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A few days before the election, I wrote in my column at Patheos that progressive pro-lifers should not feel unwelcome in the Democratic Party, and that a vote for Joe Biden, given the alternative, was the only ethical option. Others made similar arguments. Jerushah Duford, the granddaughter of Billy Graham, encouraged pro-life Christians to distance themselves from Donald Trump. "I'm pro-life, and I'm voting for Biden" was a recurring theme in both religious and secular publications.

But the mainstream pro-life movement still stands with Trump, who has been touted by his fans as the "most effective pro-life president in American history." Among many Catholic pro-lifers, support for Trump has become a nonnegotiable principle. Some, such as La Crosse priest Fr. James Altman, even preach that one cannot be Catholic and a Democrat.

To those of us who believe "pro-life" should refer to all life, Trump's policies are a grotesque parody. Nevertheless, many consistent-life advocates were unwilling, even after four years of cruelty and mismanagement, to back the opposition, because of the Democratic Party's liberal policies on abortion. Progressive pro-life groups such as Democrats for Life of America argued that the Democratic National Convention should alter its stance on abortion, or risk losing the election.

So Trump's loss looks like a blow to the pro-life movement, thanks to pro-lifers who have made the Trump brand indistinguishable from the pro-life brand. And for consistent life advocates who were critical of Trump, Biden's win must seem a hollow victory. The Democratic Party did not, after all, need to woo pro-life voters by changing its platform. So where are progressive pro-lifers to go?

Clearly the threat of a second Trump term was enough to override many voters' concerns about the DNC's stance on abortion. That does not mean these concerns have vanished. The majority of U.S. voters' views on abortion are not represented by either party. Most believe abortion should be legal under some circumstances, and that *Roe* v. *Wade* should not be overturned, but do not support unrestricted access. Those who think abortion should be legal under all circumstances are a minority, as are those who favor banning it across the board.

Progressive pro-lifers should use this as a starting point for reengaging with Democratic Party leaders on the topic of abortion. To do this effectively, however, new tactics will be required. I suggest at least four:

1. Progressive pro-lifers need to delineate themselves more clearly from the mainstream pro-life movement.

Pro-choice activists have often accused pro-lifers of being misogynistic, pro-birth only and indifferent to issues other than abortion. In allying with the Trump administration, pro-lifers have done their utmost to prove these accusations correct. The pro-life label now evokes the anti-life ethos of the Make America Great Again movement: anti-immigrant policies, hate speech, excuses for sexual assault, anti-environmentalism and militarization of police against racial justice protesters.

Unfortunately, right-wing pro-lifers have sometimes gestured toward consistent-life advocates as proof that pro-lifers are not what their opponents accuse them of being. We need to refuse to let them do this. Public displays of solidarity with right-wing pro-lifers, such as at the annual March for Life, appear now to entail tacit acceptance of anti-life policies, and do more harm than good.

2. We must make common cause with pro-choice activists, when our goals align.

Progressive pro-lifers situate opposition to abortion within a broader life ethic, alongside issues of racial and economic injustice, sexual assault, gun violence, militarism, capital punishment and environmental protection. Believing all life has intrinsic value, we do not think "pro-life" should refer only to abortion, nor that this complex issue can be dealt with by simple bans.

We share pro-choice activists' concerns about the challenges and even threats women face in our society. We understand that women who choose abortion often do so as an escape from existing societal evils. And we can find common ground in working to eliminate those injustices that increase abortion demand, even if we do not see eye to eye on the question of supply.

Moreover, political leaders who favor keeping abortion legal tend to promote policies that alleviate the evils that drive up abortion demand. In contrast to the Republican Party, which insists on economic libertarianism and cuts to social welfare programs, Democratic leaders believe, with progressive pro-lifers, that the role of government is to help create a more just society.

3. In order to make common cause, new language, arguments and rhetoric will be needed.

Here I must acknowledge that consistent-life pro-lifers have already attempted solidarity with pro-choice advocates, and not always been successful. A notable instance: New Wave Feminists applied to partner the Women's March, in 2017. The organizers initially accepted NWF as official partners, but after learning about their pro-life credentials, rejected them. New Wave Feminists were not disinvited to the march, but the organizers were wary enough of the pro-life label not to want their name on the partner list.

While I can not agree with the Women's March's decision, I understand their reaction. The language and rhetoric of pro-lifers, for decades, has been derogatory towards pro-choicers. The occasional "love them both" or "pro-woman, pro-life" bumper sticker does not erase the barrage of abusive speech. Pro-choice feminists, many of whom have spent their lives working for better conditions for women and babies, have been called "baby killers" and "feminazis." Pro-lifers who call themselves feminists have derided their pro-choice sisters as "fauxminists."

4. We need to admit that abortion politics involve complex questions with no easy answers.

It should be possible simultaneously to take abortion seriously as a life issue, and to recognize that abortion politics involve an intersection of delicate ethical concerns, which cannot be legislated away. Global and historical evidence suggests that attempts to eradicate abortion by outlawing it do not work and may do more harm than good. Because it has to do with women's reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, abortion cannot accurately be compared with such violations as slavery or genocide, which may be opposed via force. We should think of this as we do other life-ethics questions about which one may hold strong beliefs — but which we recognize as difficult and nuanced, with no easy solutions. Just war, killing in self-defense and animal rights come to mind.

It is a mistake to assume that Catholic politicians and voters are "pro-abortion" because they do not favor bans. Understanding how double-edged such bans can be, many Catholics, including prominent Catholic politicians, may feel more confident about addressing the abortion problem by tackling those injustices that increase demand, rather than cutting off legal supply.

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This is what the U.S. bishops' conference clearly fails to understand, in their plan to address a supposed threat to the common good from the Biden administration. In taking up a stance of antagonism rather than seeking solidarity, the bishops are missing an opportunity to build a pro-life coalition that might be effective. And this sudden combativeness looks all the more misguided, when we consider their failure to take a strong stand against the anti-Catholic and anti-life abuses of the Trump administration.

The pro-life movement has failed on several counts. For nearly 50 years it has followed an unaltered agenda that has done nothing to reduce abortion rates. It has failed to evaluate its own tactics and ask what might work better to protect unborn life. In its alliance with libertarian economics and far-right politics, it has destroyed its own moral credibility, probably permanently.

Progressives who uphold a consistent ethic of life need to regroup and reconsider. While Democratic Party leaders may not be ready for arguments about protecting life by restricting abortion access, we can initiate conversations about reducing abortion demand by alleviating stresses on women and families. And with Joe Biden poised to become the second Catholic president of the United States, we may hope to get a listen.

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