

The Illusion of Secular Salvation

The limits, and opportunities, of politics



by Thomas A. Droleskey

The decision by President George W. Bush to permit “limited” federal funding of research conducted on the stem cell lines of embryonic human beings who were killed for the harvesting of such cell lines has sharply divided many pro-life Catholics. Some praised the President for the “limited” nature of the funding he approved on August 9, 2001 – ignoring, however, that the President premised his “compromise” on his acceptance of the evil of *in vitro* fertilization as a necessary means to “help” infertile couples. These Catholics, most of whom have long embraced some form of “incrementalism” to try to combat the culture of death, also ignored the fact that the guidelines issued by the President to determine which “stem cell lines” (colonies of cells derived from embryonic human beings who were killed specifically for the harvesting of their stem cells) were eligible for funding are actually less restrictive and more permissive than those issued by President Bill Clinton in 1996. No, many Catholics sought to enable a career politician who has said repeatedly that abortion is a “difficult” issue about which “good” people may legitimately disagree. Those who opposed Bush’s decision were denounced by his apologists in the establishment pro-life

community (especially the National Right to Life Committee) as unrealistic extremists uninterested in grappling with the nuances of a difficult issue.

Unfortunately, Bush’s decision was predictable. His track record as governor of Texas revealed him to be a quintessential pragmatist eager to curry favor with different constituency groups. However, many pro-life Catholics have permitted themselves time and again to be convinced by leaders of the pro-life establishment –

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especially the National Right to Life Committee and Priests for Life – that phony pro-life politicians, most of whom actually support abortion

in certain cases as a matter of principle, are worthy of our electoral support.

The sad fact is, however, that we have gone backward over the past twenty years. We have been reduced into believing that candidates who are only conditionally opposed to one form of child killing in the later stages of pregnancy are pro-life champions even though they support *Roe v. Wade*. It is important, therefore, to take a hard look at our situation, being careful to do so as Catholics, not as Americans who believe in the illusion of secular salvation through our two-party system.

The very narrowness of the 2000 presidential election

spoke volumes about the fruit of the fallacious nature of this country's founding. Bad ideas lead to bad consequences. The belief that it would be possible for men of differing beliefs to pursue the common good without reference to the authority of the Catholic Church as the ultimate arbiter of the natural law is false. Ironically, this belief is what is common to the Calvinists who landed at Plymouth Rock and to the Freemasons of the lodges of the eighteenth century. As Pope Leo XIII noted in *Immortale Dei*, religious indifferentism leads to the triumph of atheism in every aspect of a nation's life. And a country that relies on a written document as the sole basis of governmental legitimacy and the propriety of public policy will travel all too naturally down the path of social chaos, expedited by the forces of positivism and deconstructionism. That is why the country is so divided at present.

The United States is divided into many different camps. Essentially, however, there are those who have been catechized and evangelized by the spirit of religious indifferentism, cultural pluralism, legal positivism, moral relativism, and the whole gamut of statist policies into believing that we are the masters of our own destiny. The majoritarianism of John Locke and the "general will" of Jean-Jacques Rousseau have created an atmosphere in which the average person has come to believe that morality is determined at the ballot box or by those who serve in the institutions of civil governance. The very people who reject out of hand the possibility of the infallibility of the Successor of Saint Peter accept uncritically the passing fads of political correctness put forth by the scions of our popular culture. The very people who say they do not believe in creedal religion accept secularism as the civil religion of our day, and resent anyone and everyone who dares to speak in denominational terms. Thus, promoters of contraception and abortion and sodomy and state control of education and all manner of statist and redistributionist programs are seen as the defenders of truth. Those who represent any threat to this state of things, no matter how shallow or insincere the threat may be, are seen as enemies of the people.

This is what accounts for the fact that former Vice President Al Gore won the national popular vote in November 2000. Indeed, he would have won the presidency outright in the electoral college (the allegedly disputed popular votes in the state of Florida notwithstanding) had Ralph Nader not been in the race as the Green Party's presidential nominee. Gore's national vote total would have eclipsed George W. Bush's by more than a million votes, at least. This is a far different nation than it was

in 1980 when former California Governor Ronald Reagan defeated then President Jimmy Carter. Millions of young people have grown up knowing nothing other than legalized baby-killing and a veritable panoply of state-sponsored and administered goodies. These young people, many of whom are living as the barbarians of yore, are voting. And they are not voting for anyone who appears to be a threat to the lifestyle they have been convinced that they have the right and moral duty to pursue and to uphold.

