

Kudos to Congressman Ryan and Congresswoman DeLauro

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 24, 2009 NCR Today

It is impossible not to admire the long hours and tough negotiating that went into the Ryan-DeLauro Bill that aims to reduce abortions. And, it is equally impossible to think that sometime in the near future, a majority of Americans, including a majority of American Catholics, will come to believe that contraception is a bad thing.

But, still, I can't help thinking that *Humanae Vitae* reads better with every passing year. (This can be said of other texts by Pope Paul VI ? read his address at the end of Vatican II again. [It is breathtaking in its challenge](#) [1].)

Of course, back in 1968 no one actually read *Humanae Vitae*, did they? They just read the headline ?Pope Bans Pill.? But, we Catholics are not revivalists. We do not reduce religion to ethics. We did not support Prohibition. No one has, so far as I know, accused the Catholic cultures of Italy and France of being puritanical. The pope was not talking about the pill in *Humanae Vitae*, he was talking about us, about our vocation as Christians, about people called to sell all we have to acquire the pearl of great worth which is the Gospel. And, he was warning against the false sense of control which today has issued forth in such vulgar and frightening confidence in our ability to manipulate human life of which bio-engineering and designer babies are the most obvious, and bitter, fruit.

Can Catholics support Ryan-DeLauro? I think it is still preferable to push for the Pregnant Women Support Act. I hope that legislators will try and bring the two bills into a single bill that might not pass muster at the Bishops' Conference but still would appear less beholden to the culture of contraception. Still, no one knows how the competing pieces of legislation will play out and it is important ? vitally important ? that we try and reduce the abortion rate in this country.

So, on balance, I believe elected representatives can, in good conscience, reach the conclusion that the Ryan-DeLauro bill may not be their first choice but it is nonetheless something for which they can vote. Others may find that their conscience does not permit them to vote for the bill. As Judge Noonan said at Notre Dame, well informed consciences can reach different conclusions.

Kudos go not only to Congressman Ryan and Congresswoman DeLauro. A host of organizations, some religious and some political, worked to bring pro-life and pro-choice people together in drafting this bill. The extent that both sides did not get what they wanted is the measure of the hard work and spirit of compromise (in the good sense!) that were exhibited by all. At least people stopped shouting at each other long enough to listen and to focus on the needs of women facing crisis pregnancies. Even if the bill does not pass, bringing the two sides together is no small achievement.

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[1] <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6closin.htm>