



Obama' Pro-Life Apologists: Covering up His Pro-Abortion, Pro-ESCR Record

by Robert P. George

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LifeNews.com Note: Robert P. George is McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. He is a member of the President's Council on Bioethics and previously served on the United States Commission on Civil Rights. This article previously appeared in [Public Discourse](#).

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Three months into President Obama's first term, one of his most prominent pro-life opponents, Robert P. George, engaged in a debate with one of his most prominent "pro-life" supporters, Douglas W. Kmiec. The article below is adopted from George's remarks, which called for candid speech on [Obama's abortion record](#).

One does not treat an interlocutor with respect if one refuses to speak plainly. Candor, far from being the enemy of civility, is one of its preconditions. And so I will speak candidly of the points where I, as someone dedicated to the principle that every member of the human family possesses profound, inherent, and equal dignity, find myself at odds—deeply at odds—with President Obama and his administration.

In my judgment, citizens who honor and seek to protect the lives of vulnerable unborn children must oppose the Obama administration's agenda on the taking of unborn human life. Our goal must be to frustrate at every turn the administration's efforts, which will be ongoing and determined, to expand the abortion license and the authorization and funding of human embryo-destructive research.

Because the President came into office with large majorities in both houses of Congress, ours is a daunting task. But the difficulty of the challenge in no way diminishes our moral obligation to meet it. And I here call upon pro-life Americans, including those who, like Professor Kmiec, supported President Obama and helped to bring him to power, to find common ground with us in this great struggle for human equality, human rights, and human dignity.

Professor Kmiec and I share common ground in the belief that every member of the human family—irrespective of race, class, and ethnicity, but also irrespective of age, size, location, stage of development or condition of dependency—is entitled to our care and respect and to the equal protection of our laws.

This is what it means to be pro-life. In this shared conviction, Professor Kmiec and I are on one side of a crucial divide, and President Obama is on the other. Professor Kmiec and I stand together in our opposition to abortion and human embryo-destructive research, but we share very little common ground on these matters with President Obama and those whom he has appointed to high office who will determine the fate of vast numbers of our weakest and most vulnerable brothers and sisters.

I appreciated the President's candor at Notre Dame when he said:

Now understand, understand, class of 2009, I do not suggest that the debate surrounding abortion can or should go away. Because no matter how much we may want to fudge it . . . the fact is that at some level the views of the two camps are irreconcilable."

The President is right. His view regarding the status, dignity, and rights of the child in the womb, and the view shared by Professor Kmiec and myself, are irreconcilable. A chasm separates those of us who believe that every living human being possesses profound, inherent, and equal dignity, and those who, for whatever reasons, deny it.

The issue really cannot be fudged, as people sometimes try to do by imagining that there is a dispute about whether it is really a human being who is dismembered in a dilation and curettage abortion, or whose skin is burned off in a saline abortion, or the base of whose skull is pierced and whose brains are sucked out in a dilation and extraction (or “partial birth”) abortion. That issue has long been settled—and it was settled not by religion or philosophy, but by the sciences of human embryology and developmental biology.

So it is clear that what divides us as a nation, and what divides Barack Obama, on one side, from Robert George and Douglas Kmiec, on the other, is not whether the being whose life is taken in abortion and in embryo-destructive research is a living individual of the human species—a human being; it is whether all human beings, or only some, possess fundamental dignity and a right to life.

Professor Kmiec and I affirm, and the President denies, that every human being, even the youngest, the smallest, the weakest and most vulnerable at the very dawn of their lives, has a life which should be respected and protected by law. The President holds, and we deny, that those in the embryonic and fetal stages of human development may rightly and freely be killed because they are unwanted or potentially burdensome to others, or because materials obtained by dissecting them may be useful in biomedical research.

The President speaks of human rights, and I do not question his sincerity. But he does not understand the concept of human rights, as Professor Kmiec and I do, to refer to rights—above all the right to life—that all human beings possess simply by virtue of our humanity. For the President, being human is not enough to qualify someone as the bearer of a right to life. Professor Kmiec and I, by contrast, believe that every member of the human family, simply by virtue of his or her humanity, is truly created equal.

