

# BOTH PARTIES HAVE A “POPE PROBLEM”

The mainstream media likes to say that the Republican candidates for president have a “pope problem,” meaning that their views are out of sync with those of Pope Francis. They are wrong: both parties have a “pope problem,” and by comparison the Republicans come out better.

Here is how the media are spinning it. On July 20, there was a front-page story in the *New York Times* titled, “For G.O.P., Visit by Pope Comes with Tensions.” In June, the *Times* ran a front-page story, “Pope’s Position on the Climate Tests the G.O.P.”

The *Times* is not alone in promoting the idea that Pope Francis has left the Republicans in a jam. Politico, Huffington Post, The Atlantic, Salon, the Economist, CNN, The Week, and the Washington Post have done similar stories. Indeed, in June the latter ran a story on this issue that was an echo of its March 19, 2013 piece, “Republicans Have a Pope Francis problem.”

We have not seen a single story explaining why the Democrats have a pope problem. Yet an examination of the most prominent public policy issues addressed by the Church suggests it is the Democrats who have the bigger problem.

The following Catholic public policy issues tend to favor the Republicans: abortion; embryonic stem cell research; euthanasia (doctor-assisted suicide); human cloning; same-sex marriage; religious liberty (conscience rights); and school choice (vouchers).

The following Catholic public policy issues tend to favor the Democrats: the death penalty; climate change; workers’ rights (unions); immigration; and healthcare.

Judging from this list, it seems that Pope Francis is slightly more a problem for Democrats than he is for Republicans. In fact, he is a much bigger problem: not all issues are of equal moral weight. For example, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, human cloning, and euthanasia are all declared by the Church to be “intrinsically evil.” None of the issues that favor the Democrats merit such a designation.

On the issue of abortion, the leading Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, has a bigger “pope problem” than the leading Republican candidate, Donald Trump. Trump is pro-life, though his conversion is not without concern. She is relentlessly pro-abortion and has never changed.

In July, Wisconsin Governor and presidential candidate Scott Walker signed legislation banning abortions in Wisconsin after 20 weeks of pregnancy. “At five months,” he said, “that’s the time when the unborn child can feel pain.”

When he was president, Bill Clinton said he wanted to keep abortion “safe, legal and rare.” His wife, Hillary, has seconded that position on many occasions.

We know that Hillary lied when she said she wants to keep abortion safe. As soon as Walker signed the law protecting unborn babies from feeling pain, Hillary labeled his decision “dangerous.”

Her response motivated Bill Donohue to ask a few questions: “Why is it not uncomfortable—forget about dangerous—for a sensate human being to be pierced with a surgical knife? Why, for example, do these babies put their fingers up to the knife in an attempt to shield them from more pain? The public has a right to know what’s going on in her mind.”

Since 2011, Trump has identified himself as pro-life. But in 1999, when he ran for president, he was an abortion-rights advocate, and even defended partial-birth abortion. So what changed him?

On October 24, 1999, Trump told "Meet the Press" host Tim Russert, "I'm very pro-choice." When pressed whether he would oppose a ban on partial-birth abortion, he said, "I would—I am pro-choice in every respect, as far as it goes." Yet less than three months later, Trump was on record saying he would support a ban on partial-birth abortion. He actually made the switch immediately following the show.

On January 16, 2000, Trump's new book was published, *The America We Deserve*. He discussed why he flipped on partial-birth abortion. Here is what he said: "When Tim Russert asked me on *Meet the Press* if I would ban partial-birth abortions if I were president, my pro-choice instincts led me to say no. After the show, I consulted with two doctors I respect and, upon learning more about this procedure, I have concluded that I would indeed support a ban." That was the beginning of his conversion.

In July, Trump senior advisor Roger Stone was the subject of severe criticism by Bill Donohue. Stone, he said, was a founding member of Republicans for Choice. It was he who pushed for the Republican platform to drop its opposition to abortion, and though he failed, he never gave up this goal. "I think you can be pro-choice and respect life," he said at the time. In August, Trump fired Stone, for different reasons, but it is a good sign nonetheless that Trump no longer has a rabid pro-abortion adviser on his team.

The big media will try to pin Republican candidates by trotting out selective statements of Pope Francis. If they were honest, they would ask Hillary to explain why she rejects the pope's views on just about all of the most central life-and-death issues of our day.