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LIBERAL POLITICS AND THE BISHOPS

Are the liberal Democratic politicians leading the U.S. Catholic Bishops down the primrose path to serve liberal political goals and to elect liberal Democrats to office?

It is easy to see how the liberal Democrats must have agonized about the way they have lost such a large segment of the Catholic vote because of the abortion issue. The pro-life movement played a significant role in defeating many liberal Democrats, especially Senators Dick Clark, John Culver, Birch Bayh, and George McGovern.

As the 1982 election campaign got under way, liberal Senator Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) came up with a plan which he unveiled rather frankly in the March 8 Washington Post. He deplored the way that pro-lifers have made an "odd-couple alliance" with conservatives and fundamentalist Christians on the abortion issue so that many "compassionate" Congressmen have been defeated. By "compassionate," he meant Congressmen who vote regularly for big-spending economic legislation. Leahy concluded, "Both as a Catholic and as a legislator, I hope many in the hierarchy of our church will soon reevaluate this course."

Obviously, Leahy ranks money bills as of a higher value than the moral issue of abortion. He is an ultra-liberal who usually votes against any restrictions on abortion and for government spending bills including the funding of abortions.

In September of '82, the abortion battle boiled up in the U.S. Senate. The Bishops backed the Hatch Amendment which required a two-thirds majority, and Senator Jesse Helms backed pro-life bills which required only a simple majority. The entire pro-life effort failed on a procedural motion.

Two days later, on September 17, a memorandum was put out from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops which accused President Reagan of being unsympathetic to the pro-life cause and of using pro-life disunity "as an excuse for inaction." Outrage in pro-life circles over this slur on our pro-life President led to an apologetic phone call from Cardinal Krol to President Reagan.

On October 3, another ultra-liberal Democratic Senator, Thomas Eagleton, delivered an address at the St. Louis Archdiocesan Pro-Life Convention. His speech was basically an

attack on pro-life Senator Jesse Helms. What are Helms' sins? He is also for school prayer and against busing, homosexuality, teenage promiscuity, and the Communist Party.

Eagleton then proposed that pro-life organizations work only with groups that are not interested in "other issues." Translated, that means that pro-life liberals should band together and exclude pro-life conservatives. Then, pro-life liberals should abandon support of a constitutional amendment that would ban abortions all over the country, and instead back an amendment that would let every state decide for itself whether to allow abortions.

This type of amendment would offer a face-saving way for pro-abortion Catholic liberal Democratic Senators, such as Leahy and Ted Kennedy, to cast an apparent pro-life vote for an amendment while knowing that it would allow abortions to continue.

Now, the liberal Democrats who are stuck with a pro-abortion voting record have come up with a different plan to erase that stigma. It is to "deep-six" abortion as the premier moral issue and replace it with the Nuclear Freeze as the "life" issue. The key to accomplish this political objective was to get the U.S. Catholic Bishops to dress this political trick in the semantics of religion and morality.

The cat was let out of the bag in a candid article in the Washington Post on November 2 (coincidentally, election day) by Marjorie Hyer, who has close contacts with the United States Catholic Conference (the Catholic bureaucracy in Washington, D.C.). The problem? A drift of Catholics toward conservative (pro-defense) candidates. The goal? To reclaim the Catholic vote for liberal (anti-defense) candidates. The method? To "put a powerful new spin in national politics" by getting the Bishops to condemn nuclear weapons as immoral, and thereby to lure Catholics back into the liberal camp.

So, the strategy of the liberal politicians is clear: Use the Catholic Bishops to redefine "pro-life" to emphasize nuclear pacifism. Instead of saving babies' lives, the visible "moral" goal suddenly becomes opposing the Reagan defense budget.

The benefits to the liberal politicians are obvious. This plan makes Ted Kennedy and Patrick Leahy as "pro-life" as Jesse Helms. It stops the drift of Catholic voters toward conservative candidates. It relieves the Democratic liberals of the moral burden of fighting for babies, and allows them to fight for something they really care about: the materialistic federal spending programs. Will the Catholic Bishops be pawns in the game?