

March 28, 2005      The Terri Schiavo saga has made millions of pro-life Americans understandably upset about the state of our culture, our courts, and our legislatures. Many worry that legal niceties have trumped morality, leading us down a slippery slope that cheapens life. My own pro-life views were strengthened by my experiences as an obstetrician. I believe beyond a doubt that a fetus is a human life deserving of legal protection, and that the right to life is the foundation of any moral society. The abortion issue forged my belief that law and morality must intersect to protect the most vulnerable among us. The proper role of government, namely the protection of natural and constitutional rights, flows from the pro-life perspective. Morality is inherent in law, no matter what the secularists might say. But morality is not inherent in politics. As law professor Butler Shaffer explains, politics is about obtaining power over the lives of others through government force. Thus politics is a rejection of the sanctity of life. So it is a mistake to assume that a pro-life culture develops through political persuasion or government power. Respect for human life originates with individuals acting according to their consciences. A pro-life conscience is fostered by religion, family, and ethics, not government. History teaches us that governments overwhelmingly violate the sanctity of human life rather than uphold it. The notion that an all-powerful, centralized state should provide monolithic solutions to the ethical dilemmas of our times is not only misguided, but also contrary to our Constitution. Remember, federalism was established to allow decentralized, local decision making by states. Yet modern America seeks a federal solution for every perceived societal ill, ignoring constitutional limits on government. The result is a federal state that increasingly makes all-or-nothing decisions that alienate large segments of the population. This federalization of social issues, often championed by conservatives, has not created a pro-life culture, however. It simply has prevented the 50 states from enacting laws that more closely reflect the views of their citizens. Once we accepted the federalization of abortion law under the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, we lost the ability to apply local community standards to ethical issues. It is much more difficult for pro-life advocates to win politically at the federal level. Those who seek a pro-life culture must accept that we will never persuade 300 million Americans to agree with us. Our focus should be on overturning *Roe* and getting the federal government completely out of the business of regulating state matters. A pro-life culture can be built only from the ground up, person by person. For too long we have viewed the battle as purely political, but no political victory can change a degraded culture. A pro-life culture must arise from each of us as individuals, not by the edict of an amoral federal government.