We reject the idea that is at the foundation of President Obama’s position on abortion and human embryo-destructive research, namely, that those of us who are equal in worth and dignity are equal by virtue of some attribute other than our common humanity—some attribute that unborn children have not yet acquired, justifying others in treating them, despite their humanity, as non-persons, as objects or property, even as disposable material for use in biomedical research.

President Obama knows that an unborn baby is human. He knows that the blood shed by the abortionist’s knife is human blood, that the bones broken are human bones. He does not deny that the baby whom nurse Jill Stanek discovered gasping for breath in a soiled linen bin after a failed attempt to end her life by abortion, was a human baby.

Even in opposing the Illinois Born-Alive Infants Protection Act, which was designed to assure that such babies were rescued if possible or at least given comfort care while they died, Barack Obama did not deny the humanity of the child. What he denied, and continues to deny, is the fundamental equality of that child—equality with those of us who are safely born and accepted into the human community.

During his campaign for the Presidency, then-Senator Obama was asked by Rick Warren: When does a baby acquire human rights? In reply, the future president did not say, “well it depends on when a baby (or a “fetus”) comes to life, or becomes a human being.” He knows that an unborn baby is alive and human, and he did not pretend not to know. His response to Pastor Warren did seem to express doubt of as to when rights begin, saying that the question was “above his pay grade.”

But Obama’s record as an activist, legislator, and now as President makes clear his view that an unborn baby, or even a baby outside the womb like the one discovered in that soiled linen bin by Jill Stanek, possesses no rights that others are bound to respect or that the law should in any way honor. Throughout his political career, Obama has consistently and fervently rejected every form of legislation that would provide unborn babies or children who survive abortions with meaningful protection against being killed. Indeed, he has opposed even efforts short of prohibiting abortion that would discourage the practice, limit its availability, or directly favor childbirth over abortion.

Professor Kmiec and I believe in the equal fundamental rights of all, including the equality of mother and child. We recognize that women with undesired pregnancies can undergo serious hardships, and we believe that a just and caring society will concern itself with the well-being of mothers as well as their children.

We agree with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who by precept and example taught us to reach out in love to care for mother and child alike, never supposing that love for one entails abandoning care and concern for the other. President

Obama holds a different view. He has made clear his own conviction that the equality of women depends on denying the equality and rights of the children they carry. He has made what is, from the pro-life point of view, the tragic error of supposing that the equality of one class of human beings can and must be purchased by denial of the equality of another.

One wishes that President Obama had listened carefully, and with an open mind and an open heart, to the pleas of Mother Teresa during her last visit to the United States.

Her message was that a pregnant woman in need is not in need of the violence of abortion. What she and her child need are love and care—love and care from all of us. Our task, Mother reminded us, as individuals and as a society, is to love and care for mother and child alike.

President Obama's supporters do him no good service by pretending that his expressions of willingness to find "common ground" with pro-lifers involve, at some level, recognition that abortion or embryo-destructive research is bad or tragic because it kills a living member of the human family.

Unlike, say former President Clinton or former New York Governor Cuomo, or even Vice President Biden, President Obama does not profess to be "personally opposed" to abortion, or to believe that abortion is a wrongful act that must nevertheless be legally permitted because the consequences of outlawing it would be worse than those of tolerating it. His belief, and his policy, is that abortion, if a woman chooses it, is not wrong. That is why he is not personally opposed to it. There is no wrong there to oppose. Indeed, the President made crystal clear his view that abortion can be an entirely legitimate and even desirable option, when he said that if one of his daughters made a mistake and became pregnant, he would not want her to be "punished with a baby."

In such a case, he saw abortion as the right solution to a problem—a solution that we should be happy is available, and that we should make available if it happens not yet to be available. Without it, a young woman would be "punished."

I have no doubt that the President regards it as deeply unfortunate, sometimes even tragic, that the problem giving rise to the woman's need for an abortion exists; but there is equally no room to doubt that President Obama regards it as fortunate that a solution to the problem—in the form of abortion—is available. For someone holding this view, and many people in the academic world hold it, abortion is not in itself a bad or wrongful thing, any more than a knee replacement operation is in itself a bad or wrongful thing.

