

Me & CFC

Michael Sean Winters | Mar. 17, 2010 NCR Today

Most days it would never occur to me to give a thought to the group Catholics for Choice (CFC). It is an unpleasant topic. Better to think about Somalia, or the stomach flu, than to occupy one's mind with a group that seems determined to make a mockery of the moral tragedy which is abortion. They give a bad name to those on the Catholic left who really do struggle with the complexities of the issue, who understand that there is no shame in ambivalence and great honor in wrestling with moral difficulty. CFC is to the Catholic Left what Randall Terry is to the Catholic Right, an embarrassment. Still, in this great, free country of ours, they are entitled to their opinion, even if it is a loathsome opinion.

Yesterday was not most days. Yesterday, I received a call asking me to be on a radio show to discuss the issue of health care reform. I was told that the president of CFC, Jon O'Brien, would be the other panelist. That was fine by me. I am always ready to speak about my opinions and defend them as best I can. As the host said, "I know you disagree with Jon, but we are all civilized people who are capable of a good discussion." Agreed. She called back ten minutes later to say that Jon refused to be on the show with me because of things I had written about CFC in the past.

I have been harsh about CFC in the past, especially when their foundress, Frances Kissling, launched an attack on Alexia Kelley, the founder of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, a group that has done more in a few years to advance the causes dear to the heart of most progressive Catholics than CFC has done in decades. I have re-read what I wrote about them today and I stand by every word. In fact, one of the good things to come of yesterday's unpleasantness is that I have the opportunity to put what I have written before the readership of NCR again. You can click [here](#) [1] and [here](#) [2] to read the posts in question.

What was surprising, even to me who holds CFC in such low regard, was the idea that Mr. O'Brien would fail to see that democracy lives by disagreement and discussion. I will go on the air to debate ideas with anyone except a Holocaust denier. Surely, it was not cowardice that motivated Mr. O'Brien to decline to appear on the same show as me. What was it? I think I know. I think Mr. O'Brien must know that I am on to the game they are playing at CFC, the game they exist to play. As someone who agrees "how can one not?" with the bishops about the morality of abortion but who sometimes disagrees with them about the politics of abortion, I am well acquainted with the line between moral authority and political authority. CFC exists to confuse people about that line. They are constantly raising an alarm that the separation between Church and State is threatened, as if a renewal of the Thirty Years War was the most likely thing to happen tomorrow. CFC displays a kneejerk hostility to anything any bishop says. They proclaim that abortion is a "personal decision" without acknowledging that such a formulation avoids, it does not confront, the moral issue. Still, even I was surprised that Mr. O'Brien would be so averse to the kind of debate and discussion that makes democracy possible. I knew CFC hated the Church. It was news to me that they have such contempt for democracy too.

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