



# NEWS

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **BISHOPS RESPOND TO SENATOR BIDEN'S STATEMENTS REGARDING CHURCH TEACHING ON ABORTION**

WASHINGTON—Cardinal Justin F. Rigali, chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Bishop William E. Lori, chairman, U.S. Bishops Committee on Doctrine, issued the following statement:

Recently we had a duty to clarify the Catholic Church's constant teaching against abortion, to correct misrepresentations of that teaching by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on "Meet the Press" (see [www.usccb.org/prolife/whatsnew.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/prolife/whatsnew.shtml)). On September 7, again on "Meet the Press," Senator Joseph Biden made some statements about that teaching that also deserve a response.

Senator Biden did not claim that Catholic teaching allows or has ever allowed abortion. He said rightly that human life begins "at the moment of conception," and that Catholics and others who recognize this should not be required by others to pay for abortions with their taxes.

However, the Senator's claim that the beginning of human life is a "personal and private" matter of religious faith, one which cannot be "imposed" on others, does not reflect Catholic teaching. The Church teaches that the obligation to protect unborn human life rests on the answer to two questions, neither of which is private or specifically religious.

The first is a *biological* question: When does a new human life begin? When is there a new living organism of the human species, distinct from mother and father and ready to develop and mature if given a nurturing environment? While ancient thinkers had little verifiable knowledge to help them answer this question, today embryology textbooks confirm that a new human life begins at conception (see [www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic/fact298.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic/fact298.shtml)). The Catholic Church does not teach this as a matter of faith; it acknowledges it as a matter of objective fact.

The second is a *moral* question, with legal and political consequences: Which living members of the human species should be seen as having fundamental human rights, such as a right not to be killed? The Catholic Church's answer is: Everybody. No human being should be treated as lacking human rights, and we have no business dividing humanity into those who are valuable enough to warrant protection and those who are not. Even this is not solely a Catholic teaching, but a principle of natural law accessible to all people of good will. The framers of the Declaration of Independence pointed to the same basic truth by speaking of inalienable rights, bestowed on all members of the human race not by any human power, but by their Creator. Those who hold a narrower and more exclusionary view have the burden of explaining why we should divide humanity into the moral "haves" and "have-nots," and why their particular choice of where to draw that line can be sustained in a pluralistic society. Such views pose a serious threat to the dignity and rights of other poor and vulnerable members of the human family who need and deserve our respect and protection.

While in past centuries biological knowledge was often inaccurate, modern science leaves no excuse for anyone to deny the humanity of the unborn child. Protection of innocent human life is not an imposition of personal religious conviction but a demand of justice.