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Hi everyone,

This paper is not new, but it is still pretty rough. I can't quite figure out if I'm trying to do too much here, or too little. So I could use some help clarifying what contribution (if any!) the paper is and should be making. I could also use some help identifying the logical and empirical holes in the argument that could you some backfill.

Thanks in advance for taking a look at it. I am really looking forward to the workshop next week.

Take care,

Ziad

ABORTION AND THE REMAKING OF CONSERVATIVE POLITICS

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Introduction

Opposition to legalized abortion is part of the bedrock of conservative politics today. Pro-life activists make up a sizable and particularly reliable component of the Republican Party's grassroots base. This political army has ensured that opposition to legalized abortion has become a Republican litmus test for national office. As John McCain told an audience in the 2008 Presidential campaign, the pro-life cause is one of the “fundamental principles of a conservative” (Shear 2007). The politics of anti-abortion activism today are also closely linked to conservative Protestants, many of them self-described evangelicals. Conservative, evangelical religious leaders like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Gary Bauer, and James Dobson have made opposition to legalized abortion a centerpiece of their moral and political world views. Gary Bauer, for example, recently wrote an essay ostensibly about terrorism in which he managed to raise the specter of abortion no less than three separate times in less than a thousand words (Bauer 2008). Leaders like Bauer are supported by tens of thousands of conservative Protestant activists who took up civic disobedience and violence in front of abortion clinics in the early 1990s, and today dominate many of the largest and most active pro-life organizations.

Despite the almost seamless integration of the pro-life movement into the Republican Party today, the relationship between the two is historically and ideologically peculiar. The pro-life movement was formed largely by Catholics, not conservative Protestants. Moreover, the

background of the movement was to a large degree rooted in progressive Catholic ideas about social justice and the (progressive) experiences of many early activists in advocacy for peace and the poor. At the same time, Republicans did not initially embrace pro-life activists following the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. Twenty years ago, then, there was nothing inevitable about opposition to legalized abortion becoming one of the central social issues around which conservative mobilization and electioneering revolves. While taken for granted today, the alliance between pro-life forces and the larger conservative movement is a puzzle that requires an explanation.

I argue here that the pro-life movement was at the forefront of the single-issue advocacy revolution in American politics. The revolution was accomplished through a transformation of the pro-life movement from a progressive, Catholic orientation to a conservative, Protestant orientation by a rising cadre of conservative leaders. Moreover, this transformation is responsible for some of the important dynamics within the pro-life movement today. I draw on four main sources of data to develop this argument. First are the many excellent histories of the abortion debate in the United States. Second is the polling data-- primarily from the General Social Survey-- on abortion attitudes that has been collected since the early 1970s. Third are 82 in-depth life history interviews I conducted with pro-life activists around the country. Fourth are three years of ethnographic data I collected on more than thirty national and local pro-life organizations operating in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Charleston, South Carolina, Boston, Massachusetts, and the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. The latter two data sources come from a more general study of mobilization within the pro-life movement in the United States. Complete information on the study's methodology and sample is found in Munson (2008).

Abortion Politics in a Two-Party System

Republican opposition to legalized abortion is so central to the political fabric of the United States today that it is easy to forget how recent, how contingent, and how incongruous this position is for the party. On the eve of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Republican party had a strong record of support for women's issues. They endorsed the principle of equal pay for equal work before the turn of the century, and endorsed the Equal Rights Amendment four years before the Democrats. Future Republican president George Bush publicly supported *Roe v. Wade*. By contrast, Democratic leader Jesse Jackson was a fierce opponent of abortion, equating abortion with slavery and suggesting legalized abortion would produce a “hell right here on earth” (Jackson 1977). Voters generally reflected these positions, with public opinion polls from the period consistently showing more support than opposition to abortion rights among Republicans, as well as more support for abortion rights among Republicans than among Democrats.

Republican support for abortion rights was built on a solid ideological rationale. The modern conservative ideology, forged in the 1960s, takes personal freedom as one of its central organizing principles. Conservative positions on a wide range of issues, from school vouchers and homeschooling, to taxes and Social Security reform, to gun control and health care, are formulated in terms of maximizing personal freedom for the individual. Abortion represents a glaring exception to this conservative principle (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2005:246). For better or for worse, criminalizing abortion represents an extension of the long arm of the state into the private lives of individuals. We should not be surprised, therefore, that Republicans were initially supportive of abortion rights. Opposition to legalized abortion represents a significant anomaly in the larger ideological narrative of modern conservatism.

Liberalism, on the other hand, has long championed the use of state power to protect minority rights, and has sought to give voice to those who are too weak and powerless to speak for themselves. This was initially the lens through which many liberals viewed abortion. In 1976, pro-life activist Ellen McCormack ran for the Democratic presidential nomination with a campaign successful enough to qualify for public election funding as well as Secret Service protection (Bernstein 1975; Shanahan 1976). Some activists today still see their work through a similar lens-- as fighting for the “little guy” whose rights would be otherwise trampled by the powerful. As Frank¹, a Boston activist in his mid-50s, explained to me:

There is a responsibility to the unborn woman, little girl, little boy, gay little boy, lesbian little girl, Downs Syndrome kid, fine. Hey, they have a right. I'm an American. That's what America is all about. Our weakest voices, little people. So I feel committed to speaking for these people as I would speak for my niece and nephew who are deaf. They can't speak for themselves.

Frank's framing of the pro-life issue in these terms is not common in the contemporary pro-life movement. But this is precisely the point; in today's political parlance, the language of minority rights and the needs of the downtrodden that characterize liberalism have not extended to the “unborn,” just as the conservative focus on liberty and individual freedom have not extended to pregnant women. So why have abortion rights become a liberal issue and opposition to those rights a conservative rallying cry?

