

In Media Stat Virtus

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Whenever I have the opportunity to be in contact with politicians, I strongly urge them to find common ground with those of the other party in order to serve the best interests of the people. Unfortunately, the current status of political activity is polarization. The body politic tends to separate into two basic camps and the common good is sacrificed.

The famed Greek philosopher, Aristotle, and the revered Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas, used a concept that addresses the situation. They asserted: “In media stat virtus,” “In the middle stands virtue.” The idea is to move toward balance, toward the center, that which best serves the human person made in the image and likeness of God.

Wedge issues perpetuate polarization. They are stances on certain political questions that keep a rift alive. By unbending advocacy for certain positions, candidates guarantee a dependable number of votes of those who focus on single issues. As political aspirants try to patch together groups of supporters, they seek to capitalize on these issues in striving to achieve a winning combination. Unfortunately, the result is stasis, and problems go unresolved.

In our time, three wedge issues persist – abortion, immigration and environment. Granted, they need to be addressed in the political sector. But my take is that they

are not merely political. They have moral components that should heavily influence debate.

The so-called justification for abortion, in the end, is that human life is not present when a fetus is aborted. Such denial of equivalent humanity drove the acceptance of slavery. It was at the heart of the Dred Scott decision. However, scientists basically concur that human life begins at conception. You and I are the same individuals throughout our lives.

Given that starting point, there is an opening for agreement that demonstrates compassion and understanding. It appears the only two choices for a so-called problematic pregnancy are the mother's keeping the baby or abortion. Could there be a return to a more expansive adoption practice? Adoption is a viable, desirable option from many perspectives. Another consideration is practicing "green sex" or natural family planning.

The second wedge issue is immigration. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama made similar proposals of comprehensive immigration reform. Each failed because the opposite party rejected them. Evolving from these considerations, the pursuit of radical immigration policies have resulted in the heartless, indefensible separation of infants, toddlers and young children from their parents. How do we move to the middle? If a country so rich in resources would confront the resolution of the root causes of immigration – poverty, violence and lack of education – then those fleeing would remain where they want to be. The world can take justifiable pride in the enormous reduction of poverty since 2000, especially in India and China, through the widespread expansion of healthcare and education.

As our dialogue moves to the middle, don't initiatives of this sort correspond to logic?

Finally, 97% of the world's scientists of every religious persuasion identify climate change with the build-up of carbon. The moral issue is the responsibility of the current generation to provide for our daughters and sons destined to follow us. Again, change can be made without imposing undue hardship. The midpoint is the conscientious discussion of how to adopt renewable energy practices and through innovation, directly face and resolve problems such progress poses. Care must be taken in the transition to protect as many jobs as possible.

It might be easy to separate our political life from our moral anchors, but we are not wired that way. Once we have established some measure of agreement about facts, we can forge ahead through discussion and dialogue in the perspective of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas to positions that reflect balance and human good. We can move forward in authentic human progress. In so doing, we will decrease polarization and come closer to achieving the common good.