Of course, it would be better if no one ever injured a knee and found himself in need of a knee operation. No one regards knee operations as desirable for their own sakes. No one deliberately injures himself just so that he can have a knee operation. And people don't have knee operations performed on them for frivolous reasons. But a knee operation is not something that one would discourage or be personally opposed to. It is a solution to a problem, and should therefore be made as available and accessible as possible for people who need them.

For those who share President Obama's view of the moral status of the child in the womb, the decision to abort may be more wrenching for many women than the decision to have a knee operation typically is, but it is like a knee operation precisely inasmuch as it is a legitimate solution to a problem.

All of this was made transparently clear at a recent meeting at the White House in which people on both sides of the abortion issue were brought together to see if they could find some common ground.

The meeting was led by Melody Barnes, the Director of the President's Domestic Policy Council and a former board member of Emily's List, one of the nation's most aggressive organizations devoted to legal abortion and its public funding.

At one point in the meeting, she recognized pro-life activist Wendy Wright, who attempted to explain ways that the President could begin to achieve his reported goal of reducing the number of abortions. Barnes interrupted her to make clear that the precise goal of the administration is to "reduce the need for abortions." Two days after the meeting, the President spoke at Notre Dame, and he chose his words carefully. In speaking of common ground, he did not propose that we reduce the number of abortions, but rather [and I quote] "the number of women seeking abortions." Get it?

The President and his administration will not join us on the common ground of discouraging women from having

abortions or even in encouraging them to choose childbirth over abortion. The proposed common ground is the reduction of unwanted pregnancies—not discouraging those in “need” of abortion from having them. The idea that the interests of a child who might be vulnerable to the violence of abortion should be taken into account, even in discouraging women from resorting to abortion or encouraging alternatives to abortion, is simply off the table.

The President and the people he has placed in charge of this issue, such as Melody Barnes, have a deep ideological commitment to the idea that there is nothing actually wrong with abortion, because the child in the womb simply has no rights. This commitment explains the policy positions President Obama has consistently taken since he entered the Illinois legislature.

It crucially shapes and profoundly limits what he and those associated with him regard as the “common ground” on which he is willing to work with pro-lifers. And it explains why he and they reject what we, as pro-lifers, propose as common ground.

Because the President does not believe in the profound, inherent, and equal dignity of every member of the human family; because he does not believe that babies acquire human rights until after birth; because he does not see abortion as tragic because it takes the life of an innocent human being, he is utterly and intransigently unwilling to support even efforts short of prohibiting abortion that would plainly reduce the number of abortions.

Moreover, he is adamantly in favor of funding abortions and abortion providers at home and abroad, and has already taken steps in that direction by revoking the Mexico City Policy and proposing a budget that would restore publicly funded abortions in Washington, D.C.—despite the well-documented and universally acknowledged fact that when you provide public funding for abortion, you get more abortions.

Some pro-choice people think that the killing of unborn children where there is no grave threat to the mother, though bad and unjust, should not be made illegal at least in the earliest stages.

Potentially we would have significant common ground with these fellow citizens in the form of policies to discourage abortion and reduce the number of killings. For example, we could join together to oppose the funding of abortion at home and abroad; we could work together for bans on second and third trimester abortions, on abortions for sex-selection, and on particularly heinous methods of abortion, such as partial-birth abortions; we could agree on what Professor Hadley Arkes calls “the most modest first step of all,” namely requiring care—at least comfort care—for the child who survives an attempted abortion and is born alive.

We could provide desperately needed financial support for pro-life clinics that assist pregnant women in need—need that is not always financial, but is often emotional and spiritual—and encourage and help these women make the choice for life. We could enact waiting periods, informed consent laws, and parental notification laws that have been shown, in research by Michael New and others, to reduce abortions. We could reject the funding of embryo-destructive research, and join together to support promising research and treatments using non-embryonic sources of stem cells.

However, far from meeting us on any of these areas of common ground, President Obama opposes our efforts. Political realities have prevented him from making good on his promise to the abortion industry to sign the pro-abortion nuclear bomb called the Freedom of Choice Act as one of his first acts in office. But he was not lying when he made that promise. His policies, and above all his appointments to key offices in the White House, the Justice Department, Health and Human Services, and elsewhere make clear that his strategy will be to enact the provisions of FOCA step by step, rather than as a package.

