

Abortion and the “Catholic Right”

James Hitchcock

Abortion, along with the legal and social status of homosexuality, is the issue that above all causes secular liberals to identify “the Religious Right” as dangerous to American freedom. But in 2006 cracks began to appear on the Catholic side of “the Right,” something that cannot be explained in conventional journalistic categories but requires following a tangled and sometimes obscure thread.

During the 2006 election campaign, the syndicated journalist Joseph Sobran,¹ a Catholic who considers himself one of the few remaining spokesmen for authentic conservatism, advised readers that “if you must vote, you should almost never vote for an incumbent,” and characterized James Webb, the Democratic candidate for senator from Virginia and a former Republican, as someone “who commanded my immediate trust and respect” when they first met, adding only that “One hates to see him coming out in favor of abortion.” Later in the campaign Sobran proposed that the recovery of the country from the “disasters” of the Bush administration “may mean enduring a period of Democratic dominance,” although he judged that before long the Democrats too would discredit themselves.

What was most surprising about these opinions was that they were published (June 22, August 3, October 18), in the pages of the newspaper *The Wanderer*, one of the most conservative Catholic journals in the United States and a publication that is implacably anti-abortion.

During the campaign (October 18), Paul Likoudis, the news editor of the paper and someone whose byline appears on many of its articles, interviewed Howard Phillips, candidate for president on the Constitution Party ticket in 1992 and now head of the Conservative Caucus, which Likoudis described as a “nonpartisan nationwide grass-roots public policy advocacy group” that, among other things, opposes free trade and the income tax.

Worsening economic conditions, Phillips charged, are the result of deliberate government policies, and he cited liberal journalists to prove that the Bush administration acted surreptitiously and illegally in pursuing the Iraq War, actions that Phillips said were “in long Republican tradition, starting with Abraham Lincoln.”

Although major pro-life groups claim otherwise, Phillips charged that Bush

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“has boosted the massive subsidies to Planned Parenthood and to population control programs overseas.” But when asked by Likoudis what issues ought most to concern the citizens, Phillips ignored abortion and announced that “The Number One Issue” is that Bush “wants to merge the United States with Mexico and Canada. He doesn’t want any borders. . . . Bush is a bigger danger to the Constitution of the United States than Saddam Hussein ever was.”

Despite Phillips’ obvious lack of interest in the abortion issue, Sobran has often endorsed the Constitution Party, which he says is the only reliably pro-life party in America, and after the election (November 16) he found it impossible to distinguish between two “factions” pretending to be two different political parties, but he expressed great satisfaction that Webb’s opponent, the “arrogant” Senator George Allen (who happened to be anti-abortion), had been defeated; then he declared (December 21) that Bush was a worse president than William J. Clinton (who happened to be by far the most zealously pro-abortion president ever to occupy the White House). Even later (January 18), Sobran judged that “I do not think Bush has been the worst American president ever. But he may prove to be one of the hardest to clean up after” and complained that the new Democratic Congress appeared unwilling to do anything about him.

After a 5-4 majority on the Supreme Court upheld a federal law regulating partial-birth abortions, Sobran (May 3) acknowledged that a Republican defeat in 2008 would be bad for the pro-life movement, but he blamed that likely outcome primarily on the President himself. A week later he praised the pro-abortion Democratic Senator Joseph Biden as “someone who takes his faith very seriously” and announced that, although the office of the presidency “ought not to exist,” he found Biden to be a trustworthy candidate.

Likoudis (November 16) surveyed the electoral disaster suffered by the Republicans, including significant defeats for the pro-life cause, and attributed much of it to Catholic “swing voters,” while Christopher Manion, an occasional contributor, also described at length (January 18) how the cause was imperiled. Neither writer recalled that, in turning so many pro-life legislators out of office in 2006, the voters had in effect followed Sobran’s advice in *The Wanderer*—vote against incumbents.

The defeat of Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania was one such serious loss, and Likoudis attributed that defeat—at the hands of a pro-life Democrat, Robert Casey Jr.—to anger on the part of pro-lifers at Santorum’s past support of Pennsylvania’s other Republican senator, the pro-abortion Arlen Specter. Such anger was arguably justifiable, but Likoudis immediately introduced other issues, claiming that Santorum’s defeat was also due to his support for the Iraq War and for his having “accepted dictation” from

“neo-conservatives”—people whom Likoudis called Santorum’s “tenders,” appointed by the Bush administration to ensure his “proper behavior” on the issues. A *Wanderer* reader asserted (November 16) that Santorum’s real offense was not his support of Specter but the fact that he had departed from “Catholic teaching” concerning the state of Israel, and another reader (January 18) dismissed abortion as an issue and said Santorum had been defeated because of his “ungodly voting record on economic justice issues.”

