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A Private Conviction About Murder?

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Speaking Sunday on NBC's "[Meet the Press](#)," Senator Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee for Vice President, made headlines by stating that he accepts "as a matter of faith" that human life begins at conception, but he would not impose that view on others as a matter of law.

Sen. Biden's statement is similar in form to those offered by other Catholic politicians like former New York Governor Mario Cuomo. Nevertheless, what it really represents is far more horrifying than may be recognized at first.

Speaking on "Meet the Press," Biden responded to a question from Tom Brokaw. The anchor had asked Biden what he would say if Sen. Barack Obama asked him when human life begins [see video clip [here](#)]:



I'd say, "Look, I know when it begins for me." It's a personal and private issue. For me, as a Roman Catholic, I'm prepared to accept the teachings of my church. But let me tell you. There are an awful lot of people of great confessional faiths-Protestants, Jews, Muslims and others-who have a different view. They believe in God as strongly as I do. They're intensely as religious as I am religious. They believe in their faith and they believe in human life, and they have differing views as to when life-I'm prepared as a matter of faith to accept that life begins at the moment of conception. But that is my judgment. For me to impose that judgment on everyone else who is equally and maybe even more devout than I am seems to me is inappropriate in a pluralistic society. And I know you get the push back, "Well, what about fascism?" Everybody, you know, you going to say fascism's all right? Fascism isn't a matter of faith. No decent religious person thinks fascism is a good idea.

Biden first calls the issue "personal and private," an interesting way to introduce a statement about a matter that inevitably has relevance to public policy. He claims to accept the teachings of his church, but then states that other religions hold to other views, and these believers "believe in God as strongly as I do" and are equally religious.

We live in a pluralistic society, he argues, and it would be improper for him to "impose" his judgment on others, who may be "equally and maybe even more devout than I."

He then realizes something of the intellectual problem he has just created and argues that, for example, all good religious folk would oppose fascism, and thus we can presumably establish that as public policy. "No decent religious person thinks fascism is a good idea," he concludes. So is the new criterion for public policy to be what a "good religious person" might think?

Brokaw then asked Biden about his support of abortion rights, given what he has just said about his belief that life begins at conception. Biden answered, "I voted against telling everyone else in the country that they have to accept my religiously based view that it's a moment of conception."

Kate Phillips of [The New York Times](#) explained Biden's predicament this way:

In the interview Sunday, Mr. Biden tried to walk the line between the staunch abortion-rights advocates in his party and his own religious beliefs. While he said he did not often talk about his faith, he said of those who disagree with him: "They believe in their faith and they believe in human life, and they have differing views as to when life — I'm prepared as a matter of faith to accept that life begins at the moment of conception."

Sen. Biden may have been attempting to "walk the line" politically, but a closer look at his actual argument is truly horrifying.

Sen. Biden says, and we must take him at his word, that he accepts as a matter of faith that human life begins at conception. But, he argues, he is perfectly willing to support a woman's right to choose to end that human life.

The killing of human life is called homicide. Murder is the willful taking of a human life. The senator has here stated that he believes abortion to be homicide, but he defends a woman's right to kill the unborn human life within her because he would not impose his beliefs about human life (and thus about homicide) on others.

In other words, if we take Sen. Biden seriously, he would defer to others who believe otherwise when it comes to the law.

How can he live with this? There are significant questions about the extent to which some matters can properly be legislated. But there is no question that the government — any government — must take a stand on the question of human life. This is why the abortion issue simply will not and cannot go away. The government takes a side on this question, like it or not.

I believe Sen. Biden to be a serious man, and that is what is most frightening about this. Can a morally serious man really say that he believes that unborn babies are human beings, but that it should be a protected right to kill them?

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