

The Controversial Claim of James Talarico

Rev. Mr. Keith Fournier, JD, MTS, M.Phil.

As we approach significant midterm elections in the United States, one of the most notable is happening in Texas. Although I no longer reside in Texas, my wife and I spent five years there in my ministry. I am writing as a constitutional lawyer with extensive experience in pro-life and religious freedom issues. Additionally, I am a husband of 50 years, a father to five children, and a grandfather to eight grandchildren. I am also an ordained member of the Catholic clergy, a Roman Catholic deacon for 30 years, and a moral theologian.

I am compelled to express my sincere concerns about a particular candidate in Texas, James Talarico, who is running for the United States Senate as the Democratic candidate. James Talarico has the right to run for office and to openly discuss what he claims to be his religious convictions as a Christian. However, he has made several controversial statements that are antithetical to that claim. I will address only one.

Recently, Pope Leo XIV spoke to Catholic politicians from France, delivering a message that applies to all Christians in public service, especially those in politics. The Pope emphasized that the salvation Jesus secured through his death and resurrection affects all aspects of human life, including culture, economics, family, marriage, human dignity, health, education, and politics. He stated that Christianity is not merely a private devotion, but a societal way of life marked by love for God and neighbor. The Pope also highlighted that a public figure cannot separate their political identity from their Christian identity but must live out their commitments in a Christian manner under God's gaze.

My concern with James Talarico arises from his claim to be Christian while making statements that contradict Christian teachings. One of the most troubling statements occurred during his interview with Joe Rogan on "The Joe Rogan Experience," where he expressed his already announced support for abortion on demand, federally funded at any stage of pregnancy. He suggested that this stance is compatible with his Christian beliefs. This is false. The Christian faith has consistently held for over 2,000 years that every human being, from conception to natural death, is made in the image of God and has a right to life. The Christian church has always taught that taking the innocent life of a child in the womb is intrinsically evil and cannot be justified.

What was particularly disturbing in the interview were Talarico's comments linking the concept of what he called consent in creation to the conception of Jesus Christ and the Incarnation, suggesting that Mary could have chosen to abort Jesus. This interpretation is

not only contrary to the teachings of the Bible and the continuous teaching of the Christian church. It is also heretical and blasphemous. Jesus, speaking to the crowd and recorded in the Gospel of St Luke, notes that they can read the signs in weather patterns but fail to read the signs of the times. (Luke 12: 54-59) We do not need to look very far in our own day to see that there is a moral collapse happening all around us. Men and women of this age are making wrong choices and experiencing the consequences. The signs of the times are evident. However, there is another way, the Way of the Lord Jesus. As Baptized Christians, we are all sent to change the climate of this age through proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, we also need to look in our own lives to see the effects of wrong choices. We need to honestly acknowledge the struggle we face as we try to choose to follow the Lord - but often choose against Him. The struggle to do what is good - even though we know it is right. One of the truths of life in this world is that what we choose certainly affects who we become. Choosing not only has consequences outside of us, it changes us. This is what we call the moral life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church addresses human choice in these insightful words:

"The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to "the slavery of sin." (Cf. Rom 6:17)" (CCC#1733)

When we make good choices, we can begin to learn to develop the habits which form Christian character, by cooperating with God's grace. Conversion of life is an ongoing process. In his letter on the Moral Life entitled the Splendor of Truth, Pope St John Paul II responded to the call of the Second Vatican Council to re-root Catholic moral teaching within the Bible, which is the "soul of theology". (Dei Verbum #24)

In the first chapter he used the Lord's encounter with the Rich young man to present a moral theology of choice. It was not the man's possessions which made him choose to say no to the Lord's invitation. It was his disordered relationship to them which impeded his correct exercise of freedom. The possessions possessed him. He went away sad.

Through this encounter, Saint John Paul II explains the path to proper human development and formation of conscience.

Two years after issuing The Splendor of Truth, John Paul released another Encyclical letter entitled *Evangelium Vitae*, (The Gospel of Life) It continued his work of laying a firm

foundation for a proper understanding of the meaning and implications of human freedom and choice. In that letter, he discussed the threats against the dignity of human life that have been caused by the redefinition of the word freedom, what he referred to as a "counterfeit notion of freedom".

Part three of the Catholic Catechism is entitled "Life in Christ". It reminds us that the vocation of man and woman is to beatitude, which can also be translated as happiness. It treats the morality of human acts, the role of the passions, proper formation of conscience, the cultivation of the virtues, and the rejection of sin. In explaining the morality of human acts, the Catechism offers a profound insight concerning the wrong exercise of freedom: "Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself."

Authentic Human Freedom can never be realized in decisions made against God and against what is good. That is because our human freedom is, according to the Catechism, "patterned on God's freedom." The Catechism quotes John Paul's letter on the moral life, the Splendor of Truth, to help us understand.

“Patterned on God's freedom, man's freedom is not negated by his obedience to the divine law; indeed, only through this obedience does it abide in the truth and conform to human dignity. This is clearly stated by the Council: "Human dignity requires man to act through conscious and free choice, as motivated and prompted personally from within, and not through blind internal impulse or merely external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when he frees himself from all subservience to his feelings, and in a free choice of the good, pursues his own end by effectively and assiduously marshalling the appropriate means. (VS #42)”

The New Testament is filled with examples of this connection between what we choose and who we become as a result. For example, we become adulterers when we look at a woman with lust (Mt. 5:28); what comes out of our "heart" (the biblical meaning of heart is that center of our moral personality, where freedom is exercised, human choices are made and character is formed) is what makes us "unclean" (Mk 7:14-23).

The capacity to make choices reflects the "Imago Dei", the Image of God, present within each one of us. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council wrote in their document on the Mission of the Church: "Authentic freedom is an outstanding manifestation of the divine image within man." (GS #17) Freedom must be exercised in reference to the truth. We are not "free" to take innocent human life.

Some are portraying James Talarico as a sign of the rise of what some pundits call "the religious left." While he has the right to run for office and express his views, it is crucial to clarify that his statements grossly misrepresent core Christian teachings concerning the moral life and the nature of true freedom. His blasphemous claim that the Mother of the Lord could have "aborted" Him is not only sacrilegious, it denies the truth concerning Mary's free consent in the invitation she received from the Lord who had already chosen her.

Voters in Texas must decide whether James Talarico is merely pretending to be a Christian or genuinely attempting to integrate his faith into his public service, as the Pope urged all Christian politicians to do. I urge my fellow Catholics and other Christians living in Texas to inform their exercise of the vote by the truth and make a choice consistent with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.