After the Supreme Court’s decision on partial-birth abortions, Likoudis wrote a front-page article headlined “Supreme Court Ruling Might Not Prevent One Abortion” (April 26), in which he quoted a law professor, Charles Rice, as calling the decision “grotesque,” because it did not outlaw abortion completely, and a pro-life activist named Judie Brown saying that “If pro-lifers consider this a victory, then someone should check to see what they are putting in their coffee.” (Like pro-abortionists, Likoudis referred to partial-birth abortion in quotation marks, as though the term is somehow misleading.)

These reactions help explain *The Wanderer*’s seeming indifference to the likely effect of elections on the abortion issue—if anything short of the complete reversal of *Roe v. Wade* must be rejected, and if such reversal is at present scarcely realistic, then pro-lifers are in effect being advised to base their votes on other issues.

A weekly feature of *The Wanderer* is “From the Mail” (FTM), where letters from anonymous readers are published with replies from an anonymous editor. As one can discern from its obvious passion, FTM takes a view of the world that has economics at its center, and it defines economic relationships as essentially a conspiracy of the rich against the poor, offering few specific proposals for change but expressing an apocalyptic sense of doom. Almost every week the anonymous editor warns that American economic conditions are getting steadily worse, to the point where “working people” can scarcely even survive (one reader could not find a house costing less than \$863,000; people pay over 26 percent monthly interest on their credit cards). When a reader complained (November 16) that the paper was slighting religion in favor of economics, FTM replied in exasperation, “Where does one begin?” and asked sarcastically whether the paper should ignore “the two-party political charade that enables Washington to fatten while Michigan and Ohio go on economic life support.”

If politics makes strange bedfellows, none are stranger than the alliances forged by FTM, which sometimes cites left-wing commentators like Gabriel Kolko (December 7) to prove that the United States is collapsing. Kolko,

now half-forgotten but at one time a leading New Left historian, was described by FTM as “America’s preeminent historian of U.S. wars and warfare,” and readers were directed to his essay “‘As an Economic System, Capitalism Is Going Crazy’: Factors in Our Colossal Mess,” predicting a disaster for which, not surprisingly, the Bush administration is largely responsible. FTM also quoted extensively from a newsletter that advocates investment in precious metals, on the grounds that the dollar is sinking to the point of worthlessness, and has predicted (January 18) that the American economy will “implode” during 2007.

Marxists like Kolko have a vested interest in the collapse of capitalism, since Marx based his entire system on that supposition and, for 150 years, Marxists have repeatedly proclaimed various economic crises as heralding that collapse. But—far as it is from Marxism philosophically—FTM seems to have an equal vested interest in seeing that prophecy fulfilled. Sobran predicts (November 9) that America is “heading for total ruin” and that Communism might after all be “the wave of the future.”

For many years *The Wanderer* has printed, alongside the title of the paper itself, a warning by Pope Pius XI that “No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true Socialist.” But behind that bold warning lie complex issues unknown even to most Catholics. Thomas Storck correctly explained to *Wanderer* readers (November 23) that Pius XI condemned socialism not so much for its economic doctrines and practices but because of its predominantly materialistic view of society; this position was developed further by later popes. Catholic economic doctrine has never supported unrestrained free-market capitalism, and papal social teachings, dating at least from Leo XIII in 1891, condemn acquisitive competitiveness and advocate a society governed by moral principles, especially a “just price” and a “just wage.” But such a society has never existed anywhere, even in the old Papal States, so that it is difficult to know what it might actually look like. In the 1930s some Catholics thought they saw it in fascism, a judgment that had the effect of discrediting the entire idea unfairly.

Along with its approving citation of the Marxist Kolko, FTM printed a letter from Rupert Ederer, an economist who has been America’s leading exponent of a certain kind of Catholic economic theory. Ederer was cheered by the recent electoral defeat of the Republican Party and congratulated *The Wanderer* on its stands: “It is an act of patriotism to expose the actions and policies which are destroying our country. . . . fatuous free trade, tax, and monetary policies.”

In matters of economics FTM usually looks for guidance to treatises of past times, as in its periodic citations of the early-19th-century English radical

William Cobbett, whom Likoudis (February 1) characterizes as “the first [almost three centuries after the fact] to cry out against the new capitalism that grew out of the Reformation, the dissolution of the monasteries, and the enclosure of public lands.” FTM also frequently cites Hilaire Belloc, as in his charge that democracy is a sham and that modern society is governed by “a few quite unworthy controllers of our lives—the monopolists of material, of currency, of information, and transport; the tyranny of trust—masters of production, banking, journals, and communications” (October 26).