Catholic Roots, Progressive Roots

Abortion had been criminalized across the country in the last decades of the 19th century. Exceptions were generally permitted only to save the life of the mother, as determined first by

¹All names referring to interview participants are pseudonyms.

individual physicians, and later by formal hospital committees. Medical advances over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, however, steadily reduced the number of cases in which abortion was strictly necessary to save the physical life of a pregnant woman. Physicians continued to perform abortions, but they needed to make use of an increasingly soft definition of the term “life of the mother” enshrined in legal statutes governing the procedure, including considerations of psychological and emotional health. Efforts to liberalize the law began in the late 1950s, and were spearheaded by groups of doctors, lawyers, and physicians who sought to bring the legal statutes governing abortion in line with how abortion decisions were actually being made by abortion providers. It was a small movement of professionals, and these reformers for the most part did not seek to make abortion completely legal, but only to expand the range of situations in which a doctor could legally perform one.

In 1959 the American Law Institute (ALI) issued a “model” abortion law that explicitly permitted abortion to preserve either the life or the psychological health of the mother, or in cases of known fetal defects or when a pregnancy was caused by rape or incest (Tribe 1990). Colorado became the first state to reform their abortion law along the lines of the ALI model in 1967.² It was followed in the same year by California and North Carolina, and in the next three years by Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, New Mexico, Oregon, South Carolina, and Virginia (Reagan 1997:222). In 1970, four states-- Hawaii, Alaska, Washington, and New York-- went a step further and decriminalized abortion entirely (Tatalovich 1997:28).

The main opposition to the liberalization of abortion law in these early years came almost exclusively from Catholic leaders and the Catholic church.³ The Conference of Catholic

² Mississippi modified its abortion law in 1966, but only to add rape to the list of legal exceptions (Tatalovich 1997:28).

³ Canon law had proscribed excommunication as punishment for abortion as early as 1398. Catholic theologians,

Bishops, the official body of Catholic bishops and archbishops in the United States, established a Family Life Bureau in 1967 in order to organize opposition to the reforms (Blanchard 1994:28). Monsignor James McHugh, the Family Life Bureau director, quickly established the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) for the purpose of organizing the growing opposition to abortion and monitoring attempts at abortion law reform in the states (Critchlow 2001:138).

The Family Life Bureau and the NRLC distributed anti-abortion literature, testified at hearings and before votes in state legislatures, hired lobbying firms to oppose reform legislation, organized local diocesan chapters, and trained Catholic clergy to speak out against abortion. Kesselman (1998) shows that the Catholic church single handedly derailed attempts at liberalization in Connecticut prior to 1973. Catholic groups were similarly successful in defeating reform in Illinois (Reagan 1997:222). In California, ten of the eleven pro-life activists Luker found active prior to *Roe v. Wade* were Catholic, and Catholics groups constituted most of the organized opposition to liberalization in that state, including the St. Thomas More Society, the Guild of Catholic Psychiatrists, the Catholic Physicians Guild, the Catholic Parent-Teacher Groups, and the California Council of Catholic Hospitals (Luker 1984:83). In describing the reaction of abortion opponents to the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, the New York Times could only refer to the shock of the Catholic cardinals (Van Gelder 1973); at that time, they constituted the only real leaders of the movement.

Direct action against abortion clinics was conducted by radicalized social justice Catholic activists several years before the *Roe v. Wade* decision. In 1970 a Catholic group called the Sons of Thunder invaded clinics in Dallas and Washington DC, leading to arrests in both cases.

however, continued to express a variety of views about what constituted abortion throughout the next five centuries. The bishop of Philadelphia had spoken out against abortion as early as 1841 (Luker 1984:58), and opposition to abortion under all circumstances was enshrined in canon law in 1917.

Catholics also established the first crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) before *Roe v Wade*.

Birthright, a Catholic-affiliated organization that now runs one of the largest CPC networks in North America, was founded in 1968 and today has hundreds of offices throughout the United States and Canada. Reviewing the origins of the leadership, organizational infrastructure, movement resources, and main activists of the pro-life movement prior to 1973, Paige was right to declare that “the Roman Catholic Church created the right-to-life movement. Without the church, the movement would not exist as such today” (1983:51).

The Church redoubled its efforts in the wake of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions. Five months after the Supreme Court issued its rulings, the few activists who had been spearheading opposition to abortion law reform in the different states, nurtured and funded by the Catholic Church, came together in Detroit in order to organize themselves nationally and decide on a national strategy. The result was a reorganization of the NRLC to institutionalize its national scope and formally separate it from Church's Family Life Bureau. Organizers in Detroit felt that the organization needed to expand outside of the formal Church hierarchy if it was to generate broad public support and political influence. They publicly marked this new separation by choosing a Methodist-- Minnesota activist Marjory Mecklenburg-- as the first NRLC president.⁴ Two years later, the bishops announced their ambitious Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, which led to the creation of a special “Respect Life” office in each of the eighteen thousand parishes nationwide. These offices were charged with sponsoring educational and counseling programs, participating in political action campaigns, and conducting media and political outreach (Paige 1983:72). Thus, by the early 1970s, the Catholic Church had

⁴ The Conference of Catholic Bishops then created a new organization, the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment. This group was legally independent from the Catholic Church, but the leadership and funding for the organization all came directly from the Conference of Catholic Bishops (Paige 1983:63).

established the basic infrastructure of the political stream of the pro-life movement.

