

Bishops respond to House Speaker Pelosi's misrepresentation of Church teaching against abortion

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

In the course of a "Meet the Press" interview on abortion and other public issues on August 24, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi misrepresented the history and nature of the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church against abortion.

In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law." (No. 2271)

In the Middle Ages, uninformed and inadequate theories about embryology led some theologians to speculate that specifically human life capable of receiving an immortal soul may not exist until a few weeks into pregnancy. While in canon law these theories led to a distinction in penalties between very early and later abortions, the Church's moral teaching never justified or permitted abortion at any stage of development.

These mistaken biological theories became obsolete over 150 years ago when scientists discovered that a new human individual comes into being from the union of sperm and egg at fertilization. In keeping with this modern understanding, the Church teaches that from the time of conception (fertilization), each member of the human species must be given the full respect due to a human person, beginning with respect for the fundamental right to life.

More information on the Church's teaching on this issue can be found in the attached brochure **"The Catholic Church is a Pro-Life Church."**