As anyone occupying the role of David Axelrod or Karl Rove will tell you, this is obviously the politically astute way for the President to prosecute his agenda. The country does not accept President Obama’s extreme position on abortion. A recent poll showed that a majority of Americans now regard themselves as pro-life, and a majority favors significant legal restrictions on abortion.

Plainly the President’s actual views are far more favorable to abortion than those of the general public; so if he is to advance his goals, and the goals of those who share his commitment to making abortion more widely available and easily accessible, the last thing it would make sense to do is try to enact FOCA as a package.

At Notre Dame, the President offered to work with pro-lifers to draft what he called “sensible” conscience protections for pro-life physicians and other health care workers. This favorably impressed some in the pro-life community, especially

since one of President Obama's first acts was to rescind conscience protection regulations supported by the pro-life community that had been put into place by the Bush Administration's Department of Health and Human Services. Here, alas, I must urge caution. It seems to me overwhelmingly likely that the key word in the President's offer is "sensible."

What is "sensible" to him, I predict, is precisely what is regarded as sensible by the Committee on Ethics of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, namely, requiring physicians to refer for abortions, even if their consciences forbid it, and allowing pro-life obstetricians and gynecologists to refuse to perform abortions only when it is clear that an abortion can be provided by a willing physician in the area.

For physicians and surgeons who believe that abortion is unjust killing and a grave violation of human rights, this is not sensible. It is ominous. I beg the President's pro-life supporters urgently to request from him a statement clarifying the meaning of "sensible" conscience protection. If it means weakening current laws, so doctors will be compelled to refer for abortions and in so-called emergencies even to perform abortions, then even here pro-life citizens have no common ground with the President of the United States.

Finally, let me say a word about a matter that has been of deep concern to me—the expansion of federal funding for embryo-destructive research. I regret that the President passed up a golden opportunity to establish true common ground with pro-life citizens. He could have left the funding of research involving cell lines created by the destruction of human embryos in place, and led the charge to promote ethically unproblematic non-embryo-destructive forms of stem cell science.

He could have rallied the nation around adult stem cell science and brilliant new technologies for the production of pluripotent stem cells that manifest the very qualities that make embryonic stem cells interesting and potentially useful. He could have shown that we can give both sides in the great stem cell debate what they want—the promise of stem cell science, without the moral stain of embryo killing.

But the President did not do that. He revoked the restrictions on funding research involving embryonic stem cell lines created after August 9, 2001. He even took the additional step of revoking President Bush's 2007 executive order promoting research to advance non-embryo-destructive sources of pluripotent stem cells. Finally, he opened the door to funding research involving stem cell lines created by producing human embryos by somatic cell nuclear transfer or other means specifically for research in which they are killed. He delegated the details of any new guidelines to the National Institutes for Health.

The NIH, under Acting Director Raynard Kington, a Bush-administration holdover, recently published its draft guidelines, which mercifully decline to walk through the door the President opened. For now, at least, there will be no funding of research involving embryos created just for destruction. If the President's pro-life supporters are partially responsible for this piece of good news, they deserve our sincere thanks, and I here heartily offer mine. The NIH guidelines also include strong consent rules for parents.

Already the supporters of embryo-destructive research and so-called "therapeutic cloning" are pressing the NIH to reverse course in both these areas. For that reason, I plead with all who believe in respect for human life, and especially those whose support of the President politically has given them influence with him and his administration, to work tirelessly to ensure that there is no further expansion of funding for embryo-destructive research or weakening of current consent requirements.

The common ground I am interested in is with pro-life Americans who, like Professor Kmiec, have supported the President politically. The election is over, and the current question is not who anyone thinks will do the best job as President, or even whether one may legitimately support candidates who deny the fundamental dignity and right to life of unborn human beings and who promise to protect and extend the abortion license and expand the funding of embryo-destructive research.

The question is: On which issues will we support the President's direction, and on which will we challenge him because he is heading in the wrong direction? Those pro-life Americans who voted for him and support him should not object when we speak for the most vulnerable and defenseless of our fellow human beings, even when that means severely criticizing the President's policies. They should stand with us on common ground, and join their voices with ours.

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