

The Secularist Assault On America's Moral Consensus

Rick Hinshaw

From the earliest days of their agitation to legalize abortion, America's modern-day secularists made inevitable the aggressive war on religious freedom they are engaged in today.

From the start, the secularists deployed the weapon of anti-religious – primarily anti-Catholic – bigotry in advancing the pro-abortion agenda, portraying their opponents as narrowly sectarian religious zealots trying to “impose their morality” on our pluralist society.

The tactic served several useful purposes.

It enabled them to divert attention from the scientific and medical certainty – “which everyone really knows,” as the pro-abortion California Medical Association publicly acknowledged at the time – “that life begins at conception,” and that every abortion takes a human life; and to instead transform opposition to abortion into a religious issue.

And that, in turn, allowed them to accuse the Catholic Church of violating America's “constitutional separation of church and state” in order to impose Vatican-dictated religious teachings upon all Americans.

And it permitted them to cast themselves as defenders of freedom of choice, advocates of a “live and let live” approach that would let Americans conduct themselves according to the dictates of their own conscience.

As the ensuing years have made clear, however, “freedom of choice” was never their real goal. They are every bit as determined to impose *their* secular agenda – their secular

religion, as some would describe it – on our pluralist society as they claim people of faith are determined to impose our religious beliefs when we stand up for the moral consensus that had previously guided this nation for most of its history.

And in truth, they have to be.

For as Kenneth Grasso, professor of political science at Texas State University, explains in an essay titled, “From Articles of Peace to Kulturkampf: Catholicism, the HHS Mandate, and the Problem of Religious Pluralism in America,” our nation’s ability to survive and flourish as a pluralist democracy has depended on our having been able to arrive at a “moral consensus” despite religious differences. This has worked, Grasso explains, because historically, “the diverse religions of America” have “shared a common Judeo-Christian tradition,” and “taught substantially the same moral code.”

“The type of natural law thinking that informed early American political culture saw the moral truths embodied in the natural law as largely congruent with traditional Judeo-Christian morality,” Grasso writes; and thus America’s “multitude” of religious sects was able to develop “traditional articles of peace” built on a shared moral consensus.

Grasso’s essay is contained in *The Crisis of Religious Liberty: Reflections from Law, History, and Catholic Social Thought*, a collection of essays by prominent Catholic scholars edited by Stephen M. Krason, director of the political science program at Franciscan University of Steubenville and cofounder and president of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists.

It is this shared moral consensus—and its natural law roots—that is under attack by modern day secularists. Their attack is not – and cannot be—limited simply to specific issues, like abortion and same sex “marriage.” For as Anne Hendershott writes in the foreword to the same book, “There

cannot be common ground on issues like abortion or same sex marriage.” The sacredness of pre-born human life and the integrity of authentic marriage – reflected for more than 200 years in the laws of every state in the union –are central to that moral consensus and its natural law foundations; and thus, those laws cannot be changed without dismantling that moral consensus.

The secularists have endeavored to do so, and “the result,” writes Grasso, “is the culture war that today wracks the American polity – a culture war that finds its most vivid expression in the ongoing conflicts over abortion, gay marriage and religion’s place in public life – pitting the proponents of the traditional forms of biblical theism and natural law thinking against the proponents of progressivism.”

As we have seen, for the secularists the culture war has entailed scapegoating religious institutions and people of faith – primarily the Catholic Church, for as Hendershott writes, “in the current culture wars, the Church is viewed as the major barrier to full acceptance of a woman’s right to choose abortion throughout her pregnancy or a same-sex couple’s right to marriage.”

It is not clear that this strategy ever really had its desired effect upon the American people. After all, unrestricted abortion was legalized nationwide not by the will of the people, but by the *diktat* of an unelected U.S. Supreme Court.

But the strategy did have its desired effect upon those who overrode the will of the people, as a perusal of Justice Harry Blackmun’s majority opinion in *Roe* makes clear.

In any event, having found it so successful in achieving their aims with abortion, the secularists have employed this strategy repeatedly, and over the years escalated it considerably. They have moved beyond the social pressure and cultural isolation that they employed during the early years

of the abortion debate to try to deprive pro-life voices of legitimate standing in the public square, to now using the coercive powers of government to *silence* people of faith and religious institutions – among other methods, using dubious “hate speech” laws to *criminalize* speech defending traditional marriage – and to *force* us to abandon the moral teachings of our faith and to *actively participate* in that which we hold to be immoral.

