Opinion

Guest Voices



Anti-abortion protesters celebrate outside the Supreme Court in Washington June 24 in the wake of the court's decision in *Dobbs* v. *Jackson Women's Health Organization* . (RNS/AP/Jose Luis Magana)



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Just war theory requires that combatants have not only a just cause, but also that they wage their war in a just way. Thus, Catholic teaching about conflict condemns direct attacks on civilians or even disproportionate killing of civilians as collateral damage in an attack on a military target.

In other words, you cannot blow up a 10-story apartment building to kill a terrorist.

The same is true of politics. You may have very good goals, but you also must look at the political muscle employed in attaining those goals and ask if the end justifies the means. You need to ask, for example, what is the collateral damage caused by the tactics you use in gaining your objective.

The bishops waged a long war against *Roe* v. *Wade* and won this past June in the form of Justice Samuel Alito's decision in *Dobbs* v. *Jackson Women's Health Organization*. It would be difficult to find any bishop who thinks that this war was not justified. Some bishops, however, do question some of the tactics employed in this war — for example, denying Communion to pro-choice Democrats.

As the bishops gather in Baltimore this week for their fall meeting, will they acknowledge the collateral damage caused by their tactics?

I am not talking about the negative impact of the decision as perceived by those who are pro-choice. Pro-choice advocates argue that the lives and health of women

are being put at risk by the decision. Bishops and pro-life advocates deny these charges.

But even those who see no problems with the *Dobbs* decision need to ask about the collateral damage caused by the strategy used by the bishops and their pro-life allies.

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The pro-life strategy was simple: Support presidential and senatorial candidates who would put justices on the U.S. Supreme Court in order to overturn *Roe*. In current American politics, that meant supporting Republican candidates.

Thus, by making abortion their "preeminent priority," the bishops made Donald Trump and the Republican Party their allies.

The Republicans, as promised, successfully killed *Roe*, but what else did they kill?

The Supreme Court justices who overturned *Roe* also gutted the Voting Rights Act that protected the rights of Black and other minority voters. They also invalidated environmental and other business regulations. This term it appears they look ready to cast aside affirmative action programs.

All of this is collateral damage from the bishops' decision to support stacking the court with conservative justices who would overturn *Roe*.

Republican legislators, meanwhile, have opposed almost every proposal that would have implemented Catholic social teaching.

They have opposed laws and regulations to deal with global warming. They ignore the warnings of scientists and Secretary-General António Guterres who warns, "We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator." The devastation that will be caused by global warming by the end of this century will be apocalyptic.

The Earth and humanity are collateral damage from the decision of bishops to ally themselves with the Republican Party to defeat *Roe*.

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Republicans also called for closing the border to refugees and immigrants. Salvadoran and Haitian families fleeing the threat of gangs, Venezuelans escaping a Communist dictatorship, and believers running from religious persecution: All are to be turned away by this country where almost all our ancestors were immigrants.

If the Holy Family crossed our border, we would send them back to Bethlehem and King Herod.

Migrants and refugees are collateral damage to the bishops' decision to back Republicans to overturn *Roe*.

Republicans have also voted against programs aimed at helping the poor: the expansion of Medicaid, the child tax credit, increases in the minimum wage and nutritional and housing programs. Republicans prefer massive tax cuts that mostly benefit the rich.

The poor are collateral damage to the bishops' decision to back Republicans to overturn *Roe*.

Former President Trump, who appointed the justices who made the *Dobbs* decision possible, has also made American politics more polarized and even violent. His refusal to accept the 2020 election results is a threat to democracy. He has turned the Republican Party, the party of fiscal conservatives, into the party that does not accept election results unless they win.

Democracy is collateral damage to the bishops' decision to support Republicans who would overturn *Roe*.

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There is even a chance that the anti-abortion cause itself may be collateral damage to the alliance with Republicans. Most voters in the midterm elections opposed *Dobbs*. They voted against the bishops on every ballot measure dealing with abortion. Many candidates who opposed abortion without exceptions were also defeated.

The bishops will argue they did not endorse this collateral damage and therefore should not be blamed for it. But if you arm an ally who says he will use the arms to kill civilians, then you have to accept blame for their deaths.

The Republicans were never shy in proclaiming what they would do if they gained power. To the extent that the bishops and pro-lifers helped the Republicans gain power, they must accept responsibility for what the Republicans did with that power.

In wars, generals always ignore or play down collateral damage as part of the cost of winning. The bishops will do the same when they meet in Baltimore Nov. 14-17. They may even believe that this collateral damage was an acceptable cost of overturning *Roe*.

But as they celebrate their victory in *Dobbs*, they cannot ignore their responsibility for the collateral damage that came from their alliance with the Republican Party. They must also consider how to make up for this damage.