a late-term abortion. When the same legislation came up in the Judiciary Committee on which he served, he held to his opposition. First, he voted "present." Next, he voted "no."

Along with 108 members of Congress, the present democratic candidate for President continues his strong support for the Freedom of Choice Act. In aspeech before the Planned Parenthood Action Fund last year, he made the promise that *the first thing* he would do as President would be to sign the Freedom of Choice Act. What a choice for a new President!

At the time when Herod murdered John the Baptist because of his promise, Rome practiced the principle "one man, one vote." Whoever the emperor in Rome placed in authority over a subject people, ruled. Today we live in a democracy. We choose our leaders who make our laws. Every vote counts. Today, either we choose to respect and protect life, especially the life of the child in the womb of the mother or we sanction the loss of our most basic freedoms. At this point, we are still free to choose!

+ Arthur J. Serratelli

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