This first took the form of conditioning access to public resources on adherence to the secularist agenda. During the welfare reform debate of the mid-1990s, George Weigel wrote that “The current welfare system is managed by those same folks who have brought you Official Secularism as America’s quasi-establishment of religion. In city after city, and in order to qualify for federal funding, church-based agencies have had to agree not to do anything terribly ‘religious’ in their work with the poor.”

In a more recent example, the Obama Administration withdrew federal funding from a U.S. Bishops anti-human trafficking program – even as the Administration acknowledged that it was one of the most effective of such programs – because the bishops did not include abortion and contraceptive “services” for victims of human trafficking.

But this effort still left religious entities the option of declining federal funds in order to continue conducting their ministries in accord with their religious teachings. So now the secularists have moved to outright government coercion – under penalty of law – to force religious compliance with directives that offend against their moral teachings.

As we know, the Obama Administration’s Health and Human Services mandate *requires* faith-based entities to provide “health” insurance for their employees that includes abortions, contraceptives, and sterilization.

And in state after state, Catholic adoption and foster care agencies are being forced, by law, to either place children with same sex or unmarried heterosexual couples, in violation of the Church's teachings on marriage, or abandon their adoption and foster care services, and their moral commitment to finding homes for displaced children.

People of faith who own businesses are being told they have no discretion to decline to provide "services" that violate their religious beliefs. As we have seen play out most recently in Indiana, powerful secularized corporate interests are putting their considerable economic weight behind efforts to force states to legally require that caterers, florists, bakeries, and other family-owned businesses participate in same-sex wedding ceremonies, regardless of their religious convictions.

And of course, making all this more insidious – if that is possible – the Obama Administration, under the guise of providing "conscience exemptions" from its HHS contraceptive-abortionifacient mandate, has taken upon itself the power to define which of a Church's ministries are legitimately part of its religious mission. It has thus decreed that Catholic health care agencies, Catholic Charities, and Catholic higher education institutes are *not* part of the Church's religious mission – regardless of what Church teaching and tradition, let alone the Gospel of Christ, tell us.

That the secularists are so determined, now that they have achieved so much of their agenda, to force people and institutions of faith to actively participate in that agenda, confirms that they have never really been about "freedom of choice" – that they are, as I said earlier, every bit as determined to impose *their* secular agenda on our pluralist society as they claim people of faith are to impose our religious beliefs when we stand up for our nation's long-held moral consensus.

The secularists are not satisfied simply to have torn down the

moral standards that have guided our culture and informed our laws. They must also bring people of faith – and especially the Catholic Church – to heel, forcing us to *participate* in same sex marriage, in placing children for adoption with same sex or unmarried couples, in the destruction of pre-born life.

Why?

Part of it is strategic. If they can force people and institutions of faith to be actively involved in abortions, or same sex weddings, or other anti-life or anti-family policies, how do we credibly maintain public opposition to those practices? Our voices are effectively discredited, and the culture war is over.

I would suggest that it also has something to do with the natural law. Recall how King Henry VIII, when he wanted a divorce that the Church could not grant, simply named himself head of the Church of England, granted himself the divorce, and married the second of his six wives. Thomas More did not rebuke the King. He simply maintained his silence, unable to publicly assent to the marriage. But, as Randy Lee, professor of law at Widener University, writes in Krason's book, "that didn't seem like enough to Henry. ... incrementally, like water torture, drop by drop, Henry took from Thomas More his office, then his status, then his wealth, then his friends, then his personal liberty, then his family, and ultimately his life."

Why? Why was Henry so obsessed with forcing Thomas More to assent to his divorce and remarriage? I would submit that it was because he was himself terribly conflicted, knowing deep within himself that what he had done was wrong. But if he could get Thomas More, a prominent Catholic of saintly virtue and impeccable integrity, to go along with the marriage, perhaps it could ease his conscience.

Similarly, I submit, while our modern day secularists deny and ridicule the concept of a natural law, they cannot escape it –

it is imprinted by God on every human heart. Somewhere, deep within, there is a nagging discomfort – within individuals and within our secularist nation as a whole – a discomfort they do not understand, but cannot escape. But if they can force people of faith – and especially the Catholic Church, the foremost defender of the timeless moral teachings on which our nation was founded – to go along, maybe they can free themselves of the nagging doubts which they will not acknowledge but cannot escape.

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The Catholic Advantage

Bill Donohue

We all want to be healthy, happy, and make it to heaven; even atheists who do not believe in heaven would prefer they enter the pearly gates if given only two choices. Who are the most likely, and the least likely, to achieve the Three H's of health, happiness, and heaven is the subject of my new book.

