

OBAMA, CATHOLICS AND ABORTION

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

William Donohue

When Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973, the Republican Party was the pro-abortion party, and the Democrats were the party of life. There was a very strong WASP presence in the Republican Party at that time, and for many of them, abortion was seen as a way to fix the urban problem. No, they didn't come right out and say it, but racism was clearly a motivating factor. The Democrats, home to Catholics back then, were strongly pro-life. By the end of the decade, the two Parties switched places.

Why this happened had much to do with the McGovernization of the Democratic Party: radical reformers took command and aligned themselves with the cause of feminism; this, of course, meant abortion rights. By the time Reagan became president, the Democrats were fully on board with the pro-abortion agenda. But Catholics weren't buying it, which is why they fled; they've been politically homeless ever since. That's why they are so important: at the national level, the candidate who gets the Catholic vote wins. It happened again last month.

Like many Catholics, I got bounced around because of these changes. I started as a Democrat, then became a Republican and have been happily independent for nearly two decades. In this job, it's much easier for me to be independent: there are times when I have to come down hard on a candidate, and I don't want to have to look over my shoulder because of Party affiliation. I say this as a backdrop to my concerns over the Obama administration and its dealings with the Catholic Church.

No one questions Obama's abortion credentials. When he was in

the Illinois state senate, he led the fight for a bill that would allow a baby born alive as a result of a botched abortion to go unattended. That's infanticide, not abortion. So it came as no surprise that in 2007 he told Planned Parenthood that the first thing he would do upon becoming president would be to sign the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA). Because of opposition, the bill never reached his desk.

There is no question that it was the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that put the brakes on FOCA. It was one of their finest hours. The bishops made it clear that they would not tolerate a bill that could arguably force Catholic hospitals to close: lawyers for the bishops advised that if FOCA were to pass, it would give the government the right to deny funds to hospitals that refused to perform abortions.

Well, guess what? The day after the election, the National Organization for Women issued a statement saying it will fight for FOCA. In other words, the pro-abortion crowd isn't giving up. It is not certain whether Sen. Barbara Boxer of California and Rep. Jerry Nadler of New York will seek to reintroduce FOCA, but if they do, the bishops will have their hands full again.

There's more. The Department of Health and Human Services, led by pro-abortion Catholic Kathleen Sebelius, is currently considering a proposal made by the ACLU that would force Catholic hospitals to perform emergency abortions or lose federal funds. Now imagine for just one moment how this proposal would be playing out if the Democrats had swept the nation the way the Republicans did. Surely, it would have gained much traction, promising yet another showdown between the bishops and the Obama administration. It still might—Boxer and Nadler were both reelected.

To those who say that such examples are not proof of an anti-Catholic animus in the Obama administration, consider that Dawn Johnsen almost became the head of the Office of Legal

Counsel. Johnsen worked on a case in the late 1980s that sought to deny the Church its tax-exempt status (it was the Church's pro-life lobbying that angered her). Last March, I wrote to every member of the U.S. Senate asking them one question: "Are you aware that Dawn Johnsen, who will be voted upon by the full Senate, sought to strip the Catholic Church of its tax-exempt status?" Twice nominated, she finally pulled out because of Republican opposition.

What is it about this administration that makes it so unyielding in its passion for abortion rights? Why is the president so driven by the need to finance abortion, and to seek sanctions against those who don't cooperate? Unfortunately, given the dire straits of the economy, questions like these are not being asked.

In October, we lost a great champion of life, Dr. Mildred Jefferson. The first black woman ever to graduate from Harvard Medical School, she was a tireless defender of the unborn, so much so that the other side refused to have another woman debate her. "I am at once a physician, a citizen and a woman," she said in 2003, "and I am not willing to stand aside and allow this concept of expendable human lives to turn this great land of ours into just another exclusive reservation where only the perfect, the privileged and the planned have the right to live." She died at the age of 84.

It is too bad that our black president could never voice Dr. Jefferson's prophetic words. Worse, it's shameful that his administration is still trying to punish the Catholic Church for its pro-life stance.