Prior to the election (October 26), Likoudis thought that, beyond particular issues, the habits of Catholic voters revealed a deeper divide, one that had been identified in 1941 by a Catholic sociologist, Msgr. Paul Hanly Furfey: a division between those who fully accept the Church’s social teachings and those who compromise with the “predominantly Protestant culture.” Furfey called for “thoroughgoing criticism of the present socioeconomic system that makes widespread want inevitable” and identified race, peace, and economic justice as the key issues, essentially the same list as that of present-day liberals.

There is no reason—either in 1941 or later—to think that the positions Furfey and Likoudis criticize are distinctively Protestant in nature, and Likoudis’s essentially populist social outlook is scarcely faithful to the Furfey tradition, insofar as Likoudis identifies free trade, the income tax, and unrestricted immigration as major social evils. To the contrary, the Furfey school argued for a moral obligation to welcome new people unreservedly and for taxation to support welfare programs, and most of those in that tradition now favor free trade as beneficial to non-Western countries. (Furfey was especially passionate about race relations and advocated strong government action in that area, something Sobran deplures.)

FTM also frequently cites Father Charles Coughlin, a Detroit priest who once had a vast radio audience, first with a religious message, then with sweeping theories about politics and economics. A populist who was severely critical of capitalists, Coughlin turned against the New Deal just as strongly, and FTM has recalled (October 26, December 16) that 70 years ago Coughlin charged that the Roosevelt administration was channeling wealth away from ordinary people and towards the rich, deliberately trying to impoverish the country and to bring American living standards “down to Third World levels,” a plot that FTM claims has now succeeded. (FTM overlooks the fact that, except for identifying poverty as an acute social problem, in most ways Furfey and Coughlin were ideological opposites of each other.)

FTM’s conviction that malicious government policies over many decades have ground ordinary people into the dirt requires denying that there was a

sustained and palpable rise in the general standard of living after World War II, and implies that Americans were actually better off a century ago, perhaps even during the Great Depression.

FTM sometimes posits economic conditions as the direct cause of the country's moral deterioration. The woman who allegedly could not find an affordable house proclaimed, without explanation, "I do see why 99 percent of all the young adults I know are sleeping together and contracepting. Our culture and economy are sickening!" A half century after it was first made, FTM resurrected (November 9) the claim by a Catholic radical of the 1950s that usury is the cause of sodomy, because the working class, unlike in times past, can no longer afford adequate housing and is forced into crowded quarters that make sodomy a major temptation. (With unrecognized irony, the man who posited this connection was described as an admirer of the early-20th-century Catholic artist Eric Gill, who had his own eccentric economic ideas and is known to have regularly, and apparently unrepentantly, committed incest with his daughters.)

Coughlin and FTM belong to the loosely defined American populist tradition that is neither "liberal" nor "conservative" in the usual sense but is hostile both to government and to business, often positing a malign alliance between the two. The maldistribution of wealth is at the heart of its critique of society, making every other issue, such as foreign policy, understandable in terms of plutocratic conspiracy. In identifying international capitalists as the principal conspirators, populists of this kind almost inevitably discover, as Coughlin did, that "the Jews" are key participants. FTM (January 4) claims that Coughlin "was subjected to an unprecedented publicity campaign based on lies and calumny, and silenced simply because he too often pointed out the Jewish role in the Russian Revolution," but Coughlin was in fact a full-blown anti-Semite and the order to cease his broadcasts came from his archbishop, acting at the behest of the Vatican.

The Wanderer is isolationist in its view of foreign policy, publishing a weekly column by Patrick Buchanan that argues for such isolationism in both political and economic terms. Often prefixing its citations with the word "respected," FTM sometimes cites far-left publications such as the *Guardian* in England and *The Nation* in America to find quasi-Marxist "proof" that the U.S. has nefarious, imperialist designs for the world. Likoudis himself sees the U.S. as the world's chief aggressor, warning (July 27) that American actions appear about to ignite World War III. He has strongly criticized support for Israel by pro-life politicians like Santorum and Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas and reminds readers that the United Nations (often criticized in *The Wanderer* for promoting abortion and other evils)

has repeatedly condemned Israel. Likoudis regards the threat of a militant Islam as “wildly overblown” (January 25), because Islamic hostility to the U.S. is attributable to America’s false moral values, its designs on oil found in Muslim countries, and its support for an Israel that mistreats Muslims.

