

I am a prochoice Catholic

Kate Childs Graham | Feb. 26, 2009

I wasn't always a prochoice Catholic. During college I attended the annual March for Life on more than one occasion. The first time my friends and I traveled to the event from Indianapolis, Ind., was with a bus full of high school students -- most, seemingly, only going for the trip to Washington, D.C., with their friends, sans parental supervision. Needless to say, it was a noisy bus ride. After I transferred to Catholic University, I volunteered for the Mass for Life two years in a row -- helping to herd all of those high school students into every crevice of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Each time I attended the March for Life, I felt overwhelmingly conflicted. On one hand, it was moving to be among so many people, all energized by their faith around an issue. On the other hand, I sensed that I wasn't getting the complete picture -- I wasn't being told the full story.

And thus started my process of discernment around the right to abortion. It took several years. I asked friends on both sides of the issue thousands of questions. I read book after book. I prayed. I studied what the church hierarchy had to say about the issue. I studied what the Catholic church -- the faithful -- had to say about the issue.

In the end, after months of avoiding my conscience as to not stir up any controversy in my life, I finally discerned that I am a prochoice Catholic.

There is no way to explain in just a few words all of the reasons I came to this conclusion. Nonetheless, I would like to highlight a few points that moved me to identify as a prochoice Catholic.

Where abortion is prohibited or stigmatized, women do not all of the sudden decide to carry pregnancies to term. Decisions pertaining to family are greater than law or custom. Instead, women seek out abortion where it is available. Where it is illegal, more often than not abortions are unsafe. According to the World Health Organization, 19 million unsafe abortions occur each year and some 70,000 women die as a result. Even worse, in some countries where abortion is illegal and women come into hospitals to seek medical attention for a botched abortion, they aren't treated with the care they need. Rather, they are treated as criminals, left to suffer on an examination table as the doctors and nurses are forced to call in a police examiner.

For these reasons alone, I could see that the illegalization of abortion is not the way to go. However, for me (and for many others), being prochoice does not end at supporting the right to safe and legal abortion; it extends to discovering the best methods to prevent unintended pregnancies. Contraception promotion, comprehensive sexuality education, and access to affordable child care and healthcare are just some of the methods that are paramount to reducing the need for abortion. The antiabortion movement (and even moderate Catholics who talk about reducing the number of abortions) are avoiding discussions around these important ways to prevent unintended pregnancies.

Finally, I am a prochoice Catholic because my Catholic faith tells me I can be. The Catechism reads, "[Conscience] is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in

his depths.? Even St. Thomas Aquinas said it would be better to be excommunicated than to neglect your individual conscience. So really, I am just following his lead. After years of research, discernment and prayer, my conscience has been well informed. Being a prochoice Catholic does not contradict my faith; rather, in following my well-informed conscience, I am adhering to the central tenet of Catholic teaching -- the primacy of conscience.

My hope is that together the hierarchy of the Catholic church, the antiabortion movement and the prochoice movement will help people of all faiths and no faith to develop well-informed consciences. However, this can only be done by talking about the whole picture -- from the dangers of unsafe abortion to the importance of preventing unintended pregnancy. By narrowing our focus to the legalization/illegalization of abortion, we are ignoring the realities which women and families face around the world. And that?s not serving anyone.

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