

Last Friday, Fr. Greeley sustained a serious injury in Chicago. Keep him in your thoughts and prayers. The article was sent to me. I am not sure where it appeared.

Why so many pro-life Catholics backed Obama

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BY ANDREW GREELEY

It would appear from the pre-election polls that more than half of American Catholics voted for Barack Obama. How could they do that when their bishops ordered them to vote for John McCain? In fact, no such order was issued, though some bishops came pretty close to it. Most bishops were content with a somewhat obscure statement about the evil of abortion which also urged Catholics to consider all the items on the Catholic pro-life agenda.

Some years ago, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger issued a statement on the subject to which he added a footnote about cooperation in evil. Sometimes such cooperation can be "formal and direct," as when one votes for a pro-choice candidate because one deliberately agrees with and supports that position. Other times, however, the voter does not approve of the candidate's position on abortion but votes for him because of other "proportionate" reasons. Then the cooperation is "material and indirect."

What might such a reason be?

It might have been that while the candidate did not reject abortion, he supported most of the other Catholic positions on life, i.e. he condemned unjust wars, the death penalty, torture, kidnapping, cruelty to immigrants that his opponents implicitly support.

Some bishops and priests argue that abortion is such a horrible evil that there can be no proportionate reason. That might be their opinion, but it goes beyond Catholic ethical demands. Another -- and similar -- stand might be that the Catholic voter would have to abstain from all politics since there are very few political leaders who support the whole list of Catholic life issues. Opposition to abortion does not by itself exhaust the moral obligations of the Catholic social ethic.

The pro-choice enthusiasts who think they have fulfilled their moral responsibility when they reduce that social ethic to abortion do not understand Catholic teaching. Abortion certainly violates Catholic respect for life, but so do many other actions that are common in many modern societies -- like torture, the death penalty, unjust war, cruelty to the elderly, abuse of children, racial injustice -- what the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin called the seamless garment of life.

If McCain were elected, we were told, he would have appointed judges who would have reversed *Roe vs. Wade*. Perhaps that would have happened, but we kid ourselves if we think that the present court would in fact do that. Moreover, if it did, state laws would continue to apply.

Ultimately, Catholics must strive to persuade others by the depth and power of their commitment to life issues. Ranting at others because they are "killing babies" may be emotionally satisfying, but it doesn't change people's minds. In a society like ours, one needs to build a coalition to change people's minds on such an issue. Arguing with them and trying to impose the Catholic notion of natural law on them by political power won't work.

Only living the whole Catholic social ethic, as difficult as that may be, will provide examples that may change the anti-Catholic prejudice that the most fanatical pro-lifers create. It will not be an easy task. But Catholics can only achieve any progress against abortion by the good example of their lives.