Likoudis regards the Iraq War as not only mistaken and unjustified but as an instrument by which Americans’ liberties are being destroyed by their own government, perhaps deliberately; he proves that claim by quoting a left-wing law professor, Francis Boyle, who charges that the Bush administration, by its treatment of war prisoners, has set the nation on the road to totalitarianism (October 26). Although *The Wanderer* ordinarily regards left-wing professors as having a destructive effect on American culture, Likoudis praises Boyle as “one of the country’s leading experts on international law.”

Sobran questions the justice and wisdom of American involvement in World War II. Like Sobran and Buchanan, FTM (October 5) honors those who opposed American entry into the war, including a congressman who in 1940 charged that “the minds of American citizens are being warped by propaganda that comes from foreign sources” and several Catholic prelates who warned against war at that time. FTM has also lamented (November 23) that in the 1930s a congressional committee set up to investigate the sources of funding behind “pro-war propaganda” was subverted by Communists into an investigation of “anti-interventionists,” especially of German-Americans who were “an ethnic majority in the United States at the time.”

After the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, Sobran wrote a series of articles questioning (and sometimes ridiculing) the fear that al-Qaeda constitutes a threat to American security, and five years later (December 7) he reported that for him the real experience of terror was having to undergo a security check at Dulles Airport. Noting that the screeners were from “the Third World” (one was “slightly paler” than the other), he complained that they detained him arbitrarily because he had an expired driver’s license; he asked them sarcastically, “Who do you people work for, al-Qaeda?” On board the plane he was further annoyed by a stewardess who “seemed to be warming up for Kwanzaa,” and he repeated the same question to her. “This is the government that is supposed to be protecting us?” he demanded. “It’s a gluttonous, irrational monster.”

Sobran considers himself a “homeless conservative,” because “neo-conservatives” have taken over the movement, including its flagship publication, *National Review*, where he was at one time a senior editor. His commentaries are relentlessly and witheringly critical of the Bush administration, without even a hint that anything positive can be said about it, but his antipathy

extends beyond specific policies to the claim that practically all government activities today are in violation of the Constitution and that the nation long ago departed from its roots, an apostasy in which Lincoln played a major role by opposing Confederate secession. (On the other hand, the pro-life movement often cites the anti-slavery crusade as a precedent for its own efforts.) The terrorist threat is minimized both because no legitimacy can be granted to the Bush administration and because by definition practically everything that the government does is detrimental to the nation.

Quoting the journalist Paul Craig Roberts (January 25), Likoudis claims that the U.S. imprisons far too many of its citizens—far more than totalitarian states like China—and that many of those imprisoned have never had a fair trial, having been pressured into confessing to crimes they did not commit in order to avoid even more serious charges.

Political and economic issues come together in *The Wanderer*, because the same malevolent, only half-visible forces promote—for reasons never fully explained—both foreign policies that undermine American liberties and economic policies that impoverish the nation. There is, according to FTM (November 2), a vast, interlocking political and economic conspiracy, so that “Americans have to realize the extent to which their brains are being manipulated, and how they are being deprived of their free will and reason without knowing it,” a process in which both liberals and the presidential adviser Karl Rove play major roles. Robert Hickson, an occasional *Wanderer* contributor, has identified (December 15) “a transnational managerial elite, closely allied with tax-exempt foundations and the governing elite which is intent on establishing a new feudal order called a ‘new mercantile order.’” Hickson characterizes the United States as a “rogue superpower” that “does increasingly seem to be out of control.”

To the right of *The Wanderer* is *The Remnant*, a newspaper whose name derives from the fact that in effect it seceded from *The Wanderer* after the Second Vatican Council, whose authority *The Wanderer* accepts but *The Remnant* does not. The schism runs through the Matt family—*The Remnant* is edited by the nephew of the editor of *The Wanderer*.

The Remnant's disaffection with American society goes much deeper even than Sobran's, since it condemns the Founding Fathers themselves as Masons whose rebellion against Great Britain's divinely appointed king was motivated in large measure by the desire to destroy “the Catholic order” of society. The paper insists that no existing political order is legitimate and that it is necessary to return society directly to “the lordship of Christ.” (The editor, Michael Matt, asserts [October 31] that “The crusaders of old were

gallant gentlemen in every sense of the word.”) In *The Remnant* the “Jewish-Masonic conspiracy” (alternatively “Judeo-Masonic oligarchy” [September 15]) is simply taken for granted, routinely cited as an explanation for everything bad in both the church and the world, including the attack on the World Trade Center.

