

I recently read an article where a person described themselves as being a "pro-choice Catholic". How can that be?

That is a big question. First, I never intend this column to be a bludgeon with which we (or I) attack any unsuspecting individual or group of individuals. It is meant to provide some teaching and then some "why's" behind those teachings. It rarely does anyone any good to just say "that's that" and walk away. We need to know the reasons behind what we claim to believe. So, please know that my goal is not to shout anyone down, but to bring as much clarity as I can.

And yet, the issue already seems to be clear. The phrase "pro-choice Catholic" is ultimately a contradiction in terms. In fact, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops stated years ago that, "No Catholic can responsibly take a 'pro-choice' stand when the 'choice' in question involves the taking of innocent human life". That sounds pretty clear.

Some people will claim that they are not for abortion...they are merely for "choice". Let's bring more clarity to the term "Pro-choice". It is used because it implies an association with freedom and liberty. But it is a smoke-screen. It means "pro-abortion". Now, someone could say, "No it doesn't. It simply means that I do not think it is right to take away a woman's right to choose what to do with her pregnancy". Two things about that. First, the "what to do" only has to do with killing her baby. The "choice" is between allowing the baby to live and actively taking steps to end the child's life. Second, "what to do with her pregnancy" is another mis-leading phrase. It implies that she is the only person involved. It entirely neglects the fact that this also involves the life of an innocent child.

Again, "pro-choice" is a mis-direct; it only means the speaker believes we ought be able to choose to kill if we want. That is the only choice: life or death.

The archbishop of Denver, Charles Chaput, put it this way, "One cannot be a pro-choice catholic. There are Catholics who don't understand that and think they're Catholics... We believe that if you don't accept what the church teaches in the grave matters of faith and morals..., then you're not in communion with what the Church teaches and therefore you shouldn't go to communion. Communion isn't about personal worthiness, it's about faith, what you believe."

I've been trying to think of an analogy that would be helpful here. Imagine that a person belonged to the imaginary "Green Shirt Wearers Association" (GSWA). Those in this association wear a green shirt every day. Say that, after much consideration, you join the GSWA. In this group, you can wear a whole variety of green shirts: light green, pea green, neon green, hunter green, etc...(you get the picture). But then you decide that you want to start wearing red shirts. Now, there could be a number of reasons why you would wear a red shirt. Maybe you forgot and made an honest mistake. Maybe you are color-blind and couldn't tell the difference between a green shirt and a red one. Maybe you ran out of green shirts and in a panic threw on the only thing you thought you had. For all of

those reasons, there is no real central conflict to your “membership” in the GSWA. But what if you chose to wear red shirts because you thought wearing red shirts was the right thing to do? You would be then be obliged to wear the red shirts. You would also be obliged to acknowledge that you had (for all practical purposes) left the GSWA. Now, maybe you have fond memories of your days in the GSWA. Maybe there are a lot of things you like about the GSWA and you identify with those things. But in the end, one of the distinctive components about belonging to the Green Shirt Wearers Association is actually wearing green shirts!

The “pro-choice catholic” issue is similar. A person does not become Catholic if they are “good enough” to be Catholic. Being a Catholic is not a matter of moral goodness, it is a matter of faith. Now, faith can be defined as “belief”, but even more accurately, faith involves the complete submission of one’s intellect and will to God. If my will and intellect are not submitted to the Church, then I am not “in”. I may still like the Church; I might have fond memories of my days in the Church; I may agree with a lot of things about the Church...those are all good things. And there are a variety of expressions of Catholicism (think of the various hues of green shirts). But abortion is one of the “deal breaker” issues. If my conscience leads me to the place where I think it is okay for a person to be able to murder another innocent person, then I’m not Catholic. By that point, I’ve left the Church. No one is “kicking me out”; I’ve already left.

The good news is that the door is always open. The Church doesn’t want you to leave. Your bishop and your priests, your brothers and sisters in the Church love you and want you to come back. It’s just that sometimes we don’t even realize that we are standing out in the cold. Please come home. Come back to the Church and let Jesus love you in your struggle.