Catholics were also instrumental in initially framing abortion in progressive terms. John Cavanaugh O'Keefe is sometimes referred to as the father of pro-life direct action strategies. O'Keefe was a Catholic conscientious objector and active opponent of the Vietnam War when he began pro-life organizing in 1972. He viewed the issue through a distinctly progressive lens, seeing abortion as “the war in Vietnam come home” (Maxwell 2002:29). Traces of these kinds of views can still be found in the movement. Richard is a 57-year-old Catholic priest in the Twin Cities. He is a strong supporter of worker's rights, gay rights, gun control, birth control, and new reproductive technologies like stem cell research and in vitro fertilization. He is opposed to both capital punishment and school prayer. Richard was active in the pro-life movement in the early 1970s, including serving some time on the board of directors of the Minnesota affiliate of the NRLC. He left the movement years ago, however, because he “feared that the abortion issue would be perceived as a conservative issue when I perceive it as a liberal issue. And I've always pursued it in politics as a liberal issue...That is how I perceive things and I don't think anyone else does. That's my problem!” Robert, another activist in his 50s, saw abortion as a “capitalist plot” and framed the issue in terms of his opposition to the war in Vietnam: “To me it was all part and parcel of the Vietnam war...you know, that the people who gave you napalm and Agent Orange in Vietnam were now giving you abortion at home.” Activists like these tie abortion to other issues of concern to progressives of many religious backgrounds.

Catholics as a whole were one of the Democratic party's most reliable voting blocs during this period. As Prendergast notes, “for many years to be a Catholic in religion was to be a Democrat in politics” (Prendergast 1999:23). According to the General Social Survey, 62% of Catholics identified with the Democratic party in 1973. By contrast, only about 22% of

Catholics identified with Republicans (see Figure 1). Even Democratic President Jimmy Carter, an evangelical Protestant, received the majority of Catholic votes (54%) in 1976. Catholics were thus firmly in the Democratic camp on the eve of *Roe v. Wade*. And the pro-life movement, in turn, was almost synonymous with American Catholicism. A 1980 study of the membership of the National Right to Life Committee found that it was 70% Catholic (Granberg 1981). Similarly, Luker (1984:196) found over 80% of the movement was Catholic.

Coming of the Protestants

It would have been hard to predict even twenty-five years ago that evangelical Protestants would become the face of the pro-life movement in the United States. Not only were Protestants a distinct minority in the movement, Protestant churches seemed arrayed to support abortion rights. By 1980, the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the United Presbyterian Church, and the Lutheran Church of America had all taken a public stand in support of legalized abortion (Ellingsen 1990; Blanchard 1994). The historical animosity between Catholics and conservative Protestants make the integration of the latter into the initially Catholic pro-life movement particularly surprising. Anti-Catholic sentiment is an enduring theme of American history, and conservative Protestants have been particularly outspoken in their demonization of Catholics and claims that Catholics are not Christians. Such sentiments have been tied to waves of nativism in the United States, with beliefs about Catholics intertwined with anti-immigrant and often racist beliefs about Italians, Irish, and more recently Mexicans. McGreevy (2003) argues that many evangelical leaders in the United States publicly supported abortion rights prior to the 1980s precisely out of anti-Catholic bias; they did not want any laws they viewed as originating in the Vatican. While overt displays of this animosity have

become less common, anti-Catholic sentiments have not. Even today, 66% of conservative Protestants say that Catholics can't think for themselves; seventy-two percent believe the rosary is superstitious (Greeley and Hout 2006:175). And there remains anti-Catholic propaganda popular in evangelical circles that refers to the Catholic Church as the “Whore” and the pope as the “Antichrist” (Shea 2004:159). The historical record of the relationship between the two religious groups thus leaves few hints that conservative Protestants would take on a “Catholic” issue so willingly and enthusiastically as they took on abortion in the 1980s and 90s.

The coming of conservative Protestants into the movement is part of the story of the rise of the Christian Right more generally in the United States, beginning in the early 1960s but coming of age on the national political scene only in the late 1970s. Demographic changes in the country moved the political center of gravity southward and westward, shifting the balance of power away from the traditional “establishment” elites of the East Coast and incorporating new political ideas into the mainstream. Conservative, evangelical Protestants became more important to the electoral fortunes of the Republican Party, and new social issues centering on race, sexual morality, and the structure of the family took on a new significance in politics. American politics were changing writ large, as single-issue advocacy transformed political campaigns and modes of governance (Pierson & Skocpol 2007).

The abortion issue and the pro-life movement was the leading edge of this transformation. And its decisive move into partisan politics was made possible by new cadre of young, conservative leaders that came of age in this period, intent on both shifting the Republican Party to the right and breaking the stranglehold Democrats had held on national political power for decades. Four of these young leaders in particular were instrumental in linking the emerging (Protestant) Christian Right with the (Catholic) pro-life movement: Terry Dolan, Howard

Phillips, Richard Viguerie, and Paul Weyrich. Dolan founded the National Conservative Political Action Committee. He had experience framing political issues in stark, emotional terms and (as a result) securing the support of thousands of small donors for political campaigns. Phillips, who founded the Conservative Caucus in 1974, was a conservative organizer and early proponent of using single issue politics for grassroots organizing. Viguerie is often referred to as the father of direct-mail political advertising campaigns. He was a pioneer in the use of computers to create large mailing lists of potential donors (and voters), creating custom mailings by geographic area of the country, special political interests, and amount of prior giving. Weyrich, who founded the Heritage Foundation in 1973, was perhaps the most fervently opposed to abortion of all four men. From the start Weyrich refused to support any candidate who did not publicly oppose abortion. He also saw the power of single issue politics generally, and of the potential uses of the emerging pro-life movement in particular.

