

BIDEN'S CURIOUS CATHOLIC CREDENTIALS

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Obsessing Over Biden's Religion

The obsession with President Biden's religion is everywhere apparent, especially among Democrats, liberal pundits, reporters and activists. They are working overtime to convince the public that he is a good Catholic.

On Biden's first day in office, White House press secretary Jen Psaki addressed his religion at a press conference. "I will just take the opportunity to remind all of you that he is a devout Catholic, and somebody who attends church regularly." "Devout Catholic." A lexis-nexis search reveals that this descriptive term has been used by the press hundreds of times in the last three months.

The day after Biden was inaugurated, the New York Times gushed that he is "perhaps the most religiously observant commander in chief in half a century." Usually, this newspaper is apprehensive, if not alarmed, about "religiously observant" public officials (especially Catholic ones), yet for some reason they made an exception for Biden.

Sister Carol Keehan is the former head of the Catholic Health Association. She says Biden is a "man who clearly loves his faith." To get an idea of what she considers to be a model Catholic, she recently showered Xavier Becerra with praise when he was grilled by a Senate committee over his nomination for Secretary of Health and Human Services. It does not bother her one iota that Becerra supports partial-birth abortions and is known for his never-ending crusades against the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Another Biden admirer is John Carr, co-director of a Catholic project at Georgetown University; he is a reliable liberal Catholic voice. He is impressed by the difference between Biden and his predecessor. "We're going from one of the least overtly religious presidents in modern times to one of the most overtly religious presidents in recent times."

If there is one thing that makes Biden "overtly religious," it is his habit of carrying a rosary. That puts a smile on the face of liberal Catholics like Father Tom Reese, a prominent Jesuit writer. "This is a guy who carries a rosary around in his pocket and talks about his faith." The media also love this story. This explains why there is so much chatter about Biden's rosary beads.

Let's concede that Biden is a rosary-carrying "devout Catholic." What does that have to do with his public policy decisions that are of interest to the Catholic Church?

Biden's lust for abortion rights, and his steadfast opposition to religious liberty legislation—as exemplified in his defense of the Equality Act—are uncontestable. In other words, if a "devout" Catholic doesn't connect the dots between his faith and his public policy decisions, how excited should Catholics be about him? And does this not explain why secularists adore this kind of Catholic?

At the individual level, Biden is the embodiment of what the privatization of religion means. In this view, religion is solely an interior exercise, having no public role to play. It must be said that there is nothing Catholic about such a position. Indeed, every pope in recent times, including Pope Francis, has spoken against this insular view. Catholicism, they contend, must have a robust presence in the public square.

Biden's privatized conception of religion is not a stunt—it is who he is.

The first time he publicly mentioned his rosary beads was in 1995, twenty-two years after he became U.S. Senator from Delaware. What he said at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on religious freedom was classic Biden.

“I am one of those guys who’s never talked about my religion. I carry a thing called a rosary bead with me all the time—I say it all the time, I say it on the train—to me, it’s a comforting thing. I don’t suggest it to anybody else.”

He did not explain why, if the rosary beads meant so much to him, he did not want to “suggest it to anybody else.” Perhaps in his mind such a suggestion could be read as an imposition. But that wouldn’t explain his support for forcing nuns to pay for abortion-inducing drugs in their healthcare plans. That was not a suggestion—it was a mandate. It was also one that violated Catholic moral teachings.

It seems a little strange for a “devout Catholic” to keep private his religion. After all, Biden is not a monk—he has been a public office holder for 47 years. This accounts, however, for the fact that when he was running for president, the majority of the public had no idea he was Catholic. In September 2020, Newsweek released a poll showing that 56% were unaware that Biden was Catholic.

Biden’s long-time secretive Catholic status is a secret no more. Indeed his fans are now touting his “devout Catholic” status whenever they can. Given the president’s strong opposition to the life issues and religious liberty, they have little choice. It is precisely this kind of Catholic that the New York Times loves.

