

Why I am Not Rejoicing over the Recent Supreme Court Decision Overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

*(A modestly revised version of my opening devotion
for the June 28, 2022, Church Council meeting)*

Please do not misunderstand me: Although I am respectful of the Supreme Court and grateful for its recent decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, I find neither satisfaction nor any cause for lasting optimism in what I see as a shallow victory. Merely changing the law changes no hearts; in this case it may even further harden hearts already cemented against each other. There is no real victory until life is so deeply respected in every heart that no one even considers the possibility of abortion. . . or suicide. . . or euthanasia. . . or murder. In overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court repudiated a controversial decision from 1973 but did nothing more. Simply returning to state legislatures the responsibility for addressing this issue makes increasingly acrimonious disagreement all but certain as each state develops its own standards and procedures for measuring the value of life in the womb—and beyond. It is conceivable, though unlikely, that all fifty states could legalize abortion; it is also conceivable, though unlikely,

that all fifty could outlaw the practice. What is highly likely is that each state will wrangle through divisive legislative and judicial challenges for years to come, leaving the nation no closer to unity on this issue than ever before.

So, what are Christians to do? Since God, in Whose image we are created, takes no pleasure in death but specifically identifies it in His Scriptures as the last enemy, we can do no differently. In this world, broken by sin, in which humanity is demeaned and diminished in ways great and small from warfare to disease to discrimination and countless ways in between, we will continue to strive to defend and sustain God's precious gift of life in the name of the redeeming, restoring, pardoning Lord Jesus, the Incarnate Word and Savior of all. Interestingly, despite lofty language of the Declaration of Independence, the Bible nowhere defines life as a right but everywhere upholds it as a gift. If we make this shift in language, we are no longer addressing a matter

of law but of gospel. To speak of a gift necessarily implies a Giver Whose intent is germane to the discussion. Now we can talk about God's will in creating life—all life, including every human life. To speak of a gift also implies a recipient, or, more appropriately, recipients. To whom does God give life in the womb? To the infant, certainly, but also to the parents, grandparents, extended family, friends yet to be made, colleagues yet to be met, and generations yet to be born. I have been blessed by the gifts God gave to the world through the conceptions, births, and lives of such luminaries as Aristotle, Michelangelo, Luther, Bach, Jefferson, Lincoln, Churchill, and others. I have also been blessed by far more anonymous lives, such as whichever ancient mathematician devised Arabic numerals, whichever culinary artist invented the tortilla, and all the allied soldiers who perished in the invasion of Normandy on D-Day, to name but a few. To frame public discussion in this way magnifies both life and lives; it sees in all persons impactful connections to all others, transcending the boundaries of mortality. Surely here we get a glimpse of God's design for life to be a blessing beyond itself.

And what is the Christian Church to do? Since abortion is disproportionately practiced in marginalized communities that have the least access to health care, higher education, professional-level employment, and quality day care, the church as the community of those made new in Christ Jesus, will now be called upon to renew and intensify its support for pregnancy-help centers, maternity homes, health clinics, day care centers, foster-care families, adoption agencies, jobs training programs, and more, as part of its fellowship in Word-and-Sacrament ministries, particularly in places where the social safety net is precarious. Perhaps it is even time to bring back the idea of the church-sponsored orphanage, generously supported by local congregations and honorably administered for the benefit of children whose parents are unable to provide for them. And it certainly remains incumbent upon the church, in this age as in all ages, to teach and model with clarity and care God's sacred design for human sexuality and reproduction, including His creation of male and female, His respect for virginity and chastity, His ordinance of marriage as the life-long, one flesh union of husband and

wife, His commendation of self-control, His expectation of personal and familial responsibility, and, above all, His forgiveness as repentance and faith look to Jesus.

I freely admit that these thoughts are not fully mature and may not reflect the views of the whole congregation. Matters of respect for life from conception through natural death deserve far more prayer than is evident here. As I personally and pastorally wrestle with current events, I have one only keen insight: that the world still urgently needs the heart-changing gospel of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of sinners. Until every

nation hears this news our commission as disciples of the Lord remains incomplete. His grace compels us toward ever-more active love. So, while I find great value in responsible earthly government, including courts that are wisely willing to reconsider and occasionally reverse previous rulings, I find far more hopefulness, joy, purpose, and peace in Him Who willingly laid down His life and rose again so that all "may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

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