All were energetic political entrepreneurs under 40-years-old. All but Phillips were conservative Catholics who were passionately opposed to abortion. All four also saw the potential of using abortion as a flashpoint to bring more conservative Protestants into the ranks of the Christian Right, and thus into Republican politics. The number of Americans who self-identified as religious evangelicals was large, somewhere between 30 and 40 percent.⁵ They represented a powerful potential political bloc not only because of their numbers, however, but because of the vast set of evangelical institutions that had been built in the preceding decades. Most obvious were the tens of thousands of churches spread across the United States. But also important were the radio stations, cable television programs, schools, music, literature, newsletters and magazines, gifts shops, clothing, and even theme parks (Jacoby 1998:78) that all

⁵Estimating the total number of evangelicals is difficult because there is no universally accepted definition or measure. See Smith (1998).

had been built up around-- and now help sustain- the evangelical subculture (Jacoby 1998:78; Diamond 2000).

The four men met as a group with Jerry Falwell, a key Southern Baptist minister and televangelist, in 1979 and proposed using abortion as the centerpiece of the organizing strategy for the new movement that has come to be called the New Christian Right (McKeegan 1992:21). Falwell agreed, and the four men began using their considerable talents, sizable mailing lists, and the array of organizational infrastructure under their control to begin making abortion a visible, *and Republican*, issue. Falwell established the Moral Majority that same year at the prompting of Phillips, Viguerie, and Weyrich. He also first introduced an anti-abortion plank to the Republican national platform at their 1980 convention (Jacoby 1998:92), less than a decade after the party had publicly supported global population control through family planning and abortion (Critchlow 2007: 136). The Republican Party withdrew its support for an Equal Rights Amendment that same year (Mansbridge 1986).

Abortion thereby became the fulcrum for a political realignment that has persisted to this day. First, it split the traditional Democratic coalition by breaking the bond between the party and Catholic voters. Since 1973, Catholic support for Democrats has dropped by 64%-- today only 40% of Catholics identify with the party. Meanwhile, Republican support among Catholics has grown by 41%-- now almost one third of Catholics identify with the Republican Party. Second, abortion was the banner issue used to mobilize evangelical Protestants in large numbers to the Republican Party, many of whom had largely stayed away from politics in the past. The capture of the pro-life movement within the orbit of the Republican coalition is reflected in changes in public opinion toward abortion. Figure 2 shows public support for legal abortion on demand over the last thirty years among those who consider themselves either Democrats or

Republicans. The data show little relationship between abortion beliefs and party affiliation in the late 1970s and early 80s. If anything, Republicans were *more* supportive of abortion rights than were Democrats until at least 1987. In 1977, the abortion rights gap between Democrats and Republicans was almost seven percentage points in favor of Republicans. Twenty years later, the gap is now over twenty-one percentage points in favor of Democrats. The picture is roughly similar if you compare the views of self-described liberals versus conservatives, as well as if you compare support for abortion under more specific circumstances. In each case, the data show a polarization of public attitudes toward abortion along partisan lines. And these trends do not simply reflect a larger polarization of Americans over controversial issues more generally. DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson have shown that abortion is the exception among social issues (DiMaggio et al. 1996); Americans opinion about most issues has become less polarized, not more (Fiorina et al. 2005). The way in which abortion was used by political entrepreneurs as a tool to force political realignment is one of the primary causes of this polarization.

The Tension

While previous scholarship has documented the political changes that took place around abortion (Carmines and Woods 2002; Layman 2001; Adams 1997), as well as the influx of Protestants into the previously Catholic pro-life movement (Jacoby 1998; McKeegan 1992), there has been little attempt to look at how this transformation has altered the dynamics of the pro-life movement itself. Despite sustained attempts by younger Christian Right leaders, such as Ralph Reed, the cultural gulf and history of animosity between Catholics and Protestants has never been overcome in the pro-life movement. This tension lies just beneath the surface of the

unified front movement activists try to project. Catholics who started the movement welcomed the increased attention and support for their cause. At the same time, they felt increasingly besieged by the new ways in which the Protestant activists understood the abortion issue and linked it to conservative, Republican concerns.

Catholic activists understand that the influx of Protestants into the movement broadens their base and gives them more power. As one activist in Oklahoma explained to me, “I was very happy to see a lot of Protestants being involved in what Catholics have been involved in for a long time.” Pro-life groups quite actively look to bring Protestants in. Donna, a 37-year-old activist, describes the college group she advises in Boston:

This year almost everyone involved is Catholic. And they've tried not to be a Catholic group and they almost didn't want me to be the advisor because they were afraid that they would appear to others as too religious. So they don't make a big deal of having me as an advisor. And they have tried to do things to increase membership among others.

Donna's description suggests that many in the movement are sensitive to the Catholic-Protestant division and eager to cast a wide net for new activists by not appearing too Catholic.

Despite the recognition of the important role Protestants play in the movement, the split between Catholics and Protestants remains an important one. Most activists recognize it. Dan, a teenage activist in Charleston, explains that “Yes, we have different theological issues. But whether or not we should pray to the Virgin Mary really doesn't have that much to do with abortion.” Dan may be right, but activists-- particularly Catholic activists-- who have been in the movement a longer time chafe at the kinds of religious pressure they feel from Protestant newcomers. Joan, a 62-year-old in Charleston, says that Catholics are always the ones expected to compromise and change when there is conflict:

I learned to pray a different way. It's like I had to make more of an adjustment I

think, whereas they [the Protestants] just were not willing to. So it's like we would always pray in the name of the Father; always say the Hail Mary. But we couldn't do that with them. They found it offensive. So I learned to pray their way. And I learned their lingo.