Christopher Ferrara (October 31), a regular *Remnant* author, has developed an extended account of how the United States grew from the poisoned roots of the Enlightenment (“a Protestant-Masonic revolt against the Kingdom of Christ”) and therefore lacks legitimacy. Practices like abortion and homosexual marriage flow inevitably from the philosophy of John Locke (one of Ferrara’s advertised lectures is “Hobbes, Locke, and MTV”), but the modern popes, beginning with John XXIII, have themselves become infected with a liberal political outlook that is incompatible with genuine Catholicism.

John Rao, another regular *Remnant* contributor, sees the American pro-life movement as itself spiritually dangerous, because its members accept the American idea of freedom and, in such things as attending White House prayer breakfasts, demonstrate their lack of authentic Catholic understanding (September 15). Because they accept the American idea of freedom, pro-lifers have no principles and have therefore reduced opposition to abortion to mere “hypocritical and stubborn whimsy” that “ultimately [depends] on whether the American Empire approves of it or not.” American Catholics, including those who are ostensibly orthodox, demonstrate that “the damage done by the Enlightenment to their own psyche is now so far gone that they, like their current victims, cannot ever hope to heal it.” The “current victims” are Europeans seeking to recover their own Catholic roots, who are being subverted by American Catholics imposing both Enlightenment ideas of freedom and loyalty to the “American Empire,” in acts of “precision bombing” against the “Catholic citadels of the Old World.”

Although the U.S. is usually seen as morally more conservative than Europe (there is little effective pro-life activity in most European countries), Rao claims that the moral corruption of Europe is something imported from the U.S., which seeks to impose on Europe a hedonistic and materialistic concept of freedom. (American Catholics have taught their European coreligionists that freedom means getting rich by building shopping malls and erecting advertising billboards.) He dismisses all elections as “meaningless” and urges Catholics to look to eleventh-century German emperors for moral and political guidance (April 15).

The Remnant sometimes exudes palpable satisfaction in reporting defeats for the pro-life movement, because those defeats vindicate the paper’s own invincible pessimism about the state of society. As Rao argues, to participate in

the democratic process in the fight against abortion is to lend support to a system that good Catholics must condemn. Logically, therefore, until the Second Coming of Christ, Catholics can do practically nothing about social evils except to attempt to convert people.

Two online Catholic journalists—Matthew Anger and Christopher Blosser (speroforum.com, March 7, 2006)—have revealed that a relatively new publishing house called IHS, which is dedicated to “bringing back into print the classics of the last century on the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church,” was founded by John Sharpe and Derek Holland, both of whom have associations with a complex and bewildering chain of anti-Semitic and neo-fascist movements. (Sharpe, for example, has strongly suggested that the American government was itself responsible for the attack on the World Trade Center.)

IHS has published two books attacking neo-conservatives and containing essays by a variety of strange bedfellows—on one hand, Buchanan, Sobran, and Likoudis; on the other, the radical leftist Noam Chomsky. The book was endorsed by a radical left-wing historian, Howard Zinn, but also by Bishop Richard Williamson of the schismatic Society of St. Pius X (“Lefebvrists”), an ultra-traditionalist group that rejects the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. (Williamson, who holds extreme right-wing political views, is excommunicated because the circumstances of his appointment and consecration as a bishop were irregular.)

For over three decades the pro-life movement has defined itself as a “single issue” constituency, although the issue of abortion has inevitably metastasized into euthanasia and other practices. Some pro-lifers do not believe that political activity is the best way to fight for life, but such activity is imperative, because no society can be allowed to withhold legal protection from any category of persons, and because it is primarily through politics that abortion has been made an accepted social practice.

But involvement in political action necessarily brings with it the moral ambiguities inherent in all politics. Citizens cannot simply will into being a political movement that perfectly satisfies all their principles; of necessity, they must work with existing parties and groups. Except in totalitarian states (and sometimes even there), politics remains the art of the possible.

Abortion as a political issue brought the pro-life movement into a somewhat unexpected alliance with the Republican Party, an alliance that has made many formerly Democratic pro-lifers uncomfortable. Such an alliance necessarily places voters in the situation of in effect having to buy a whole political package. Public officials have to take positions on a wide range of issues, so that, in supporting Republicans, pro-lifers are implicated in everything that party does.

