



## Life Issues Forum

### Turning Bad Law into a Bad Memory by Gail Quinn

August 11, 2006

Thirty-three years ago, the Catholic bishops of the United States accurately labeled *Roe v. Wade* and its companion decision, *Doe v. Bolton*. They called those Supreme Court abortion decisions *bad morality*, *bad medicine*, and *bad public policy*. To this day the bishops continue to speak out against *Roe v. Wade*, which gave two human beings (a mother and an abortionist) the legal right to kill another human being, the mother's child in the womb. That license was granted throughout the nine months of pregnancy, for any reason or none.

It seems strange, in retrospect, that the voices of others who identified *Roe v. Wade* as bad law did not garner much attention at the time. Later court decisions based themselves on *Roe*, and abortion became more and more entrenched in American culture and law. Because law is the great teacher, many began to think of abortion as morally acceptable--after all, there was no law against it.

Perhaps the worst U.S. Supreme Court abortion decision was *Casey v. Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania* in 1992. Here the Court said that *even* if *Roe* had been wrongly decided, and *even* if the Court might not reach the same decision today, it would not reverse its 1973 decisions because (a) its own stature and authority would be questioned, and (b) women had *come to order their lives* around abortion's availability. And so the Court reaffirmed that children, prior to birth—or even during birth—could continue to be killed by abortion.

What has been the result of three decades of legal abortion? Millions of unborn children have been deprived of life, many brutally. Countless women and others carry the grief and guilt of having caused the death of their children. Abortion has cheapened our respect for human life right across the board. If you can take the life of one, you can justify taking the life of another. It has coarsened our culture with its ethic of acceptable killing. And as has long been clear, legalized abortion has poisoned the politics of our nation, becoming the centerpiece of what many now call "the culture war."

But there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Legal experts, even those who support legal abortion generally, point to *Roe* as indefensible. People's attitudes are shifting to a pro-life position. And perhaps most importantly, the new generation of young people are much more pro-life than are older Americans.

In a few weeks I will retire from the day-to-day task of working to reverse *Roe v. Wade*. But I am not retiring from the challenge. I plan to be involved in other ways. So much still needs to be done, the pressure needs to be kept up, and everyone willing to lend a hand is needed. Together, you and I can turn this law that is bad morality, bad medicine and bad public policy into nothing but a bad memory.

---

Gail Quinn, Executive Director of the USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, will retire on August 31, 2006.

---

Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202) 541-3070