Judy, another Catholic activist in her 60s, describes a similar feeling when she was asked to attend a Bible study group with fellow pro-life activists:

I wanted to do a Bible study group, and so these Church of Christ ladies said, "We're going to do a Bible study group. You can come." I said, "That's great."...But their Bible study was geared toward converting people. The first...directly confronted my most basic Catholic views. So the first two meetings I kind of argued with them and said, "You know? That's OK. You believe how you want to believe; let's move on to another topic." And finally on the third meeting their minister's wife came to the meeting and she told me that I was wrong and that I *had* to believe. "Don't you understand that you *have* to believe this way because this is the only way it is?" And I said, "You know, I'm sorry. I don't. I'm glad you're really firm in your faith and that's good. But I'm firm in mine too. And I'm sorry you can't accept that." And I left.

While intellectually activists see no reason Catholics and Protestants should not be able to work together in the movement, in practice Catholics have felt unwelcome and defensive about their faith as Protestants have come to make up a larger share of the overall movement.

Such tension is also evident on the Protestant side. Protestant activists were often patronizing or dismissive of Catholic faith when discussing the different kinds of people who make up the pro-life movement. Jean, a 46-year-old activist in Oklahoma City, is trying to express an ecumenical spirit when she says, "There are some Christian Catholics. You know, yeah. We've had that...Because its not a denominational thing. I don't believe there are denominations in heaven. I believe just in those who are saved by Grace through faith, period." Of course, implicit in her very first sentence is a notion that being Catholic does not make a person Christian. And her last statement challenges Catholic theology directly. Doug, a 32-year-old activist, is even more dismissive:

I don't think you have to go to a priest for forgiveness. It's certainly not in the Bible. My mom was talking about all the saints, all the patron saints. Like if you lost something, pray to St. Andrew, the patron saint of lost items. Well what is that?! [laughs] And I said, "Mom, let me ask you something. If you're in the kingdom, say you lived in the kingdom right? And you were really good friends with the king, and you misplaced something in the kingdom, but you knew the king would be able to help you find it, would you go to the court jester and ask him him to go to the king and tell him what your need is? Or would you go to the king?" She goes, "I'd go to the king because he's my friend and I could talk to him." Same thing with God. Why go to all these other people indirectly to get to God? If God is saying, "You can approach me. I want you to come. I want to have a personal relationship with you," why involve all those human people and confuse the matter?

Doug's lack of respect for Catholic beliefs is evident in his equating the Virgin Mary with a court jester and laughing dismissively at Catholic theology. Being saved, says Doug, "is not something that you go out and do or that you have to say twenty-eight Hail Marys and stand on your head and walk five laps around the Church of the Beloved or whatever."

Given the mutual suspicion and hostility that fellow activists feel toward one another, it is perhaps not surprising that they also differ in the moral bases on which they draw to oppose abortion. The differences are important to the movement as a whole, because they reveal a lack of moral center or core set of ideas that unify the movement. All pro-life activists believe that abortion is wrong, and all would like to see abortion eliminated, under all circumstances. Understandings of *why* abortion is wrong, however, differ substantially. Moral differences map onto the Catholic-Protestant division within the movement in many ways.

For some Catholic activists, abortion is fundamentally a civil rights issue. The unborn represent an aggrieved population that is discriminated against because of their powerlessness. Linda, a 53-year-old Catholic in the Twin Cities, echoes the beliefs of many Catholics in the movement when she describes how the legalization of abortion is rooted in racial politics: "So in the early pro-abortion movement they talked about rape by a black man or the possibility of a

handicapped baby. It's the same thing they're talking about today, it hasn't changed, it's just that they've become more sophisticated in the way they present it.” Tom, a 38-year-old Catholic also in the Twin Cities, makes a similar point:

Under the guise of trying to help people there is some deep-seeded racism, or at least some elitism. Because its always the poor that gotta have them [abortions]. It's always these immigrants, it's always the people from India, or China, or Africa. It's never the Irish, it's never the Germans, it's never the Swedes. It always just happens to be that the people they want to have less of are the people with brown skin.

The ultimate reference point for the Catholic activists who understand abortion in these civil rights terms is the Holocaust. “I think you've got to compare, the only comparison I think is the Holocaust of the Jews,” says Ron, a 54-year-old Catholic in Boston, “There are people that are here that are not going to be here. There's not going to be a second choice. It's definitive.” The common thread in all of these beliefs is the injustice of abortion; the way in which it violates the rights of a certain class of human beings.

Protestant activists do not reject these civil rights claims. But they are much more likely to invoke different ideas when asked to explain the source of their own opposition to abortion. In particular, abortion is part and parcel of a larger issue of responsibility and authority in society. Abortion is wrong, in their view, in no small part because it erodes the traditional sources of authority: God and men. Tim, a 38-year-old member of a nondenominational Protestant church in Oklahoma City, focuses on God:

God is not going to be mocked very long! He's allowed it [abortion] to go on now since '72 or '73 or whenever Roe v. Wade was decided...The Holy God ain't gonna allow that very long. We're suffering now for that, and you know God isn't gonna be mocked...He is wrathful; He is vengeful; and He doesn't appreciate people killing His creation.

Tim believes that abortion violates a prerogative of God, and warns of God's wrath if society

doesn't immediately cede back authority over "His creation." Others focus less on an Old Testament God and more on men in the here and now whose prerogatives are being taken away. "The man is not in charge," explains Glen, a 33-year-old Episcopalian in Boston, "So how can you expect somebody to take responsibility for a choice they did not make? That's the reason why you've had all these women being abandoned and men walking away." The incredulity and passion stirred by abortion is thus rooted in the challenge some Protestants to the power of traditional authority holders. Even if consistent with the worldviews of some conservative Catholics now in the movement, this core understanding of abortion is substantially at odds with the social justice orientation of the largely Catholic founders and early movement activists.

