"The stakes are high and Gehenna is real!"

Good afternoon to you and to each of my esteemed listeners! Welcome to EWTN's Open Line Tuesday edition. I'm Barbara McGuigan, alive and grateful to be your host and grateful to be living in a time when we can truly become saints! God's airwaves are open. Here are the numbers to call:

In North America call 1-800-585-9396
Outside North America call 1-205-271-2985
Our email address is always: Openline@ewtn.com.

If you use a computer, I really encourage you to go to the website of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, at www.bridgeportdiocese.com and read an important new message from Bridgeport's Bishop William E. Lori. It's entitled, "Let Freedom Ring: A Pastoral Letter on Religious Freedom."

Brothers and sisters, the pastoral letter will not only make you proud to be a Catholic in America, but it will clear up many misconceptions that some folks have about Church and state and the public role of religion.

In his letter, Bishop Lori points out that John F. Kennedy, who was elected president 50 years ago next week, remarked in his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, that our rights "come not from the generosity of the State but from the hand of God."

As I read this, I couldn't help but sadly reflect on the situations in the past month in which Barack Obama failed in different campaign speeches to mention the "Creator" when he referred to the Declaration of Independence. Obama quoted the words, "all men are created equal," but when he mentioned our unalienable rights he left out the Declaration's key words about where they come from, namely, "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

Only last Saturday, and only after reporters last week had grilled his press secretary about his omissions of the word "Creator," did Obama finally utter the words "endowed by their Creator" in some campaign speeches.

Back to Bishop Lori's pastoral letter: He cites the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Liberty, issued on December 7, 1965, which, quote,

> …affirmed one's right to worship in accord with one's conscience and also implied the advisability of separating Church and State, that is to say, that advisability of distinguishing between the political power of the State and the religious authority of the Church, and protecting the latter from the former. This Declaration went on to teach that "the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person," not "in the subjective disposition of the person but in his very nature" (Dignitas Humanae, no. 2). Nothing in the Vatican

> II Declaration endorses the notion that society should be free *from* religion or that religion should be marginalized as something irrational or dangerous...
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> On the contrary, the Declaration affirms the natural right of individuals to be free from State coercion with regard to privately held religious convictions as well as the natural right to express those beliefs publicly. This public expression of faith takes the form of worship but includes more than worship: it includes education, and various forms of community service...Catholic schools, religious ed programs, Catholic charities and Catholic hospitals...
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> But we should also lay claim to our natural right to bring our religious convictions into the public square, to engage the culture in which we live, and to participate in debates and discussions which help to shape our character in a civic society. As George Washington said of religion, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these pillars of human happiness."

Brothers and sisters, that sentence by America's first president, "In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these pillars of human happiness," is chilling. And yet everything Mother Church stands for is being undermined and subverted by the "arrogance of evil" now being played out in this country.

In defending "The Role of the Church in Protecting the Rights of Conscience," Bishop Lori writes:

> Contrary to what some think, religion is not merely a private matter between God and oneself. Rather it plays an important public role in society in helping to protect the rights of conscience of the people over against the powers of government...Thus we join with fellow citizens and believers as a community of faith and reason both to make our voices heard and also to resist encroachments by the governmental power on our consciences. After all, it is not the government which grants liberty of conscience or even guarantees it. Liberty of conscience is a natural right and organized religion mediates between individuals and the government in defending not only the freedom to worship but also the freedom to proclaim publicly one's beliefs, to act upon them, and to bring them to bear upon the culture at large.

Another highlight in Bishop Lori's "Let Freedom Ring" pastoral letter, and one for which the pro-life movement has been criticized severely every time we point out the blatant hypocrisy is regarding:

> …the tendency of government to override the legitimate role and authority of parents and guardians...A school nurse needs permission from a parent or guardian to provide an aspirin to a child, but that same child can procure an

> abortion without the knowledge or approval of anyone – parent, guardian, grandparent or adult sibling. Under current law minors can undergo an abortion at the hands of strangers without adequate information and without a system of support to deal with the aftermath of an abortion...

Brothers and sisters, some years ago, after speaking in a government-run high school, having been invited by a pro-life science teacher in order to balance out a previous Planned Parenthood presentation, I was frantically asked by a couple of upperclassman girls on the walk to my car to please talk to their girlfriend who was five months pregnant and hiding that from her parents. They told me their girlfriend wanted to talk to me because a "friend of a friend's mother was going to pick her up to take her for her abortion on Friday, just two days away."