History seldom moves in a straight line. Plans are often upset by unforeseen events and, as it turned out, the pro-life movement was at least temporarily derailed in 2006 by the strong public backlash against the war in Iraq. By no means all pro-lifers support the war, but support for pro-life Republicans has in many cases amounted to a vote for the war, or is seen as such.

Abortion became legal (and thereby respectable) through judicial fiat, and most legislation to curtail the practice has been invalidated by judicial decree, while the related life issues also await judicial resolution. From the beginning pro-lifers have realized that the political fight must take place in the courts and that this means the appointment of pro-life judges, especially at the federal level. But the Republican defeats of 2006 now make it almost impossible that such judges can be appointed in the foreseeable future, probably forcing President Bush to name the kind of “moderates” who usually turn out to be pro-abortion. But amidst all the conservative Catholic criticism of Bush in 2006, the issue of the federal courts remained the elephant in the living room, something whose presence could not be candidly acknowledged. Not once during the campaign did any writer in *The Wanderer* explicitly remind readers of the crucial importance of judicial appointments, and some even implied the contrary.

Senator Webb of Virginia is probably a reliable new vote against pro-life nominees to the courts. Sobran justified his admiration for Webb partly on the grounds that Bush betrayed the pro-life cause in giving priority to the Iraq War, as though a president cannot and ought not to take simultaneous responsibility for both foreign and domestic matters. Notably, Bush’s pursuit of the war did not prevent him from successfully nominating John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, appointments that brought the pro-life movement to within one vote of having a reliable majority. But when Roberts was nominated Sobran did not welcome the appointment, saying (August 15, 2005) that he would withhold judgment until “my bellwether, Howard Phillips,” had spoken and that Phillips had not made up his mind.

After accusing the Republicans of betraying the pro-life cause, Sobran later judged (March 8) that “Abortion seems to be dwindling to an intramural Republican issue,” a judgment that seemed to recognize that the future of the pro-life movement depends on pro-life Republicans continuing in office.

A month after the election (December 7), Sobran lamented that “just when many were hoping for relief as the Age of Bush begins to wind down,” Democrats were talking about reintroducing the Equal Rights Amendment in Congress. After having said practically nothing on the subject during the campaign, Sobran at last acknowledged that “the Democrats will now have more to say about the direction of the federal judiciary,” as though that had

not occurred to him before.

However, he later (March 15) proclaimed that “We face a government essentially and practically hostile to the Church, and nearly all candidates threaten to make it worse if they can.” (Presumably President Bush, as head of the government, is among those hostile to the Church.) Sobran mentioned none of the Republican presidential candidates who have announced themselves as pro-life but instead speculated that the 2008 contest would be between Rudolph Giuliani and Hillary Clinton and judged that of the two Senators Clinton would do “less damage.”

In sounding the alarm over the civil-liberties implications of the Military Commission Act, Likoudis cited an analyst who predicted that the law in question will eventually come before the Supreme Court, where Roberts, Alito, Antonin Scalia, and Clarence Thomas can be expected to uphold it. Since this is precisely the group of justices most favorable to the pro-life cause, readers might reasonably conclude from Likoudis’s warning that, just as liberals claim, it is a judicial bloc that is dangerous to liberty—whereas a Democratic president would appoint justices who, even if pro-abortion, would have a proper concern for the nation’s freedoms.

During the 2006 campaign (October 18) *The Wanderer* published an article about the New Hampshire election explicitly suggesting that it was probably best to vote Democratic, and during the campaign its only explicit warning against doing so (November 2) did not have to do with abortion; rather, Likoudis’s complaint was that the Democrats are not reliable opponents of the Iraq War.

Despite the election results, *The Wanderer* has not sounded the alarm over likely Democratic support for abortion but apparently still considers other issues more pressing. FTM rejoiced (November 23) that, as it had predicted, the economy is likely to be the major issue in the 2008 election, along with the defense budget and the question whether it is necessary “to protect us from evildoers on the other side of the globe.” FTM (December 15) appeared to endorse a proposal that a TV commentator named Lou Dobbs be nominated for president, because he charges that the nation’s elites “are waging outright war on working men and women and their families.” But in offering that endorsement FTM did not find it necessary to inform readers of where Dobbs might stand on the life issues. Also without mentioning those issues, Likoudis (January 25) enthusiastically praised a Wisconsin lawyer seeking election to the state supreme court on the promise that he will fight to reform a corrupt criminal-justice system.

Following the electoral disasters of 2006, some pro-life critics of the Bush administration partly justified the Republican defeat by reporting a renaissance

of the pro-life cause within the Democratic Party. But so far, that renaissance has been mild indeed, and the party as a whole is about as likely to adopt a pro-life philosophy as the Republicans are to embrace socialized medicine.

