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Which presidential candidate is truly pro-life?

Nicholas P. Cafardi | Aug. 10, 2012
Commentary

A few weeks ago, I publicly defended [1] Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York against onslaughts from the left that accused him of paying off pedophile priests to leave the priesthood when he was the archbishop of Milwaukee. As I explained then, the archbishop was simply recognizing the rights to sustenance that a priest, good or bad, child abuser or not, has from the diocese according to the Code of Canon Law. We might not like it, but sustenance is the law of the church, and then-Archbishop Dolan was following the law.

Now I find it necessary to defend Cardinal Dolan, whose openness and personal character I truly admire, from onslaughts from the far-right, those folks who have created their own parallel magisterium in which the Catholic church sings one note: Making abortions illegal is the highest, truest (maybe only) teaching of our church.

Dolan is taking flak [2] from the parallel magisterium for inviting the president of the United States, Barack Obama, to the traditional Al Smith Dinner this year, along with the presumptive Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney. According to the parallel magisterium, it is also a doctrine of the faith that Obama is pro-abortion and Romney is pro-life, and the church and its bishops and cardinals can associate only with the latter and not the former.

Let me say a few things about that comparison. First of all, I don't know anyone who is pro-abortion. Think about what that word means. It means you favor women becoming pregnant so you can help them abort their child and maybe profit from it. It is an ugly word, and it is used to emotionalize the debate when what we are really talking about is people who do not favor criminalizing abortion because they believe criminal statutes are ineffective ways to solve social evils. This makes them pro-choice, not pro-abortion.

There is no doubt Obama is pro-choice. He has said so many times. There is also no doubt Romney is running on what he calls a pro-life platform. But any honest analysis of the facts shows the situation is much more complicated than that.

For example, Obama's Affordable Care Act does not pay for abortions. In Massachusetts, Romney's health care law does. Obama favors, and included in the Affordable Care Act, $250 million of support for vulnerable pregnant women and alternatives to abortion. This support will make abortions much less likely, since most abortions are economic. Romney, on the other hand, has endorsed Wisconsin Republican Paul Ryan's budget, which will cut hundreds of millions of dollars out of the federal plans that support poor women. The undoubted effect: The number of abortions in the United States will increase. On these facts, Obama is much more pro-life than Romney.

But let's not stop there. Obama does not financially profit from the abortion industry. Romney does. Bain Capital, in the time Romney was listed as its legal head and even when he was attending Bain board meetings, was an owner of Stericycle, a major disposer of the dead bodies of aborted children in the United States. (See: Romney Invested in Medical-Waste Firm That Disposed of Aborted Fetuses, Government Documents Show [3] .) Bain owned a share of Stericycle until 2004, selling its interest for a profit in the tens of millions of dollars.

We can parse what Romney's 1999 "retroactive retirement" from Bain means, but he still gets an annual payout from the firm. To the extent those dollars are part of Bain's Stericycle profits, a strong argument exists that Romney is an abortion profiteer. How pro-life is that?

And it has long been known that millions of Bain Capital's original outside funding, solicited by Romney himself, came from wealthy El Salvadorian clans, some of whom, while they were funding Bain, were "linked to right wing death squads." (*Salt Lake Tribune*, 1999; See also: Mitt Romney Started Bain Capital With Money From Families Tied To Death Squads [4].) Death squads killed tens of thousands of mostly poor people in El Salvador. They also killed priests, nuns and Archbishop Oscar Romero. How pro-life is that? How pro-life is taking the money of these people and doubling or tripling it for them? And did any of their Bain profits fund more death squads? Before we endorse Romney's "pro-life" claims, isn't it important for us to know that?

So speaking as a temporary, part-time member of the parallel magisterium, I think that if anyone should be disinvited from the Al Smith Dinner, it is Mitt Romney. Based on the above record, he, and not Obama, is the anti-life, "pro-abortion" candidate.

The fact is, the personable Dolan did right to invite them both. The Al Smith Dinner is not a religious event. It is a political dinner at a ritzy hotel where folks who look gawky in tuxes make jokes and raise money for a good Catholic cause. No one should think that, by inviting the "pro-abortion" Mitt Romney to the dinner, Dolan is endorsing him and all of his "pro-abortion" anti-life positions.

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