

# If You Keep Turning Right or Left, You Still End Up in The Same Place

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As a Catholic priest and pro-life, I hear many Catholics raising strong questions about the Catholicity of many Catholic (mostly Democrats) elected officials who state that their Catholic faith is very important to them in forming their political positions, but then consistently advocate and vote for legislation that shifts all the rights to the woman, and carefully strips the child in the womb from any claims to rights of life.

Certainly, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is in the cross hairs of many pro-life Catholics, who challenge whether one can consistently vote a pro-choice and pro-embryonic stem cell position, and still remain in communion with the Catholic Church.

In an important August 3, 2008-interview between Speaker Pelosi and C-Span's Brian Lamb, Ms. Pelosi made two comments that would be contradictory to most Catholics in the pews. In the first case, Mr. Lamb quoted from Ms. Pelosi's book, "Growing up Catholic had an enormous impact on me-- greater, I am certain, than growing up in a political family." He then asks her why.

Speaker Pelosi responds, "Well, I think it's self-evident, I mean, I make that statement because everybody knows that I grew up in a political family. But faith was a very -- is and has been a very important part of my family life growing up and now. And it informs my decision making, my value system and my sense of responsibility to the community. And it is a joy in my life."

Speaker Pelosi goes on to say that she is a regular communicant, and that if the Eucharist was withheld from her, it ". . . would be a severe blow to me." However, there are some fundamental areas where she is in deep disagreement with her Church. She said in the same interview, "So there's some areas where we're in agreement and some areas where we're not and one being a woman's right to choose, the other being stem cell research."

For many in the pro-life movement, the right to life is such an ancient and fundamental teaching of the Catholic Church, that to descent from it raises real questions if one has not only departed from the magisterial teaching, but has also departed from the Church.

This type of debate has generally been focused on what is known as the cultural war issues: abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research and gay marriage. However on this Labor Day, I ask why we are selective in our list. Since 1891, the Catholic Church has firmly and consistently acknowledged the natural rights of workers to join together in associations, and to participate in collective bargaining. Beginning with Pope Leo XIII, this tradition has been most recently echoed by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2009-encyclical *Caritas in veritate*.

So, if one's Catholicity can be challenged because one consistently votes against fundamental values of life, then can't one's Catholicity also be challenged when he or she consistently votes against Catholic values of the rights to organize, minimum wage and the right to collective bargaining.

To put this another way, if Speaker Pelosi's Catholicity can be challenged because she consistently turns left on cultural war issues, drawing her moral compass from something other than her Catholic faith, at what point can a member of Congress' Catholicity be challenged because he or she consistently turns right, and votes against legislation that supports workers wages (i.e., project labor agreements, and Davis-Bacon), and assists workers to organize into unions (i.e., legislation related to TSA and airlines workers organizing).

Congressman John Sullivan of Oklahoma is Catholic, yet according to the AFL-CIO Voting Record web site, of the ten pieces of legislation that were directly related to organizing, Davis-Bacon, or project labor agreements, Congressman Sullivan voted against the position of our country's largest workers' organization nine out of ten times.

Congressman Steve Scalise of Louisiana did Congressman Sullivan one better. He voted ten out of ten times against the positions of the AFL-CIO. Such consistent voting eventually raises the question, "How many times does it take to vote against workers' rights to organize, participate in collective bargaining, minimum wage legislation and safe workplace rules, before one's fidelity to the Catholic magisterium and Catholicity is called into question?"

Now some Catholics say that the two issues are different, and that a recent letter from Archbishop Dolan makes just that point. These same folks argue that Catholics can faithfully disagree on actual policies that are implemented, yet still be in line with Catholic Social Teaching. *Our Sunday Visitor* contributing editor, Russell Shaw, makes just that argument in the August 14, 2011-edition of the paper.

Mr. Shaw draws on a letter from the Archbishop Dolan, writing as the president of the United States Catholic Conference, that "The principles of Catholic social teaching contain truths that need to be applied. Thus, one must always exercise prudential judgment in applying these principles while never contradicting the intrinsic values."

The Archbishop went on to say, "We bishops are very conscious that we are pastors, never politicians. . . . As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, it is the lay faithful who have the specific charism of political leadership and decision."

I am totally in agreement with Archbishop Dolan's letter. It certainly is possible that Catholic statesmen and women can disagree whether an adjustment of the minimum wage should be for 50¢ or for 80¢. Two Catholics can also debate whether passing the Employees Free Choice Act is the best way to assure workers' ability to easily and fairly express their will about forming a union. However, when one continuously votes against any increase in minimum wage, argues that there should be no minimum wage, and consistently puts forth legislation that denies more and more workers of their rights organize, then somewhere along the line, that statesman has rejected fundamental Catholic Social Justice Teachings, and is ". . . contradicting the intrinsic values."

If one questions the Catholicity of Speaker Pelosi because she consistently votes against the Catholic position on abortion, then one should also start questioning the Catholicity of Catholic congressmen and women whose votes consistently reject a hundred and twenty years of consistent papal teaching. At some point their turning to the right eventually puts them in the same place that Speaker Pelosi arrived at by turning left: Public rejection of the teachings of the Church.

One can also draw this same comparison outside of politics. Many Catholics challenge the Catholicity of Catholics who work in abortion clinics. Our Code of Canon Law has clear penalties for those who assist someone in procuring an abortion. However, what about a Catholic attorney who works for a "union avoidance" law firm whose sole reason for existence is to prevent workers from organizing into unions, and to undermine unions once they are organized? When does his or her consistent actions place him or her in the same position of publicly rejecting fundamental Catholic teachings?

I know some will say, "Well, abortion and union busting are not the same thing." I would have to agree, the latter seems to be driven primarily by money and power. Now, what did Jesus say about God and mammon?