One attempt to resolve the dilemma is to claim that Bush is not really pro-life, as Phillips—contrary to all the evidence—did in his *Wanderer* interview. But it is a claim that is at best uninformed and in most cases disingenuous. Besides appointing judges infinitely better, from the pro-life standpoint, than any Democrat would ever do, Bush has vetoed a bill authorizing fetal stem-cell research, refused to ratify various international agreements that sanction abortion as a human “right,” and refused to authorize American funding for international abortion programs.

The opposition of these conservative Catholics to the Bush administration has also led some of them to reject important pro-life allies. In their fierce denunciations of “neo-conservatives,” Sobran and Likoudis ignore the fact that neo-conservatives, especially in the pages of their leading publication, *The Weekly Standard*, are among the few secular people enrolled in the pro-life cause. TWS regularly publishes strong and highly intelligent articles against abortion, fetal-stem-cell research, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and other life issues, as well as against radical feminism and the homosexual movement. It is a moral conservatism that is not accidental, since “neo-conservatives” are usually defined as people who became disillusioned with traditional liberalism on a variety of issues.

Similarly, Likoudis’s dismissal of Santorum as merely a puppet of the White House and of a neo-conservative conspiracy impugned the integrity of a man who had been regarded as one of the most principled and effective Senate champions of traditional moral causes, and it is not at all clear whether Santorum was opposed primarily for his lapse in supporting Specter or for his heresy on other issues. Since his opponent was also pro-life, opposition to Santorum could be justified, but some of his Catholic critics implied that he had to be turned out of office without regard for the life issues.

Economics appears to be the engine that is now driving *The Wanderer*’s stand on public issues, and establishing its priorities. Neither liberals nor conservatives, as those terms are understood in the U.S. today, represent classical Catholic social teachings. But since the U.S. is a predominantly capitalist country, the teachings criticizing capitalism appear more pertinent to our condition than do the teachings against socialism; so, to the degree that the Republican Party champions the free market, some Catholics draw the conclusion that it is in effect immoral to support Republican candidates.

While this is usually considered a liberal idea, in the pages of *The Wanderer* it has a conservative counterpart that is in many ways almost indistinguishable from the liberal position. The paper stops short of advising readers precisely how to vote in order to achieve true social justice, but its economic ideas seem logically to lead to the conclusion that only strong state action can overcome the plutocratic exploitation of the people, something that has been the premise of left-wing American politics since the 1890s.

Abortion was not even remotely a political issue in 1941, but Furfey gave a hint as to how he might have dealt with it when he accused Catholics of compromising their principles partly in return for “a respect for the Catholic opinion [*sic*] on birth control”—which seemed to imply that what are today called “social issues” are not as serious as some others.

The economist Rupert Ederer has asserted (December 7) that there is an authentically “Catholic” position on such issues as trade, tax, and monetary policies: “We need to recognize that there are Ten Commandments, not one or two. Along with the Fifth Commandment (murder of the innocent) and the Sixth Commandment (against sodomy) there is also the Seventh, about stealing (depriving the working man of his just wages), and the Eighth, about lying (a devastating war based on lying).” His exhortation repeated the familiar liberal accusation that pro-lifers care only about the unborn and are preoccupied with sexual behavior rather than with justice, and it also used the common liberal Catholic ploy of equating absolute moral principles with prudential judgments about particular situations, a ploy that is the basis of the “seamless garment” by which some Catholics justify support for abortion by weighing it against the policies of the welfare state.

There is an obvious but unacknowledged internal conflict here, in that Sobran espouses a minimalist view of the state, according to which almost every project that government undertakes does nothing but harm, yet at the same time seems to justify voting Democratic, in order to punish Republicans who have betrayed authentic conservatism. Rao (*The Remnant*, September 15) has used the same ploys, accusing pro-lifers of being indifferent to the death of “live innocent babies” in the Near East, and, in a breathtaking slight-of-hand, reversing the traditional relationship between formal doctrine and prudential judgments, treating the decrees of Vatican II as highly debatable but any kind of statement by the Holy See about the Near East (although not necessarily about other issues) as infallible. He charged that conservative Catholics “seem eager to hop on board any aircraft available to aid Israel that can be guilty of no wrong, no matter who it bombs and how it does so” and, despite positing the existence of a “Catholic teaching” about the Near East, accused the Vatican of failing to condemn “imperialist warmongering” out

of cowardice and a fear of losing American money.