Added into this mix is the fact that many Catholics continue to support the pro-abortion Democratic Party most reflexively. Viewing the Church as an illegitimate interloper in matters of public policy and electoral politics, many Catholics see nothing wrong with voting for candidates who promote the mystical destruction of our Lord in the womb under cover of law. They incant all manner of slogans that are supposed to put an end to rational thought. Permitting sentimentality and emotion

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to triumph over rational thought and the truths of our holy faith, these Catholics are frequently reaffirmed in their attachment to a pro-abortion political party by their pastors, men who themselves are at war with the Church both doctrinally and liturgically. It is a matter of great urgency for all believing Catholics, both priests and laity alike, to catechize these people, which is one of the principal reasons I wrote *Christ in the Voting Booth*, which I continue to believe can be of service to help pro-abortion Catholics to understand the Faith and to act in concert with the truths our Lord revealed to the Apostles and entrusted through them to the care of His Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, however, a great many pro-life Catholics also suspend rational thought in order to place their trust in electoral politics. Rejecting the belief that the Faith can be used in our civil discourse, these good people believe that anyone who is said to be a "lesser evil" than some other candidate must be preferred in the voting booth, eschewing all candidates of conscience as actual obstacles to the advancement of the culture of life. What these good people fail to realize, however, is that their misplaced (and constantly betrayed) trust in careerist politicians continues to retard, not advance, the very goals they think can be promoted by their belief in so-called pragmatism

and incrementalism. And all efforts to present the facts of how bad a particular candidate they support actually is must be met with statements of unjustified “faith” that he will change over the course of time, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. Indeed, many pro-life voters simply scoffed at then Texas Governor George W. Bush’s firm pro-abortion record in public life, and they are unwilling to accept the fact that a person who supports even one abortion as a matter of principle is not pro-life and therefore should not be called a “pro-life politician.” This concession enables the triumph of a mythology to advance the career of professional politicians who believe that we exist to enable them to win office. Such people will say just enough during campaigns to persuade voters who fear the evil more than they love the good to stay in the Republican camp, and they will *do* just enough around the margins if elected in order to demonstrate their *bona fides*. And just as pro-abortion Catholics are enabled by pastors who are of a like mind politically, many good pro-life Catholics are enabled in their reflexive attachment to the Republican Party by priests who believe that the current embodiment of “electability” will carry the day at the polls and do at least a few things to promote the culture of life.

Pragmatism and incrementalism have produced disastrous results for the cause of fundamental justice founded in truth. Weak candidates who do not understand the life issue (Bob Dole, George W. Bush) are certified as being electable.

Candidates who do understand the issue—and who can articulate it eloquently (Patrick Buchanan, Howard Phillips, Alan Keyes)—never receive the backing of the establishment pro-life community. Like lemmings, pro-life Catholics follow the advice they are given by the pro-abortion National Right to Life Committee (and by Priests for Life, which has bought into the political agenda of the National Right to Life Committee) without any hesitation whatever.

Candidates of conscience are viewed with disdain as the instrumentalities by which the supposedly “greater evil” can be elected, not as the means by which truth itself may be given a forum in the realm of electoral politics – and not as the means by which the voiceless unborn may be given voice in the course of public policy debate.

Although the realities of our current political structure militate against the viability of third parties, those who run as candidates of conscience do nevertheless help keep the life issue alive. They do not succumb to the pressures of political expediency. Such candidates understand that they will be opposed vigorously by those who worship at the altar of pragmatism, which never brings the practical political “success” that it is supposed to produce. And professional politicians do read the results of elections quite closely. Significant shifts of voters into the category of third parties provides them with a barometer by which

they can measure how far they can drift in one direction or another before they have to respond to such a phenomenon. Those who contend that votes do not carry a symbolic weight are very much mistaken. They do. And while it remains my belief that the current political structure is closed to the sort of “electoral success” promised us by the pragmatists and incrementalists, we nevertheless must be tireless in raising our voices

as Catholics in the realm of civil discourse, no matter how much opprobrium we bring upon our heads as a result.

