

Our choices end where another's more fundamental right begins

by Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann

Though he has local roots in the Kansas City area, I have never met vice presidential candidate, Senator Tim Kaine. From those who do know him, I understand that he is a very affable and likable person.

In the Oct. 4 vice presidential debate, Senator Kaine acknowledged he was blessed with great Irish Catholic parents and grew up in a wonderful faith-filled family. He also mentioned proudly that he is a graduate of Rockhurst High School, crediting the Jesuits with instilling within him a desire for public service and a commitment to advocate for the poor. I wish that was the end of the story.

It was painful to listen to Senator Kaine repeat the same tired and contorted reasoning to profess his personal opposition to abortion while justifying his commitment to keep it legal. He said all the usual made-for-modern-media sound bites: It is not proper to impose his religious beliefs upon all Americans. He trusts women to make good reproductive choices. And when all else fails, there is always: Do we really want to criminalize and fill our jails with post-abortive women?

With regard to the imposition of religious beliefs, Senator Kaine appears to have no qualms with his public positions conforming with his religious beliefs with regard to such issues as the church's opposition to racism or our preferential option for the poor. He appears not to be conflicted with our public policies mirroring the Ten Commandments with regard to stealing, perjury, or forms of murder, other than abortion.

The founders of our nation actually dealt with this issue 240 years ago in the Declaration of Independence, in which they articulate certain self-evident and inalienable rights that government does not bestow but has a responsibility to protect. Our founders actually believed that the right to life is given to us by our Creator, not by the Supreme Court.

Of course, religion will speak about fundamental human rights issues. However, to understand that the government has a right to protect human life is not dependent on religious belief. As the founders' stated, these are self-evident truths. They are accessible to everyone through the use of reason. They do not require faith.

Why is Senator Kaine personally opposed to abortion, if he does not believe that it is the taking of an innocent human life? I hope in his science classes at Rockhurst he learned that at the moment of fertilization a new human life has begun with his or her own distinct DNA — different from the genetic code of both the child's mother and father.

It is difficult to imagine that Senator Kaine has not seen the ultrasound images of his children and grandchildren when they were in their mother's womb. Is the senator unaware that abortion stopped the beating hearts of 60 million American children aborted legally since 1973?

If he knows these truths of biology, why would he believe that anyone has the right to authorize the killing of an unborn human being? This is

where the reproductive choice euphemism breaks apart. Does anyone really have the choice to end another human being's life? Our choices end where another individual's more fundamental rights begin.

As far as Senator Kaine's fear that if abortion is made illegal, our prisons will be teeming with post-abortive women, we actually have decades of legal history in our own country when this was certainly not the case.

Before the late 1960s when abortion was illegal in every state, except for the life-of-the-mother cases, it is difficult to find a single instance of a woman imprisoned for abortion. The laws were enforced against the abortionists. Our own legal experience shows clearly that it is possible to develop public policies aimed at protecting children, not punishing women.

Actually, I wish Senator Kaine would take the time to talk with some of the post-abortive women that are assisted by Project Rachel and other post-abortion ministries helping women and men find healing, hope and mercy after an abortion. Our current permissive abortion policies, placing the entire burden of responsibility for the abortion decision upon the mother, results in millions of women experiencing an inner

imprisonment where the bars keeping them from freedom and happiness are the guilt and unresolved grief that inevitably ensues from abortion.

It is interesting that Senator Kaine expressed his personal anguish when as governor he enforced capital punishment sentences. He gave the impression that he attempted unsuccessfully to convince Virginians to abolish the death penalty. Yet, with regard to legalized abortion, I am not aware of Senator Kaine making a similar effort to convince his constituents to work for public policies that protect the lives of the unborn. Instead, he appears eager to champion not only maintaining the status quo, but actually expanding abortion rights.

It is ironic that Senator Kaine expressed such profound concern about imposing his religious beliefs on others, while supporting efforts: 1) to coerce the Little Sisters of the Poor and other faith-based ministries to violate their conscience by including abortifacients, contraceptives and sterilizations in their employee health plans; 2) to put small business owners (e.g., florists, bakers, photographers, etc.) out of business with crippling fines if they decline to participate in same-sex marriage ceremonies; and 3) to force every American taxpayer to help fund abortion.

This presidential election presents all Americans with a difficult choice. Both major political parties have nominated very flawed candidates. In making your decision as a voter, I encourage you to think not only of the candidate, but who they will appoint to key Cabinet and other powerful government positions if he or she becomes president. We are choosing not just a president, but an entire administration.

Finally, be wary of candidates who assume to take upon themselves the role of defining what Catholics believe or should believe. Unfortunately, the vice-presidential debate revealed that the Catholic running for the second highest office in our land is an orthodox member of his party, fully embracing his party's platform, but a cafeteria Catholic, picking and choosing the teachings of the Catholic Church that are politically convenient.