The Consequences of Realignment

The transformation of the pro-life movement and its alignment with the Republican party are issues of more than just historical curiosity. These changes have defined some of the core dynamics of the pro-life movement. In particular, they have established a ceiling on the political success of the movement by limiting the consensus possible, and they have created a tendency for organizational proliferation and competition within the movement.

The pro-life movement has enjoyed a string of significant victories since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* Supreme Court decisions. They have successfully blocked federal funding of the procedure for poor women since 1976 and helped enact laws at the state level imposing a variety of obstacles to obtaining abortion services, including parental consent statutes, 24-hour waiting periods, and counseling requirements (Donohoe 2005). The movement has also played a significant role in reducing the availability of both physicians and facilities that provide abortion services. Today almost 90% of all counties in the United States do not have any

abortion provider (Finer and Henshaw 2003). In the wake of the 2010 elections, Republicans have introduced a range of new legislation to further limit access to abortion services, including one bill that would eliminate tax breaks for any private employer who offers health insurance that covers the procedure (Steinhauer 2011). Far more consequential, however, may be the successful elevation of two new pro-life justices to the Supreme Court, John Roberts in 2005 and Samuel Alito in 2006.⁶ Even while a complete criminalization of abortion remains unlikely, the new court-- the most conservative since WWII, and with seven of nine Catholic justices⁷-- will likely expand the variety and scope of permissible restrictions on abortion services, further reducing their frequency and availability.

Despite this successful track record, the movement has notably failed to achieve its key goal: an outright ban on abortion services nationwide. Such a ban was a possibility in the early 1980s. Congress held a total of twenty-three days of hearings on a possible constitutional amendment to criminalize abortion between 1974 and 1976. A Senate Judiciary Committee vote on whether to support one such amendment was tied 4-4. Two Republicans and two Democrats voted on each side of the measure, reflecting the lack of a partisan dimension to the abortion debate during this period. The next year, the full Senate narrowly defeated (47-40) another amendment proposal. Here too partisanship explains little-- the number of Democrats and Republicans voting in favor of the amendment were exactly equal.⁸ Congressional focus on

⁶ It is a telling reminder of the relatively late timing of the political realignment around abortion that Alito replaced Sandra Day O'Connor, a Reagan-appointee who was one of the most consistent defenders of abortion rights on the Court over the last two decades. Although many remember Reagan as an anti-abortion president, the issue was neither sufficiently important nor sufficiently partisan in 1981 for O'Connor's position on abortion to be a deciding factor in Reagan's appointment.

⁷ The religious composition of the current Court is unprecedented. More than half the Catholics who have *ever* served on the Supreme Court are currently sitting justices. This is also the first time in American history that there is no Protestant members of the Court.

⁸ This was in fact a procedural vote on whether or not to table a Human Life Amendment proposal. Nineteen Democrats and nineteen Republicans voted to move forward with the proposal (along with one independent and

abortion only intensified after these close votes. The Senate held a total of thirty-nine different roll call votes on abortion between 1977 and 1983 (Strickland and Whicker 1986:44). Things came to a head in 1982, when the movement lost a Senate proposal by a single vote, and 1983, when a constitutional amendment proposal came to a vote on the full Senate floor and was defeated 49-50.⁹

News reports and political analysis from the period-- not to mention polling data and Congressional voting records-- suggest that an abortion ban was a real possibility in the early 1980s. But one key ingredient to success was missing: a unified front by the grass-roots base of the pro-life movement. Instead of throwing their weight behind a proposal to ban abortion, they spent their time and resources fighting one another over which proposal to support. "Once the right-to-life movement gets solidly behind a single measure, it will command an impressive grassroots following," said the *New Republic*, in outlining why the prospects of a ban were bright in 1981 (Noah 1981:8). We know now that such solid support never came; the movement remained fractured.

The pro-life movement never coalesced behind a single proposal because of unresolved conflict between the incrementalists and purists. The incrementalists believed that the movement should support whatever version of an abortion ban was most likely to pass Congress or be ratified as a constitutional amendment. They recognized that such a ban might contain exceptions or loopholes that would allow some abortions to continue. They saw such a compromise as necessary in order to reduce the overall number of abortions that were being performed. The purists, by contrast, believed that the movement should only support a ban on

one Conservative Party member).
⁹Because this vote was over passage of a constitutional amendment, it would have required a two-thirds majority to be successful.

abortion that would definitively end *all* abortions and would not allow for exceptions or loopholes. They believed that any other ban was a trojan horse, because it violated the basic principle of personhood on which their abortion beliefs rested.

This division remains in the movement even today. And while the division does not map cleanly on to the Catholic-Protestant divide, it is nonetheless strongly correlated with this religious division. Catholic activists are much more likely to embrace a compromise strategy as the best means to achieve the goals of the movement. “We do have what we call tolerance of evil as a principle, a moral principle,” a 54-year-old Catholic priest in Boston explained to me, “and it's the lesser of two evils kind of thing.” David, a 51-year-old Catholic in the Twin Cities echoes this sentiment as he describes the other side of the divide within the movement:

See, they were so absolute in their beliefs that they couldn't differentiate political strategy from the absoluteness of their beliefs. Where my beliefs were absolute on abortion: save the the life of the mother was the only exception from my point of view. But politically I saw it in a whole different way. You need to go where you can be successful and you need to position yourself with the American public over the long haul.

Many Catholics in the movement continue to see an incremental approach-- attempting to stop as many abortions as possible even if it means supporting legal or political measures that allow others-- as the best means to an abortion ban in the United States

Many Protestant activists, by contrast, see this approach as both unsuccessful and morally suspect. Erin, a 47-year-old Protestant in Charleston, put it this way:

The pro-abortions are sticking to what they want-- abortion legal anytime, any reason, even no reason. Why can't we stick to our guns-- no abortion? I really don't think that parental consent [laws] save babies. Or 24-hour [waiting periods] when you get down to it.