The political analysis I have been providing

over the course of the past few years in *Christ or Chaos* has proven to be right on the money. I expressed my doubt that George W. Bush could win the White House in light of his intellectual shallowness and in light of the cultural factors facing our nation described earlier in this essay. As noted, Bush lost the popular vote, a loss that would have been considerably greater had Ralph Nader not been in the race.



Giovanni Pisano, *Massacre of the Innocents*, from the pulpit at Sant'Andrea, Pistoia

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Furthermore, I indicated last year in *Christ or Chaos* that certain states (New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont) were bound to fall into the Gore camp. Although I believed a vote of conscience was the right one to cast as a matter of principle, people in those states had in effect a free vote to cast for Patrick Buchanan or Howard Phillips. As we elect the President through the electoral college, the national popular vote total is irrelevant. What matters is the popular vote total in the individual states. Anyone who knows anything about practical politics (it's amazing to me how unrealistic the so-called pragmatists actually are when they make their supposedly clever judgments about how to vote in particular elections) knows that the states listed above have tended toward the Democratic camp in national elections. And the same people who used national polling data to browbeat supporters of Buchanan and Phillips into voting for Bush simply refused to believe the polling data on a state-by-state basis which showed Bush the sure loser in the above-listed twelve states.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom (which maintains that last year's election should have been Gore's to win as a result of the vibrant economy), Bush should have won the election handily. If Bush understood the prophetic nature of the life issue, for example, he could have hammered Gore for his support of baby-killing-on-demand under cover of law as a constitutional right. Careerist politicians believe that the life issue is a losing issue. Because this is so, you see, there has never been a candidate for president of a major party who made the life issue the centerpiece of his campaign, including Ronald Reagan. Gore was given a free pass on the issue of abortion, especially when it came to the issue of RU-486, the French abortion pill, when it was raised during the first Bush-Gore debate on October 3, 2000, in Boston, Massachusetts.

Although more competent than the ever hapless and mercurial Bob Dole, George W. Bush is not a serious man of the mind. Anyone who can say that the issue of baby-killing is a matter of "opinion" (something he would never say about racism or anti-Semitism) betrays a terrible lack of depth as a thinker. Anyone who does not see the inconsistency in saying that he will welcome every child (a phrase trumpeted by the National Right to Life Committee) while supporting the destruction of certain children in certain cases is bereft of a solid philosophical

core. A man who speaks of his powerlessness to reverse an administrative decision by an agency of the executive branch he seeks to head demonstrates a woeful ignorance of the powers of the office to which he aspires. And a person who campaigns actively with pro-abortion politicians (New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge, Colin Powell, New York Governor George Pataki) tells us that he simply cannot be taken seriously as a defender of life. Could you imagine George W. Bush campaigning with someone who supported racism, for example? But those who support the slicing and dicing of

little babies are qualified to hold office, veritable role models for young people who desire a career in politics.

Thus, there were few things more irksome in the final days of the campaign last year than to listen to

well-meaning pro-life Catholics telling us that they were going to vote for "life." A vote for George W. Bush was not a vote for life. It was an understandable vote to keep Vice President Al Gore out of the White House. However, as I will show, President George W. Bush's administration has undermined the cause of life. For those who campaign with caution so as to get elected will govern with caution in order to get re-elected.

Here is what has happened since January 20, 2001, apart from Bush's horrific decision concerning embryonic stem-cell research:

1) Bush has appointed pro-aborts throughout his administration, including Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. Two pro-abort delegates to the United Nations who served during the Clinton administration have been held over by the Bush administration. Other pro-aborts include White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, Vice President Richard Cheney's Chief of Staff Mary Matalin, White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (who has appointed a number of homosexual activists to civilian positions in the Pentagon), Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christine Todd Whitman. Additionally, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson took the lead on behalf of embryonic stem-cell research, and has said that nothing will be done to reverse the decision of the Food and Drug Administration to market the French abortion pill, RU-486, as no one has shown it is "unsafe for women."

2) Although there have been no vacancies on the United States Supreme Court, Bush will not nominate anyone

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with a pro-life track record when such a vacancy occurs. He will be very careful to nominate only those candidates who he believes are “confirmable” (an apparent variation of “electable”). That is, the last thing in the world a President George W. Bush wants is for *Roe v. Wade* to be overturned during his first term. Thus, Bush will nominate “moderates” in the mold of Sandra Day O’Connor and David Souter. It is even possible that he might elevate one of the pro-aborts he appointed to the Texas State Supreme Court.

