

Defend the Common Dignity of Human Life

By Rev. Martin Fox

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Legislature.

In the book of Exodus, the Lord says, “You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry” (Exodus 22:22).

I speak of fundamental human dignity: the premise of nearly every law you enact.¹

Who will defend human dignity? On one level, all of us. In a particular way, you. As a priest, I just quoted Scripture. As an American, let me quote other words: “All men² are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain, inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Perhaps we forget how bold a Declaration that was—and still is!

Do you believe it? If so, I ask you, do our laws reflect it?

We forget how *fragile* this idea of human dignity is—especially at the margins. We all operate on the assumption that the law will protect our basic dignity. But why assume this? What gives us this assurance?

Our Constitution? Most of the world does not have our constitution. But even if they did, recall what Chief Justice Charles Evan Hughes said:

You may think that the Constitution is your security—it is nothing but a piece of paper. You may think that the statutes are your security—they are nothing but words in a book. You may think that elaborate mechanism of government is your security—it is nothing at all, unless you have sound and uncorrupted public

¹ Some say, glibly, that we ought not to legislate morality. But what else will you legislate—*immorality*? All legislation—yes, even mundane things like product labeling and traffic regulations—are exercises in *morality*.

The legislature enacted a law some time back requiring everyone to wear seat-belts. Why? Why are even adults subject to a penalty if they fail to wear a seat-belt? Is it not because the Assembly was concerned for those adults’ *own* safety, because the legislature believed seat-belts save lives and prevent injury? Why does the legislature *care* about saving human lives? If that is not a *moral* impulse—what is it?

² Let us not quibble about terminology. If Jefferson did not intend both men and women, certainly we do.

opinion to give life to your Constitution, to give vitality to your statutes, to make efficient your government machinery.³

Bad law corrupts public opinion, and good law helps form *sound* public opinion. It is not enough to *wait* for public opinion; it must be aroused.

Our current law on abortion does a very powerful job of shaping our social values about human dignity. Do the word games we play—it's a baby! No, it's a "choice"—help or hurt our common commitment to the dignity of every human life?

Roe v. Wade...50 million abortions...euthanasia...and now, we are turning of human life into a *commodity*: "surplus" embryos...what shall we *use* them for? "Research"—and then, let us *clone millions more*.

If this is "progress," toward what, may I ask?

You may say, "these are subtle questions, and what you ask is difficult." Of course—but that is the job of a legislator! If "Thou shalt not kill" were so obvious, it would never have been said in the first place! Do you think it was easy to abolish slavery? Even that obvious *moral* insight—that humans shall not enslave others—is too subtle for some, to this very day.

There are so many fronts, many battles, but one great cause: human dignity. I ask you to enact H.B. 228. Safeguard human dignity. And heed the cry of the poor.

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³ Quoted by Jay M. Brown, "When Military Necessity Overrides Constitutional Guarantees: The Treatment of Japanese Americans During World War II," Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, 2005, accessible at: <http://www.cis.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1982/3/82.03.01.x.html>.