After asserting (December 28) that the war on drugs has failed (FTM's editor had a report from his son that large parts of Oregon are now directly controlled by Latin American drug lords with their own police forces), FTM quoted Coughlin at length claiming that Prohibition in the early 1930s was a scheme of the wealthy both to "grind more work out of their employees by depriving them of their beer" and to distract people from the real issues. FTM did not identify abortion as one of those issues, and Likoudis (February 1) has gone so far as to characterize the debate over embryonic-stem-cell research as "distracting" people from the dangers of the social Darwinian philosophy that dominates modern life. (Liberals also often cite the history of Prohibition as showing that "you can't legislate morality," and that therefore a legal ban on abortion cannot succeed.)

FTM's claim that moral evils are primarily the result of economic injustices and should therefore be combated primarily through better economic policies cannot help but make the pro-life movement seem naïve and shallow in its understanding of reality, even perhaps as an unwitting tool of the plutocracy—something that is, once again, a familiar liberal charge.

In judging that abortion has become merely "an intramural Republican issue," Sobran (March 8) offered a counsel of despair that, perhaps unintentionally, described the position that he himself represents:

. . . even most people who regard it as a grave evil have difficulty keeping it uppermost in their minds. There are just too many distractions, and in politics the urgent always tends to usurp the important.

A sense of futility, discouragement, abandonment, betrayal, and just plain baffling practical complexity makes it hard to sustain resistance. It is easy to succumb to the feeling that though it's terribly wrong, legal abortion is here to stay; that even our old allies have found other things to do.

A week later (March 15) he said that he regards abortion as "worse than aggressive warfare" but added that ". . . after all, legal abortion is going to be around for a while and the Iraq war, whatever you think of it, is urgent right now."

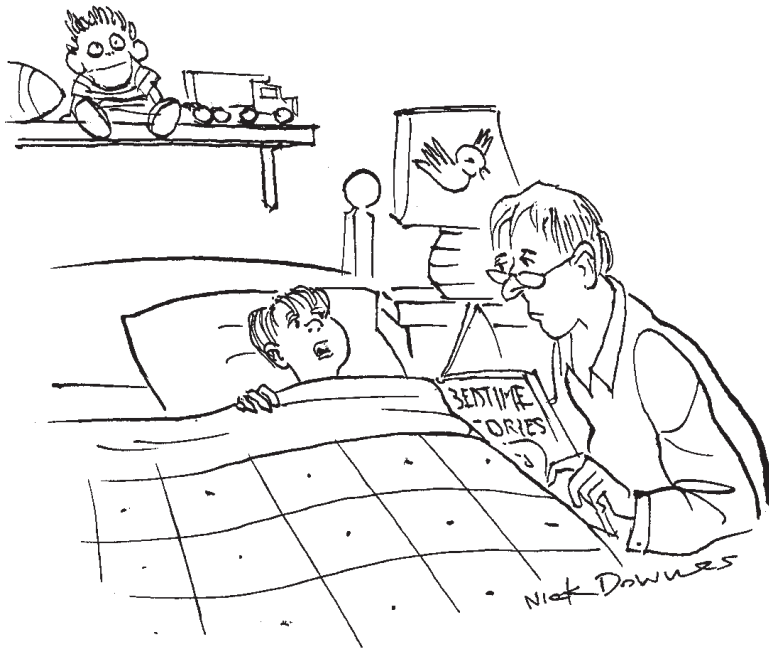
Many, perhaps most, committed pro-lifers are former Democrats who were rejected by their party and found themselves welcomed by the Republicans. Most of those converts are probably not conservatives in a principled ideological way, so that their presence in the Republican ranks has the effect of helping facilitate the "betrayal" of conservative principles that Sobran and others decry.

Hard-core conservatives tend now to hearken back nostalgically to the days of Barry Goldwater, ignoring the fact the Goldwater turned out to be

fanatically pro-abortion, as well as very liberal on most other social issues, something that gives pro-lifers little reason to want to be “true” conservatives. Sobran’s way of dealing with the life issues can then be seen as the conservative counterpart to the liberals’ “seamless garment”—an attempt to persuade pro-lifers to transcend their “narrow” outlook and support a wider agenda.

The widely held, apparently self-evident, assumption that the pro-life movement is the creature of the “religious Right” has blinded even most informed observers to the unexpected and intriguing fact that, for some on the Catholic part of “the Right,” the life issues are no longer paramount, if they ever were.

¹ All citations to Sobran are to his writings in *The Wanderer*.



“‘Happily ever after’—that’s kinda September 10th, isn’t it?”