In addition to wanting to avoid a reversal of *Roe* during his first term, Bush will point to the fact that there is no longer a “pro-life” majority in the United States Senate. There are six fully pro-abortion Republicans in the Senate (Susan Collins and Olympia Snow of Maine, Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas, John Warner of Virginia, Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado) who could bolt Bush on a judicial nominee if he was deemed to be a threat to *Roe*. Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska could be thrown into that mix as well, although it is unlikely he would bolt from Bush on one of his appointments. There is a 57-43 pro-abortion majority in the United States Senate at present. Bush is not going to fight what he believes to be an unwinnable battle over a pro-life nominee just to satisfy his political base.

Additionally, there are the vacancies that occur from time to time in the twelve Circuit Courts of Appeal and the eighty-eight U.S. District Courts. Bush will appoint a variety of individuals to these judicial vacancies, including pro-aborts now and then, all of whom will be dutifully confirmed by supposedly pro-life senators – yes, the very same people who confirmed almost all of Clinton’s pro-abortion judicial nominees. Bush will play the judicial card very, very cautiously.

3) Bush’s Executive Order restoring the ban on the use of United States taxpayer dollars to fund agencies which provide or promote surgical abortions overseas is not a pro-life victory whatever. As Howard Phillips has documented in a detailed, word-for-word analysis of the provisions of the Executive Order, employees of so-called “family planning agencies” abroad may counsel women to have abortions as long as they do so on their own time and



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outside the offices of the agencies who employ them. Furthermore, the U.S. government is funding chemical abortions aplenty by its continued funding of contraceptive programs throughout the world.

4) President Bush personally endorsed continued funding for Title X “family planning” programs within our own country. Thus, the government of the

United States continues to fund chemical abortions right here in the United States.

5) Reversal of RU-486 and the so-called Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Bill?

Not on the Bush radar screen at all.

6) Establishment pro-life leaders, such as the National Right to Life Committee and its state affiliates, have indemnified Bush at every turn, and they will continue to do so. Those who dare to criticize Bush are called impatient and ungrateful. The specter of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton will be raised at every possible turn to persuade pro-lifers that they will just have to live with silence and relative inaction on the life issue given the political realities of a Democrat-controlled Senate, a narrowly controlled House, and the fact that Bush is a President who won the electoral college vote while losing the national popular vote total.

As we know, there is no salvation in partisan politics. But what many fail to understand is that a completely acceptable pro-life candidate has not been nominated by the Republican Party because the pro-life establishment has made consistently bad pragmatic choices as to which candidates to support during the caucus and primary processes. Dole was a disaster in 1996. As noted earlier, Bush was a very weak candidate (who stood a chance to win only because there was a residue of hostility directed by some voters at the Clinton-Gore era). Priests for Life and others simply do not believe that a man of truth can be elected in this country. They are wrong. It might be difficult. There might not be success the first time around. However, it is time to stop backing flawed candidates who want our votes while burying the life issue in the campaign and doing only marginal things once elected in order to keep us on their electoral reservation.

The National Right to Life Committee (whose political action committee received \$650,000 from the Republican

Party in 1996) and others are wrong to place their trust time and again in our failed and flawed two-party system. Millions of good Catholics would follow them if they broke away. Again, we might not be successful politically for a long time. But we would be able to get the truth out there in the forum of electoral politics, thereby helping to create an electoral climate conducive to electoral success – now elusive precisely because of the wrong-headed pragmatic decisions of so-called pro-life leaders. That could do more in the long run to help Catholicize this country (the necessary precondition to stopping the advance of contraception, abortion, sex instruction, sodomy, and euthanasia) than any laws that can be enacted by Congress at present.

Our trust must be in the true faith, not in the American belief that there is some religiously indifferentist and culturally pluralistic way to ameliorate the evils that we face in our land today. There is so much fear in the world today. Good, pro-life Catholics feared the election of Al Gore without remembering that God is more powerful than Al Gore. Good, pro-life Catholics fear the invocation of the Holy Name in civil debate, something that Pope Pius XI wrote in *Quas Primas* was a matter of particular urgency. Candidates fear being defeated if they stand on principle. Fear, fear, fear.

