



ARE WE WILLING TO BE RADICALLY PRO-LIFE?

By Jim Vogt

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“Pro-Life” – What does it mean? For some, it means being opposed to abortion and committed to alternatives to that violent “solution” to an untimely pregnancy. For others, the term also includes the issues of infanticide and euthanasia. Still others see a pro-life stance extending to any issue where life is threatened. This includes capital punishment, war, high rates of infant mortality, inadequate health care, domestic violence, hunger and malnutrition, etc. This latter stance is the one the U.S. bishops took when they articulated the “consistent ethic of life.”

Yet I believe the call to be pro-life must even go beyond our positions on these issues. The stirring words of Deuteronomy – “Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live!” – challenge us primarily to examine our *attitudes*, our stance toward other people, and all of creation. If we want to be radically pro-life we must change ourselves first. Personal conversion is the most difficult thing for all of us.

I offer the following as manifestations of people who are radically pro-life:

- They cultivate a spirit of listening and openness whenever they approach someone who is different from them. Pre-judging or stereotyping others based on the color of their skin, the way they talk or dress or comb their hair, their manner of speech, are all actions that are deadening for relationships.
- They reject violence as an acceptable or effective solution to problems, even as a last resort. Is there anything more demeaning to the human person than to intentionally hurt or kill someone? For those of us who are parents it means avoiding the use of spanking and even verbal abuse in disciplining our children.
- They recognize that fundamentalism, whether religious or ideological has always been a source of death. They rather seek to foster a spirit of respect toward all who see reality differently than them.
- They cultivate respect toward all living things. They see that all life, all creation, is an intertwined web. When part of the web is damaged, the whole suffers as well.
- They are committed to the building of community, whether in their family, their community, or throughout our planet. As Americans, they recognize the strong current of individualism within our culture that so often thwarts the building of genuine community. They also recognize that, in our increasingly interdependent world, the creation of a global community and the institutions to support it are critical needs if humankind is to survive.

There are certainly other pro-life attitudes, but I find these few more than enough for a lifetime of work. How often I have failed to reject the violent solution in disciplining my child. How often I have accepted stereotypes – the one of the “dangerous and aggressive” young black male comes to mind – that keep me from meeting another person as a unique individual.

Some may feel that my approach waters down the “true” pro-life message. I would disagree. These are attitudes that, if we try to live them out, will impel us into involvement on behalf of life wherever it is threatened. And unless we are truly pro-life in our own lives, how can we ever expect to influence the behavior of another? Let us choose life, everyday, wherever we are.