

# Why 'reproductive justice' is a false choice for Catholics

In [a recent National Catholic Reporter editorial](#), NCR columnist Jamie Manson attempts to make the case that Catholics should follow the lead of Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a self-identifying Catholic, and embrace "reproductive justice." Though "reproductive justice" includes abortion, Manson argues its principles are "all consistent with Catholic social teaching."

This is nonsense, and it's imperative that clear-thinking Catholics resist the temptation to justify abortion "through a more comprehensive lens." We should instead clearly and faithfully recognize abortion for the evil that it is while, at the same time, committing ourselves to promoting true justice and true procreative health for all women, especially the vulnerable, in our society.

But, first and foremost, and above all other considerations, that means Catholics must stand firm in the knowledge that abortion is a grave moral wrong. Whether as an end or as a means, abortion is the willful and deliberate taking of an innocent life. It's never justified, no matter the "comprehensive lens" through which it's filtered.

Upholding the inherent value and dignity of every human being, including women, mothers and their unborn children, is not extreme; it's logical and consistent. And it's the only position that's acceptable for a Catholic. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) is clear: "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person."

The Church's teaching on this issue hasn't changed, nor can it

change. So it doesn't matter that, as Manson points out, 56% of self-identifying Catholics believe abortion should be legal. The Church isn't a democracy.

In [\*Evangelium Vitae\*](#), Pope St. John Paul II declared that abortion always constitutes a grave moral disorder. "This doctrine," he wrote, "is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal magisterium." The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2009 [confirmed](#) that "the Church's teaching on procured abortion has not changed, nor can it change."

If one attempts to justify abortion, as Manson does, one is in direct conflict with the moral law and the infallible teaching of the Church.

That's because true justice never involves the killing of an innocent human being, even if the end-goal is a noble one. "At its core, reproductive justice seeks to end oppression in all its forms," writes Manson. Ending oppression is indeed a noble goal, but one cannot commit evil that good may result. [According to the Church](#), "There are acts which, in and of themselves, independently of circumstances and intentions, are always gravely illicit by reason of their object; such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery."

And on the issue of oppression, let's be clear: abortion is simply oppression redistributed. For centuries, and in some places still today, women were treated as weaker, lesser human beings – property, even. Women, across time and cultures, have fought hard to be treated humanely and considered equal. Our inherent dignity as God's children must be acknowledged and respected. (Ocasio-Cortez's speech on the floor of the House of Representatives in response to Rep. Ted Yoho's actions and comments is admirable and strongest on this point.)

But it's wrong for women to then turn around and treat other

persons as lesser beings, snuffing out their lives to serve our wills, purposes and desires.

If Catholics are serious about justice for women and children, we cannot support abortion, regardless of the euphemisms that are used to describe it. Abortion gives women the illusion of an equal playing field, of power within a male-dominated world. But killing a child does nothing to address and fix societal inequalities. It instead perpetuates violence against women. It forces women to capitulate and conform to a world that refuses to accommodate the realities of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood.

Accepting “reproductive justice,” as defined by Manson, is accepting a world that continues to marginalize and fail women and children.

As Catholics, we must address and remedy the underlying reasons that cause women to seek abortions in the first place. The answer to the ills of our society – economic inequality, racism, disparities in health care, education inequities, domestic violence, the United States’ high maternal mortality rate (especially among women of color), etc. – is not abortion. The answer is calling on our Church, communities, civic leaders, civil servants and especially ourselves to create a culture and society that lifts up women and provides for their procreative health so they can provide for themselves and their children.

As a Catholic, and as a woman, I ask Ms. Manson: Why should we accept anything less?

Recognizing that each and every human life has inherent dignity and worth is our starting point. From there, we can and we must build a culture and society that not only protects the most vulnerable among us – the unborn – but also supports and empowers women and mothers. There’s no place for abortion in the Church’s future, or in any future in which women are

truly supported, respected, valued and cared for.

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