



Diocese of Chalan Kanoa

Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas

P.O. Box 745

Saipan, CM 96950

July 15, 1985

Dear Delegates,

I was pleased to hear that the Convention has taken the issue seriously enough to consider an amendment to CNMI constitution to restrict abortion. I also note a legal opinion by a legal advisor to the convention which points out that the Covenant makes the US Constitution the supreme law of the land and in light of this, and the Roe vs. Wade decision, that such an amendment prohibiting abortion would be unconstitutional. In this letter I would like to respond to this opinion and to explain my role in this issue.

Imagine that it is the practice in the United States, as it has been in a number of cultures, to take one's parents into the wilderness and leave them there to die when they are too old to care for themselves. Now suppose that people were beginning to practice this barbaric custom in the CNMI, taking their elders to Banzai Cliff and shoving them off to their death. If any one does this to people who are still able to work and care for themselves they are arrested for homicide, however, the law protects the perpetrators when it is their aged mothers and fathers they are killing. What would your reaction be? Could you sit back and say, "I won't do it but I respect the right of others to kill their parents!" I am sure that you would realize that evil is no less wrong simply because the law allows it. I hope that you would be moved to do what you could to change the law.

The situation is the same with abortion. Contrary to almost two centuries of interpretation of the US Constitution and the laws of every state in the Union, five of the nine men on the Supreme Court a decade ago interpreted the constitution to allow an almost free reign on the killing of children below that stage in their development where they have become physically separate from the mother. Now this barbaric practice is beginning to appear in the CNMI. Are we to sit back quietly and ignore it? If the CNMI constitution is to be the supreme law of the Commonwealth and a clear statement of the values of this community, then it must reflect those values. I would argue that abortion is contrary to the basic values of this community and thus should not be permitted in the CNMI constitution.

It has been suggested that my active support for an amendment prohibiting abortion is an unfair intrusion of the Church into matters of state. One of the basic rights under the US and CNMI constitution is freedom of speech. It is this right that I exercise in my position on abortion. If you, as a delegate, support an amendment to prohibit abortion simply because


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"the bishop says so", you are failing in your duty as an elected delegate. However, I hope that as mature and intelligent Christians you and the other delegates will think of the moral issues involved, come to a decision you can live with, and move to see that decision implemented.

The essential goal is to protect the lives of our children. If it is likely that a different strategy would be more effective than the current proposed amendment, such a strategy should be used. Perhaps, an amendment to recognize human life as beginning with conception (a point in time that is biologically a better choice than birth, as the unique genetic code that the person will retain for the rest of his life is set at that time), thus giving unborn children protection under the law, might be effective.

Whether the current wording is retained or a different approach is tried, we should not anticipate possible conflicts with the US constitution and avoid action based on these possible conflicts. The issue of abortion is one of the most confused of all constitutional issues. Simply because it is suggested that there is a conflict is no reason to back down from the issue. If the lives of our children are important enough that we see the need to protect those lives with a constitutional amendment, then we should place that amendment in the constitution. If there is a constitutional question, let the Courts decide the matter. After all, there are other clauses in the CNMI constitution of questionable consistency with the US constitution, such as land alienation, yet these issues were felt to be important enough to be included. Can we do no less regarding the lives of our children?

Sincerely,


+Tomas A. Camacho
Bishop of Chalan Kanoa

•• Catholics supporting abortion lack knowledge of conviction ••

VATICAN CITY (NC) — Pope John Paul II has publicly criticized Catholics who favor legalized abortion.

Such Catholics show "a lack of knowledge or a lack of conviction that, from the very moment of conception, there already exists a being distinct from the mother, subject to inalienable rights," the pope said June 11 to a group of Colombian bishops.

Abortion is banned in Colombia, but there has been public discussion of legalizing it.

The pope asked the bishops to help protect family life by opposing divorce and "the unsettling problem of abortion."

Although divorce is not a legal right in Colombia, where more than 95 percent of the 27.8 million population is Catholic, Colombians who obtain divorces in other countries and remarry are recognized as married.

The bishops should work to overcome "the materialistic and hedonistic temptations which threaten to undermine the foundations of family life without offering anything in exchange except a vacuum," the pope said.

"Many people, even Catholics, adopt permissive positions on legal matters under the pretext of guaranteeing a better health program and of preventing the evils which arise from clandestine abortions," the pope said.

They even cite "the problems of an unwanted child, the social rejection of unwed mothers, of deficient health and the bad economic situation of families," he added.

Such Catholics forget that abortion is "a grave violation of the law of God" and that life is "the first among the fundamental rights of the human being," the pope said.

The pope also asked the bishops to improve marriage preparation courses to help combat the "mentality of an easy divorce" which undermines church teachings about "the unity and indissolubility of Christian marriage."

"What grave consequences ruptured marriages cause for many children," he said. "Children often develop emotional problems which frequently open the door to painful situations of drug addiction or social rebelliousness," the pope added.

Catholic support for legalized abortion became a controversial issue during the 1984 U.S. presidential campaign.

Democratic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, a Catholic, supported abortion as a legal right in a pluralistic society although saying that she personally opposed it.

Ms. Ferraro also said that there was more than one Catholic view on abortion. Her stands drew quick criticism from several U.S. bishops, including Cardinal (then-Archbishop) John O'Connor of New York who said church teaching was very clear in opposing abortion.

"I do not see how a Catholic in conscience could vote for an individual explicitly expressing himself or herself as favoring abortion," he said.

Ms. Ferraro was defended by New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, also a Catholic and a Democrat. He said that trying to legislate one's moral beliefs could result in a loss of religious freedom.

"The price of seeking to force our beliefs on others is that they might someday force theirs on us," said Cuomo.

Last October about 100 Catholics signed a New York Times ad saying that "a diversity of opinions regarding abortion exist among committed Catholics."