I counseled her on the telephone for about an hour that night. She tearfully asked me to meet her by the flagpole at 8:00 the next morning. How could I not? Two lives are always immediately at stake in every abortion. I called the science teacher who'd brought me in to speak, and he said, "Please use my room. I'll have the fetal models all set up for you." I then called the Vice-Principal whom I met to tell her of the plan for the next morning. She gave me permission to come.

So after meeting at the flagpole, I took my anxious teen mother with child into the science room, to give her God's love and a transfusion of courage to equip her for the battle that lay ahead of her. After about 45 minutes, her demeanor had softened, her eyes were fixed on the five-month fetal model, and she began to thank me for being with her. But our peace and tranquility were then broken when the Principal burst through the door and angrily told my precious charge to "Get to class!" while he disrespectfully barked at me to "Go to my office!" I hugged the little mother, who was now sobbing, while I left, to her screams of "Please don't make Barbara go! I need her! Don't do this to me!" It was an out of body experience for me, to be sure. My heart was in my mouth.

I squeezed my rosary in my pocket. I knew this wasn't going to be pretty. Mr. Principal was terribly angry, which I was most accustomed to, so undaunted. Only a few words came to his mouth as he said, "We do not let Planned Parenthood counsel in this school and neither can you. Now get out of here!" Rather than defend myself, which was the least of my worries, I replied, "Mr. Principal, if you can let a young teen mother be picked up tomorrow by a strange woman to be taken to an abortion mill to have her unborn baby ripped from her womb, piece by living piece, without her parents' knowledge, I honestly don't know how you will be able to put your head on your pillow tonight." I calmly walked out the door, dying inside.

The next day, I received a call from one of the girlfriends. Mr. Principal called a meeting that afternoon with the little mother's parents. They spent some time in his office. They decided to *take* their daughter to have the abortion she did not want. I would be lying to say I did not suffer severely from this experience. Grieving is the price we pay for loving. Thankfully, my spiritual director was there to pick up the pieces. I'll never forget his words: "Barbara, what you've just experienced is demonic. You must be

constantly fortified with prayer and the sacraments to stand against these forces of evil that will surely come against you."

My brothers and sisters, those of you who've been in the pro-life, pro-family trenches know this same experience of mine. You also know that we cannot be concerned with human respect from others. Many do not understand because they may be suffering from a hard heart and a darkened intellect, and not even know it. St. Augustine wisely said, "Sin weakens the will and darkens the intellect." But we cannot grow weary. The time may be short and we are needed to fight the greatest fight ever against powers and principalities.

Back to Bishop Lori and his masterful pastoral letter. He writes, "A great need exists for those who understand how to bring the truths, virtues, and values that flow from faith and reason into public life while respecting the legitimate freedom of all citizens."

Remember, 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own, so that you may announce the praises' of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." May we learn who we are and act like "a people of His own" in the upcoming elections. Vote for the babies and the right to life!

I look forward to your questions and comments. Here are the numbers to call: 1-800-585-9396 and 1-205-271-2985.

Closing: Many thanks for your calls and emails and for your patience in receiving my replies. Many thanks too for my brilliant engineer, Tom Graye, and to my call screeners, Elena Rodriguez and Mike Romano. All three, "People of His own."

In Luke's Gospel 12: 54-59: Jesus said to the crowds:

> When you see a cloud rising in the west you say immediately that it is going to rain – and so it does; and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south you say that it is going to be hot – and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Fr. Peter John Cameron, editor in chief of the *Magnificat*, gave an excellent definition of a hypocrite: One so obsessed with self-made preconceptions that he becomes desensitized to sincerity, to tenderness, to genuine self-sacrifice. His hardened heart prevents him from judging what is right. Christ present in "the present time" moves us to live with humility, gentleness, patience. We remain attentive, not to our self-will, but to the one "who is over all and through all and in all."

Brothers and sisters, the words of Pope John Paul the Great at World Youth Day in Denver in 1993 haunt me: "Woe to you if you do not succeed in defending human life." Let us beg God to soften our hard hearts. The stakes are high and Gehenna is real.

Until next week on Open Line, Blessed be the Lord and Giver of Life and may He mightily bless you in your defense of all human life! Bye for now!