The Politics of Branding Biden a Catholic

Everyone knew that Sen. Joe Lieberman was proudly Jewish, so there was no need to persuade the public of his religious status. Similarly, it is widely recognized that Sen. Mitt Romney is a practicing Mormon, therefore making moot attempts

to prove he is. President Biden is different. Not a day goes by without some commentators, usually left-wing Catholics, trying to convince the public that he is a model Catholic.

This is disingenuous. If Biden were a model Catholic, there would be no need to assure us that he is. Even his fans know he isn't, otherwise they wouldn't waste so much energy on this issue. What galvanizes them is their war with the bishops.

Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez is president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). When Biden was elected, he congratulated him. However, when Biden was inaugurated, Gomez expressed concerns about the president's positions on various issues, explicitly wondering whether he "will advance moral evils."

Most bishops agreed with Gomez, but a few did not. Among the laity, those on the left were furious. Immediately, a campaign against the USCCB was launched by the National Catholic Reporter, a rogue Catholic publication.

On January 28, the Reporter asked the Vatican to investigate the USCCB for its alleged "staunch Republican support." On February 5, Faithful America, a George Soros creation, started a petition online in support of the Reporter's efforts. It will have no effect—the Vatican won't even acknowledge their game—but their intent matters greatly.

What's driving the campaign against the bishops?

Those on the Catholic left have an ideological interest in selling Biden to the public as a loyal son of the Church. Their goal is to undermine the authority of the bishops by promoting the false idea that the bishops do not have the last word on what constitutes a Catholic in good standing. They seek to persuade the public, especially Catholics, that it is perfectly acceptable to reject the Church's teachings on life, marriage, and religious liberty—the way Biden does—and still be a model Catholic.

One of their favorite tactics is to contend that Biden is more similar to Pope Francis than are the bishops. David Gibson, who directs an institute at Fordham University, claims that Biden is "more in line with the pope than the American bishops." That would surely come as news to priests who have denied Biden Communion.

Paul Elie, a Georgetown professor, says the pope and Biden have much in common. "Their informality, the fact that they were elected late in life, the fact that they seem to take issues as they come, listening, discerning and then acting." He fails to note that the pope and Biden have nothing in common when it comes to their fidelity to the Church's moral teachings. But that evidently matters less than their "informality."

Elie is more accurate when he gets to the heart of why it is necessary for Catholics like him to rescue Biden from his critics. "The hope is that the Biden Administration will invigorate American Catholicism, and vice versa." Translated this means that Catholic dissidents want the Biden brand of Catholicism to prove triumphant.

It angers Catholic malcontents that some criticize Biden's Catholic credentials. Julia Maloney, who works at the University of Michigan, gets incensed when she hears someone say that Biden is "Catholic in name only." Mark Silk, who is not Catholic, wants us Catholics to know that the president's pro-abortion record "doesn't necessarily make Biden a bad Catholic."

Sister Simone Campbell, the Democrats' favorite nun, is bolder than Silk. The star of "nuns on the bus" tries to bail out Biden by saying his views on abortion are "very developed." By that she means "he will not force his religious beliefs on the whole nation." Not exactly reassuring considering his desire to force his anti-Catholic beliefs on the Little Sisters of the Poor (as well as everyone else).

Joe Sweeney of the University of California at Davis says it is “incredibly offensive and absurd” to call into question Biden’s Catholicity simply because he has a “moderate approach to issues like abortion and same-sex marriage.” One wonders what positions Biden must take for Sweeney to label him an extremist. After all, Biden supports infanticide—babies killed in partial-birth abortions are 80% born—and he has officiated at gay weddings.

Jamie Manson, who heads an anti-Catholic organization, Catholics for Choice, says the majority of American Catholics agree with Biden on abortion. They do not. Practicing Catholics, as a recent survey disclosed, are pro-life by a 2-1 margin, and even non-practicing Catholics do not support late-term abortions.

The Catholic left has an uphill battle. Most people know that someone who identifies as Catholic yet rejects the Church’s teachings on abortion, gay marriage and the First Amendment cannot realistically be regarded as a loyal Catholic. The fact that these dissidents are working overtime to convince us that Biden is a Catholic in good standing is proof that he isn’t.