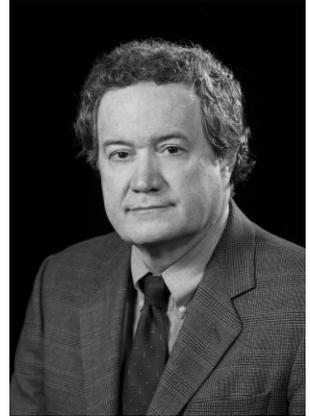




Introduction – Human Rights and the Right to Life

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It seems intuitively simple: unless you are alive, there is no practical way to claim—to insist upon, to assert—any other right. If you no longer exist, you cannot speak or protest or file a lawsuit (or hug your child or help someone in need). Thus, the right to life—the right not to be arbitrarily killed—*necessarily* is the prerequisite to, the foundation of, every other kind of right. There can be nothing recognized and respected in society, and in the courts, as “human rights” unless the most basic human right—the right to life—is respected.



However, though this would seem to be simple intuition, easily—and therefore, widely—grasped, the fact is that, in today’s world, it isn’t. That is, many people support “human rights” but, at the same time, self-identify as “pro-choice”, which *necessarily* means they support the recognition in the law of a right to abortion, that is, the right of some human beings to kill other human beings for no other reason than they wish to do so. That is the very definition of *arbitrary* killing. Holding these two positions entails a logical contradiction: the right of all human beings to life is supported, except for those who are not yet born. But how can it be that the youngest, the smallest, the most defenseless are subject to legalized violence while the older, the bigger, the more powerful human beings are not—in fact, *cannot* legally be—subject to the lethal violence of another?

There is here, as noted, a contradiction. What explains it? Can it be that it matters—in some way that has moral purchase upon our hearts—that the state has legalized the killings? Or that the mother authorizes it? This can be answered with another question – would it matter to our unstinting opposition to slavery that someone chose to be a slave? The answer, I suggest, that we would all agree upon is no, it would not matter; slavery is always and everywhere wrong, and it is wrong because it reduces a human being to property, to the status of an object; it

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deprives him of his inherent human dignity, something of which no one—not even himself—may deprive him. In other words, it violates his human rights. Whether or not, it is “legal”, it is wrong. Whether or not, the mother—or anyone else—authorizes it, it is wrong. It is wrong because it reduces the unborn human being to the status of an object that has no legal protection. But human rights are either for all human beings or they are for none. Either human rights are for human beings, or they are arbitrary legal constructs, applied to some but not all, at the whim of the powerful.

To be “pro-life” is to be “pro-human rights”, and the reverse is true as well: to be “pro-human rights” means one must be “pro-life”.

Many nations in Latin America understand this fact better than do those in North America. Neither Canada nor the United States grasps this elementary truth; thus, abortion is legalized in those countries, throughout pregnancy, for any reason whatsoever. Despite the laws and the courts and the police and the democratic elections in those countries, they ignore the most basic human right.

However, Latin America understands the unity of human rights and understands it deeply. In many nations—Honduras and Chile, for instance—abortion is forbidden. In many of those nations—Paraguay, for example—the state is legally obligated both to secure the right to life of the child and to assist the family or mother against economic or social conditions that could lead to abortion—as-a-solution to despair. Latin American countries refuse to make a false choice between the mother and the unborn child, understanding that both are human beings and every human being has human rights, and there is no contradiction in that.

Americans United for Life works—and has worked for over 40 years—in the United States to secure the most basic human right. It has sought to roll back “the right to abortion” which the U.S. Supreme Court created *ab initio* in several cases such as *Roe v Wade*. AUL has sought, in many ways, to secure legal recognition of this basic unity of human rights, which Latin America seems to grasp intuitively. The world should emulate Latin America, and that is one reason why we have sponsored this study to document the sturdy commitment to the human right to life that characterizes Latin American law and culture.

However, another reason we have sponsored this study is that the very pro-life culture of Latin America is under assault from the forces of the culture of death. They are constantly working to undermine legal protection for the unborn in Latin America. Oftentimes they do so by invoking “legal rights”, or “human rights”, that do not exist. They claim interpretations of international human rights treaties that are incoherent and self-contradictory. However, in order to stop them from undermining true human rights, their aims and activities must be exposed “to the light of day”. Doing so is another aim of this book.

Finally, and ultimately, this book aims to describe, and illustrate, the



foundation stone of a culture of life. A culture of life is a culture that recognizes and respects true human rights, one that does not pit one human being against another but comes to the assistance of all. In its laws, Latin America is closer to that ideal than any other continent. It is in the sincere wish that it will move ever closer—and never retreat—that this book has been commissioned.

The greatest cause in the world is the cause of human rights. Let Latin America lead the way!