

Pro-life Basics

I am absolutely against procured abortion. However, according to Evangelium Vitae by Pope John Paul II, we are permitted to make some compromises in cases where it is impossible to totally outlaw abortion. Therefore, I don't understand your opposition to incremental steps.

—Joe B.

Dear Joe,

In *Evangelium Vitae* we read: "When it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality. This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects" (EV 73).

The Holy Father was referring to proposals such as a ban on all third-trimester abortions without exception. Such a bill would be a valid incremental step because while it's not the ultimate goal, it does limit harm with legal protection of all third-trimester preborn babies. Furthermore, Pope John Paul II did not say that elected officials *must* or *should* vote for such a proposal; he said that they *could* vote for it.

Many pro-lifers misinterpret paragraph 73 to mean that we can licitly support a bill which would allow the

killing of some preborn persons who are conceived during rape and/or incest, etc. Yet the Church teaches that there is no valid reason for abortion; neither rape, nor incest, nor disability of the preborn person, nor disability of his mother, nor the mother's mental state, nor the mother's life.

When a physician removes a cancerous womb or a seriously infected fallopian tube containing a human embryo (tubal pregnancy), he is *not* intending the death of the preborn child. Such actions are not direct abortions.

There are other misinterpretations of limiting harm. One is the proposal of offering mothers the option to anesthetize their preborn children and spare

them the pain of abortion. This does nothing to limit harm. First, it permits all abortions. Second, it sets bad legal and social precedents—as if giving people painkillers would make murder humane. Thus, EV 74 warns: "There may be reason to fear; however, that willingness to carry out such actions will not only cause scandal and weaken the necessary opposition to attacks on life, but will gradually

lead to further capitulation to a mentality of permissiveness."

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