



**Award Comments,  
National Right to Life Educational Trust Dinner**

April 20, 2005

We're in the aftermath of a papal conclave, so I hope my non-Catholic friends will forgive me tonight if I sound too much like a Papist -- but I really can't help myself, because that's what I am.

On my way out here today I was reflecting on what one life can do to the fabric of history. In every important way, Pope Benedict XVI is an affirmation of the legacy of Pope John Paul II. They were friends and collaborators for many years. And Cardinal Ratzinger was John Paul II's closest adviser in matters of faith, Scriptural interpretation and moral theology, so they shaped and supported each other's thinking in profound ways.

Actually, the election of Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope may be more of a surprise to those outside the Catholic community than to anyone who has lived the Catholic faith seriously over the last two decades. People with direct experience of Cardinal Ratzinger invariably encountered a man of character, kindness, refined intelligence, humility, simplicity and grace. As a bishop and a cardinal, he was above all a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, and a faithful son of the Second Vatican Council where he served as a theologian.

So I think Pope Benedict XVI will pastor the Catholic Church with same dedication and love as his friend and predecessor, John Paul II. And that's important, because I've been struck by how many different persons of many different faiths have told me about their respect for Pope John Paul II. Three million people traveled to Rome for his funeral earlier this month, and they did it not because he was a media star, but because he touched their hearts and their consciences.

Karol Wojtyla embodied all of the deep truths of the Christian faith. He had an abiding love for the poor, the homeless and the oppressed. He spoke forcefully for global economic justice and inter-religious peace. He had the courage to defend the sanctity of the human person in the face of enormous contempt, not just in the days of the old Soviet bloc but more recently from our own cynics in the West - - many of them right here in the United States, and some of them self-described Catholics.

He understood that real Christian discipleship seeks to serve the whole human person, from conception to natural death. The social mission of Christians always embraces both the poor and the unborn; both the homeless and the terminally ill. John Paul understood that we can't build justice while deliberately killing -- or allowing anyone else to deliberately kill -- the innocent and defenseless.

I think we remember John Paul as "the Great" not because he won the approval of The New York Times and media pundits but because he didn't. He was a man of character and clear Christian intellect. He worked tirelessly for what he knew was right, whether it was popular or not. And he encouraged all of us here tonight to do the same by his example.

Every life like Karol Wojtyla's - a life of real Christian discipleship - has a cost. Witnessing for the sanctity of the human person involves work, struggle and courage in the face of bigotry and criticism. You all know that because you've experienced it. But that's the cost of discipleship. Success depends on each of us conforming our hearts -- and then our choices and our actions -- to the principles we claim to believe. John Paul II did it heroically, and the world is better because of him. We can at least try to do the same.

Forty-two years ago this month, another great Pope -- "Good Pope John XXIII" -- wrote a famous reflection on world peace called *Pacem in Terris*. Those are Latin words for "Peace on Earth." But Good Pope John didn't begin it by talking about the arms race or the global economy or international relations. He began it by talking about the rights and duties of the individual human person -- beginning with the right to life. He began that way because the "big picture" depends on the "small picture." World peace begins with a respect for the dignity of the individual human person. That's why Mother Teresa said again and again that abortion is the seed of war. And that's why the work you do on behalf of unborn children is a form of peace-making at the most important and powerful level.

The big picture depends on the small picture. No amount of good policy on immigration, or unemployment, or education, or housing, compensates for bad policy when it comes to deliberately killing the innocent -- beginning with the unborn. The right to life comes first. That's the priority. It's the foundation of every other right. Without it, every other right is built on sand.

That was the message of John XXIII and John Paul II, and it certainly will be the message of Benedict XVI, because every human life is an Icon of God Himself. So take heart. Be not afraid. Thank you for inviting me here tonight, and thank you for this wonderful award. And know that many, many friends are praying for your success all over Colorado.