Erin sees no compromise on the part of the pro-choice movement, and so feels that the pro-life

movement should be similarly hard-nosed in their stance. Moreover, she doesn't think that laws that make abortion services more difficult to obtain, like parental consent or waiting period requirements, really stop many abortions. Others take a similar position because they feel like such political compromises also compromise their moral principles. When I asked Stan, a 41-year-old Protestant in Oklahoma City if he would support a law that banned all abortion except in cases of rape, incest, or when the life of the mother was endangered, he replied, "No....See my belief is that it is life from conception on. So let's say your mother was raped and you were the product of that rape. Would that make you any less human? Would it?" For Stan and other Protestants in the pro-life movement like him, the issue is not what path will lead to the fewest abortions but what path stays truest to the basic moral premise of their activism, that a fetus is a fully human life from the moment of conception.

The division between Catholics and Protestants within the movement is thus the stuff of more than just typical movement bickering, or jokes about rosaries or the informality of Protestant services. Catholics and Protestants often come to the movement with different moral centers, they therefore often understand the abortion issue in different ways, and these differences balkanize their political voice and thus limit their political effectiveness.

The pro-life movement is also less ideologically coherent as the result of its marriage to Republican politics. The movement has largely abandoned the "consistent life ethic" of its Catholic origins-- opposing capital punishment, poverty, euthanasia, nuclear weapons, and so forth on the same basis that it opposes abortion-- in favor of an exclusive focus on the abortion issue. (Among the activists in my sample, only 8% of the Catholics favor capital punishment, compared to 62% of the Protestants.) The movement has activists today who seek to support pregnant women carrying their pregnancies to term, yet oppose extending welfare benefits to

those same women as they have additional children. “I think that welfare rewards laziness,” says a teen pro-life activist, echoing a common conservative trope. Others told stories of welfare recipients having child after child to collect additional welfare payments, or families on Medicaid that chose to pay for junk food rather than prescription drugs when faced with the choice in a check-out line.

The transformation of the religious backdrop of the movement also has implications for the structure of the movement itself. Because of the disconnect between Catholic and Protestant activists, each group has tended to set up its own set of social movement organizations rather than integrate together into a single organization, particularly in organizations that require close and regular contact between activists.

This organizational proliferation can be seen most clearly in the case of crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs). Crisis pregnancy centers are movement organizations that seek to convince pregnant women considering abortion to carry their pregnancies to term. They are by far the most common form of pro-life organization; somewhere between 2,500 and 4,000 are operating in the United States today (Munson & Scheitle 2009). These centers sometimes combine religious proselytism with their pro-life activism, particularly Protestant-rooted centers. But even if the CPC is firmly committed to avoiding explicitly religious discussion and persuasion, they are nonetheless often run by almost exclusively Protestant or Catholic activists who share religious sensibilities and understandings. Dana, a 28-year-old Catholic in Charleston, described her attempts to work in area CPCs this way:

And so I applied at the CPC that you went to, I applied at every CPC around here. I, for one, didn't get accepted because I was Catholic. They didn't want me because I was Catholic. And that's again, that's the Bible Belt issue that I've struggled with forever.

Dana, a Catholic in a largely Protestant community, found it difficult to express her activism in the existing social movement organizations present in Charleston. It is in CPCs that the moral foundation of pro-life activism is most explicitly and most frequently articulated, as they attempt to convince pregnant women to carry their pregnancies to term. In turn, CPCs are particularly sensitive to the religious background of their activists.

The result is a proliferation of CPCs, each rooted in different religious traditions. Most larger cities in the United States have at least one CPC associated with Birthright, a Catholic CPC network that was founded even before the *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* Supreme Court decisions. Others, like Low Country Crisis Pregnancy Center in Charleston (one of the CPCs Dana wanted to work with), and A Woman's Concern in Boston, are associated with Protestant activists. Many of these began as ministries of individual churches. All profess a broad ecumenism, but the organizational history of these groups suggest that activists are more likely to form a new CPC than be accepted in an existing one with a religious tradition much different than their own. This dynamic is one of the principal reasons why there are so many CPCs today.

Organizational proliferation can be traced to religious divisions for other kinds of pro-life SMOs as well. In the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, a group known as Rosaries for Life provides a movement home for Catholics who want to demonstrate in front of abortion clinics but who are uncomfortable with the Protestant tone of Pro-Life Action Ministries, the largest direct action group in the area. In all four cities in which I collected data, the Respect Life offices of the Catholic dioceses do little coordination with other (Protestant) movement organizations in the area, in part because of tension over the deliberately narrow focus of many pro-life groups on the abortion issue and the Catholic understanding of abortion as situated in a broader context of “life” issues.

Conclusion

My analysis here has sought to establish that the alignment of the Republican Party and the pro-life movement is a political puzzle in need of explanation. There is nothing inherent in the battle for abortion rights that makes it an organically progressive or Democratic issue. Indeed, there are several aspects of the issue that make it relatively surprising that liberals have embraced legal protections for abortion services and conservatives have opposed them. On the eve of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, the American public reflected this ambivalence. To the extent that any pattern existed, it was Republicans who were more likely to support abortion rights, not Democrats. Something changed.

What changed was the emergence of a group of young political entrepreneurs who saw in the emerging abortion issue the opportunity to simultaneously fracture the Democratic coalition while bringing a new constituency-- conservative, evangelical Protestants-- into the Republican Party. They used the extensive set of social, religious, and media institutions that had been built up by the conservative Protestant subculture in the United States to make the abortion issue salient to this constituency. Moreover, by bringing the pro-life cause whole-heartedly into the Republican fold, they also reduced Catholic support for the Democratic Party.

