

“Common Ground” Catholics

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After George W. Bush won reelection in 2004, it was disclosed that “values voters” played a major role in defeating the Democrats. More than any other issue, it was abortion that proved decisive: the “values voters” preferred the pro-life position of the Republican Party.

It didn’t take long before some Democrats, especially Catholics and Protestants, decided that it was imperative not to allow the Republicans to take ownership of this issue. But they were faced with a big problem: the Democrats were unequivocally committed to abortion rights—for any reason and at any time during pregnancy.

Enter James Carville and Paul Begala. They argued that the Democrats would continue to lose election after election until they finally pared back in their support for abortion rights. Accordingly, they recommended that Democrats oppose partial-birth abortion and support parental notification laws. Their pragmatism, however, fell on deaf ears: the leadership of the Democratic Party would not budge in its pro-abortion position.

So the only thing left for Christian Democrats who were worried about ceding this entire issue to the Republicans was to create the fiction that it was possible to support abortion-on-demand by posturing a pro-life position. To accomplish this trick, they decided to defend abortion as a constitutional right—including partial-birth abortion—while promoting social policies that might reduce the need for abortions. They labeled this a “common ground” approach, one that serviced the “common good.” As they soon discovered, however, the central problem remained.

To begin with, they never found a plausible way to answer the most basic question of them all: When does life begin? Recall that when Sen. Barack Obama was asked this question by the evangelical heavyweight Rick Warren, he fumbled. Obama actually said that answering this question was “above my pay grade.” By contrast, when Sen. John McCain was asked the same question, he quickly said, “At conception.”

McCain’s pro-life voting record squares completely with his answer, but Obama’s pro-abortion record is not explained by his evasion. If abortion doesn’t kill innocent human life, then it must be assumed that Obama believes life begins some time after birth. But when? Recall that when he was in the Illinois state senate, he led the fight against mandating health care for children born alive as a result of a botched abortion. In other words, he supports selective infanticide.

Now those who are pushing the “common ground” approach must know that they, too, are a walking contradiction. They don’t want to make any abortions illegal, and indeed they refuse to criticize Obama for his off-the-charts advocacy of abortion rights. So when they say they want to reduce abortions, they are right back to where they started from. Why would it be necessary to reduce a medical procedure that doesn’t harm anyone? After all, no one says we need to reduce the need for root canals.

There are other problems for these folks, as well. The Platform of the Democratic Party does not seek a “common ground” approach to human trafficking—it supports laws that criminalize labor and sex trafficking. Yet when it comes to abortion, it balks at any legal remedy. Is this because the Democrats are more bent out of shape over human trafficking than abortion? To put it differently, making human trafficking illegal hasn’t stopped it from occurring, so why not legalize it and then support “common ground” strategies that reduce its occurrence?

These “values” Democrats will tell you that it would be wrong to criminalize abortion because that would bring us back to the days when women were imprisoned for having an abortion. MSNBC’s Chris Matthews, for example, says this all the time. But the fact of the matter is that women were not imprisoned for having an abortion in the pre-*Roe v. Wade* days—it was the abortionist who faced prosecution.

In Leslie J. Reagan’s pro-abortion book, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973*, she makes it clear that women were not routinely prosecuted and imprisoned for having abortions during this period. Indeed, she lists only one such incident of this kind, and that was an unusual case in 1971 when a Florida woman was arrested for manslaughter. So the Matthews argument is nothing more than a scare tactic.

It must also be said that these “values” Democrats went mute when Nancy Pelosi totally misrepresented the Catholic Church’s teaching on abortion; none issued even the mildest rebuke. This certainly included Sen. Bob Casey, Jr., the so-called pro-life Catholic Democrat from Pennsylvania whose voting record on abortion lines up with NARAL—the most radical pro-abortion group in the nation—65 percent of the time.

Finally, the presidents of NARAL and Planned Parenthood spoke at the Democratic National Convention, and the most radical pro-abortion Political Action Committee of them all, EMILY’s List, hosted a big party. If this doesn’t signal what a fraud the “common ground” ploy is, nothing does.