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We remain steadfast, but...

By [Judie Brown](#)

Over the last few weeks, something rather bizarre has occurred in the pro-life movement and it is difficult for me to get my arms around it. So, I have decided to share the puzzlement I am experiencing in the hopes that others, upon reading this, will join me in a fervent Lenten prayer for healing.

This past January 17, as a personhood proposal was being presented as a way to amend Georgia's state constitution, the two bishops in that state made a public statement in opposition to it. They wrote, "As the Catholic bishops of Georgia we, along with our brother bishops throughout the world, have unceasingly advocated for the sanctity of human life and continually supported legislative efforts to increase protection of human life."

They claim to agree with the "objectives" of the proposed state constitutional amendment but oppose the approach because it "does not provide a realistic opportunity for ending or reducing abortion in Georgia."

A few weeks later, on February 26, the two Catholic bishops in Montana issued a statement expressing their views on a proposed personhood amendment to the Montana state constitution. They wrote, "We, the Catholic Bishops of Montana, remain steadfast in our commitment to defend human life in all of its stages, from conception to natural death."

They went on to commend the "objective" of the efforts to amend the state's constitution, but pointed out that they support efforts to amend the U.S. Constitution rather than the state's. They wrote that they "do not believe that CI-100 is the most beneficial venue to pursue necessary change." They listed several strategies which they deem appropriate at the state level, including funding pregnancy centers, providing support for expectant mothers and passing a law requiring parental notice with judicial bypass prior to a minor acquiring an abortion.

Two days later, the Colorado Catholic Conference issued a statement regarding the proposal by Colorado for Equal Rights to amend the Colorado state constitution with personhood language. In that statement, the Colorado Catholic Conference said, "We commend the goal of this effort to end abortion... but we do not believe that this year's Colorado Personhood Amendment is the best means to pursue this issue at this time."

The Colorado conference denied that any of the bishops had lent their support to the personhood initiative being promoted by Colorado for Equal Rights even though Bishop Tafoya, one of the three bishops in Colorado, had his picture taken with the campaign leader, Keith Mason, and had given every indication that he supported the effort.

The thread that ties these three separate actions together is the realization that even though these

seven Catholic bishops in three states all share the goal of doing all they can to end the slaughter of the innocents, they also agree that personhood amendments to state constitutions are not realistic, timely or the best way to do things. Statements like those I have just excerpted are the source of my confusion.

For the record and, if I may say so, for the babies, allow me to point a few things out.

It was not anyone in the pro-life movement, but rather United States Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun who wrote in the *Roe v. Wade* decision, "If this suggestion of personhood is established, the appellant's [abortion] case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the [14th] Amendment."

In other words, if those who understand that a preborn child is a person from the point of his creation want to restore absolute legal protection to children, then personhood must be established in the law. Justice Blackmun did not tell us how personhood could be established, but he did give us a clue and this is why so many pro-life activists have chosen to do what they can to propose personhood amendments to the various state constitutions. The hope is that one of these proposals will be passed by the people and if it eventually arrives at the U.S. Supreme Court, the actual merits of personhood will be argued.

Further, on March 7, 1974, Cardinal Humberto Medeiros spoke at a United States Senate Judiciary Committee hearing for the entire National Conference of Catholic Bishops and told the senators that any proposed constitutional amendment "...should clearly establish that, from conception onward, the unborn child is a human person in the terms of the Constitution."

In that same statement, Cardinal Medeiros also made it perfectly clear that every proposal should be "universal and without exceptions."

So, a totally pro-abortion Supreme Court justice and a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church both came to the same conclusion: Personhood is the key to ending the tyranny of the abortion empire in America. And yet when we have three actively dedicated pro-life organizations pursuing the very goal that Cardinal Medeiros encouraged, we also have Catholic bishops publicly distancing themselves from such efforts and opposing them in a variety of ways.

This is discouraging, but not surprising. In fact, it is a harbinger of things to come if those committed to pro-life principle do not press on rather than succumb to a spirit of despair.

Now is not the time to accept defeat simply because of the negative statements coming forth from Catholic conferences whether in the east, the west or anywhere in between. We cannot change the statements of those Church leaders who have chosen to oppose personhood efforts, but on the other hand, we cannot abandon the very principle that is foundational to all pro-life efforts not only in Montana, Georgia and Colorado — but everywhere else.

Among the many legal minds who have contributed to the fundamental strategy that underlies the necessary pro-life legal efforts in these three states is that of the wise Notre Dame law professor Charles Rice. In 35 years, he has never changed his perspective on personhood. What he said in 1973 he continues to say today. He teaches that it was the denial of personhood that was the foundation for everything that the Nazis did to the Jews, the Christians and others under their regime. The idea of relegating entire classes of people to subhuman status was the crux of the Nazi euthanasia program and all the gruesome acts that followed it.

Professor Rice ties that very attitude of annihilation by dehumanization directly to the abortion industry of today. And as he has written, the affirmation of the non-personhood of the preborn child

means that the particular human beings who fall into this category are subject to all manner of cruelty and abuse, including death because they have no rights — they are not human beings according to the law.

This alone should give rise to a total advocacy of personhood on the part of every single pro-life American in our day and age. Whether a Catholic prelate or a man on the street, there is no denying that the culture of death now has a tragic grip on the thought process of those in authority in our nation and that must change.

As Professor Rice so eloquently wrote, "*Roe* applies precisely the principle that underlay the Nazi extermination of the Jews, that an innocent human being can be declared to be a non-person and subjected to death at the discretion of those who regard him as unfit or unwanted. The justices, who triggered the abortion avalanche by their own free decision, are no more defensible than the Nazi judges who acquiesced in the crimes of that regime and the functionaries who administered its decrees at Auschwitz and similar places."

As if that were not enough, he concluded on this sober note, "The Court will allow states to enact marginal restrictions on surgical abortions, but those abortions are becoming obsolete because of early abortifacient drugs and devices."

So, I am left bewildered and anguished by these questions: Why not personhood? How can one be steadfast and at the same time oppose such sensible strategies?

As Alan Keyes warned, "The evil that we fight is but a shadow of the evil that we do."

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