Abortion thus played an important role in the political realignment of American politics in the early 1980s. This realignment also transformed the pro-life movement itself. The alliance between the pro-life movement and the Republican party has provided the movement with an institutional mechanism for achieving tangible policy successes. At the same time, however, the close association between opposition to legalized abortion and the Republican party has also

limited the appeal of the movement. Rather than being the singular moral issue of our time, abortion becomes just one in a panoply of different issues. The conflict within the movement brought on by this change has also limited its unity and led to an increased focus on organizational proliferation and competition within the movement, rather than a focus on achieving the movement's ultimate goal of criminalizing all abortion.

The history of the pro-life movement, and its relationship to the American political system, may hold lessons for one of the most consequential new political insurgencies to emerge in the United States in decades: the Tea Party movement. Tea Party groups represent another challenge to the reigning Republican ideology, one that now melds large corporate interests with a focus on social issues, abortion foremost among them. Tea Party activists don't care nearly as much about abortion as have previous Republican activists over the last twenty years (Zernike 2010). And grassroots Tea Party groups have remained remarkably independent, despite attempts by national groups, like the Tea Party Express, to coopt them and bring them under a national umbrella (Williamson, Skocpol, & Coggin 2011). Though there are many differences between this movement and the pro-life movement that preceded it, the dynamic relationship between anti-abortion activists and Republican political entrepreneurs may offer some clues as to what we might expect from the longer-term relationship between Tea Party groups and the Republican Party.

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Figure 1. Change in Catholic Partisanship

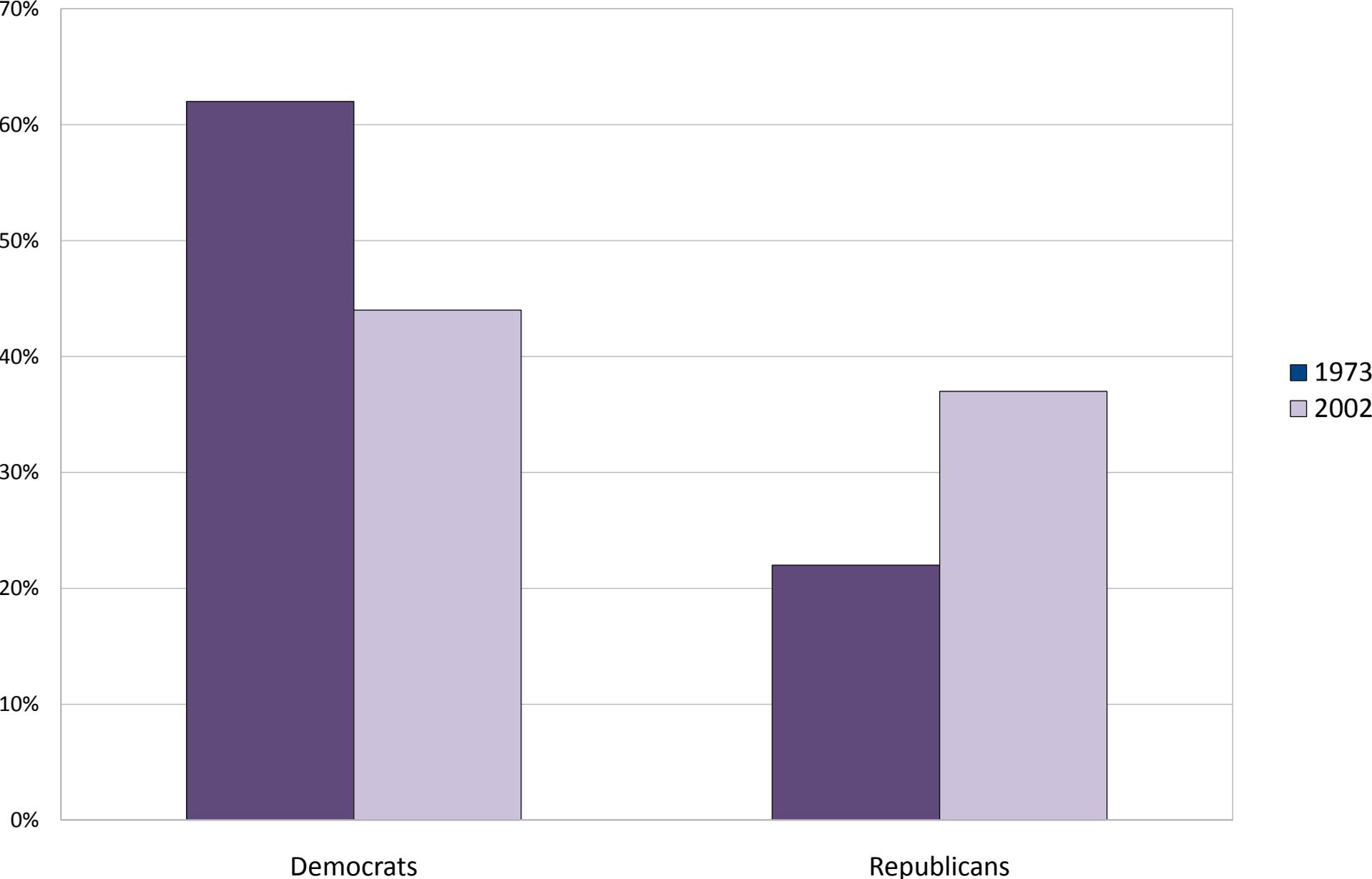


Figure 2. Support for Abortion by Party Affiliation