The apostles would have stayed in the Upper Room in Jerusalem even after the descent of the Holy Spirit if they had had the sort of fear that grips Catholics in the United States today. Missionaries would never have gone to distant lands to attempt to convert barbaric peoples to the Cross of Christ if they had had the sort of fear that paralyzes what should be our Catholic instincts to speak and to act authentically as Catholics, as Pope Leo XIII urged us to do in *Sapientiae Christianiae*. Martyrs would never have offered their lives as a witness to the faith if they loved bodily life and human respect more than they loved Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Father has urged us to “Be not afraid.” Indeed, be not afraid. We should not be afraid of making a break from the lies of the Americanist ethos. We should not be afraid to exhibit the courage of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, who believed that enrollment in the Knights of the Immacula would help to propagate a Christ-centered world in which the naturalists would be converted by the triumph of Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart. We should not be afraid to exhibit the courage of Blessed Miguel Agustín Pro, who cried out “*Viva Cristo Rey!*” as the Masonic revolutionaries were about to execute him in Mexico City on November 23, 1927. We must believe that our Lord wants to use us to plant the seeds for the conversion of

this nation to His own Social Kingship, the other sure antidote to the poisons that are infecting every aspect of our national life.

It is my firm conviction that the only way in which the multifaceted and interrelated problems facing our society can be ameliorated is by doing in our own day the slow, tedious work undertaken by the apostles nearly two millennia ago to plant the seeds for a Christ-centered world. Christendom, which flourished in Europe for nearly a thousand years, was the result of the efforts of those who took seriously the great commissioning given by our Lord to the apostles. The missionaries who came to the New World five hundred years ago were intent on doing in this hemisphere the same sort of assiduous work that had produced the glory of Christendom in Europe. For it is only a world that lives in the shadow of the Cross and recognizes the authority of the true Church on matters of fundamental justice that has a ghost of a chance of fostering justice within individual nations and peace across international borders.

Pope Leo XIII noted in *Sapientiae Christianae* that a Catholic’s love of his nation must be premised upon his love for the Church. For just as love of our fellow creatures may become mere expressions of sentimentality rather than of willing the salvation of their immortal souls, so may love of one’s country be reduced to merely sentimental and naturalistic terms. A disordered patriotism becomes a form of idolatry in which a particular

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nation’s mythology becomes more important even than the true faith. Pope Leo put it this way:

Now, if the natural law enjoins us to love devotedly and to defend the country in which we had birth, and in which we were brought up, so that every good citizen hesitates not to face death for his native land, very much more is it the urgent duty of Christians to be ever quickened by like feelings towards the Church. For the Church is the holy city of the living God, born of God Himself, and by Him built up and established. Upon this earth indeed she accomplishes her pilgrimage, but by instructing and guiding men, she summons them to eternal happiness.

We are bound, then, to love dearly the country whence we have received the means of enjoyment this mortal life affords, but we have a much more urgent obligation to

love, with ardent love, the Church to which we owe the life of the soul, a life that will endure forever. For fitting it is to prefer the good of the soul to the well-being of the body, inasmuch as duties toward God are of a far more hallowed character than those toward men.

Thus, it is not possible to truly love our country unless we first of all love the Church our Lord created upon the Rock of Peter, the Pope. There is no secular, nondenominational, religiously indifferentist, or culturally pluralistic way in which to resolve social problems. Individual souls need the life of sanctifying grace in order to grow in virtue and sanctity over the course of their lives. Likewise, societies need the guidance of Holy Mother Church in order to pursue authentic justice founded in the splendor of Truth Incarnate.

There is no salvation in electoral politics. None whatever. Electoral politics in this country merely provides us with a forum in which to challenge our fellow citizens with truths that may be difficult for them to accept. Nevertheless, we have the obligation to speak the truth in love as a means of planting the seeds which might result in the conversion of hearts and souls to the true faith, and which will help those who are already Catholic to see the world more clearly through the eyes of faith. For it is only when

we begin to view the world clearly through the eyes of the true faith that the events of this passing world come into clear focus.

With a firm reliance on Our Lady's loving maternal intercession, let us understand that the more we believe in false ideas, the more we will be disillusioned by a flawed political process. The more we enable the lesser of two evils, the higher and higher the dose of evil the so-called "lesser evil" comes to hold with each passing election. May we ask Our Lady to be so consecrated to her Immaculate Heart that we will never shrink from believing in the miracle of a Catholic America, one in which all hearts are in total communion with hers – and with the Heart of all Hearts that was formed out of her Immaculate Heart, the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us – and pray for the United States of America. ✠

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