The real challenge, I found, is not deciding who these people are—the data on the first two H's are uncontested (and there is little disagreement on the attributes that make us likely candidates for heaven)—the difficult part was explaining why some have a decided advantage over others. From scouring the evidence, it became clear that the Three B's—beliefs, bonds, and boundaries—were the key to achieving the Three H's.

Well-being is a term that describes our physical and mental health, our degree of happiness, and overall life evaluation. Those who have the highest well-being are the most religious; those who score the lowest are the least religious. This is

not debatable. As for heaven, while only God knows for sure who will make the cut, it is entirely reasonable to maintain that those who are charitable and altruistic stand the best chance of being rewarded in the afterlife. We know from many studies that religious Americans are the most likely to engage in charitable giving and altruistic endeavors; agnostics and atheists are the least likely.

While the data on religious Americans is not confined to Catholicism, the evidence is particularly persuasive for Catholics. That is why I say there is a Catholic advantage vis-à-vis secularists: the degree to which we possess the beliefs, cherish the bonds, and respect the boundaries of right and wrong is significant. Indeed, we embody the Three B's as well as any religious community; this gives us a big leg up in achieving the Three H's.

To make my argument, I selected practicing Catholics, priests, nuns (especially cloistered sisters), and saints as representative of the Catholic model. I chose Hollywood celebrities and intellectuals to represent the secular model. On the face of it, these two secular groups have little in common, but what unites them is their agnosticism and atheism: the former have no time for God, and the latter think they are smarter than God. On the whole, both suffer from poor physical and mental health, are largely unhappy, and are not exactly charitable or altruistic.

The first of the Three B's, beliefs, is an important variable explaining our physical and mental health. Patients who pray for relief of a specific medical condition usually find that their prayers have been answered. Indeed, frequent prayer is clearly related to physical and emotional well-being.

Intercessory prayer, or absent prayer, also yields important results. When people are asked to pray for a specific person, whom they do not know, but who is suffering from an illness, and the prayer recipient has no knowledge that this is

happening, such patients improve better than those patients with the same condition but who did not have anyone praying for them. These “double blind” studies have been replicated many times.

The second B, bonds, is another advantage Catholics have. The word religion is derived from the Latin, *religare*, which means “to bind together.” The opportunities that parish life provides in establishing bonds—retreats, parties, organized pastoral and political events—are plentiful. Moreover, these relationships are a great resource in time of need.

What do agnostics and atheists have to fall back on? For many of them, their beliefs are self-centered and their bonds are fragmented. It is not without consequence that celebrities are known for their narcissism and intellectuals are famous for their egotism. Unfortunately, their radical individualism does not serve them well in achieving a stable and healthy existence, never mind attaining happiness.

Boundaries, the third B, are a critical element in determining our physical and mental health. Those who do not respect the need to use the brakes that God gave us are precisely the ones most likely to engage in risky behaviors; on this score, celebrities and intellectuals have no rival. By contrast, those who do not see constraint as a liability—cloistered nuns come quickly to mind—are among the healthiest and happiest people on earth.

Dr. Jeff Levin talks about an “epidemiology of love,” or what he says is our capacity to love God. Those who possess this attribute exercise greater self-mastery, and a greater sense of self-efficacy. They suffer less from depression and physical disabilities. In fact, the association of religion with physical health is so strong that those who are the most religious are also the least likely to suffer from cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, hypertension, asthma, back pain, tuberculosis, and other maladies. Moreover, in terms of

mental health, the more religious the person is, the better his mental condition.

The “Nun Study,” a research project that studied 678 Catholic nuns aged 75-102 in 1991, found that ten years later 295 were still alive, ranging in age from 85 and older. They lived longer than women outside the convent, and were considerably happier. Cloistered nuns, the evidence shows, live on average eight years longer than other women.

Alcohol and drug use, promiscuity, and crime, are all inversely related to religiosity: the more religious a person is, the less likely he is to indulge in these behaviors. The obverse is also true: secular-minded persons, such as celebrities and intellectuals, are the most likely to partake in these destructive acts. That’s because religious Americans are more likely to exercise self-restraint, and the folks in Tinseltown and in higher education are more likely to be self-indulgent.

Our mental health is often a function of our connectedness, our ability to establish meaningful bonds. Loneliness, depression, and suicide are the sad results of an inability to connect. Barbra Streisand’s famous refrain, “People who need people are the luckiest people in the world,” didn’t quite nail it. All of us need people—those of us who have people are the luckiest in the world.

Cloistered nuns, unlike celebrities, enjoy two benefits that their swinging counterparts do not have: they are strongly connected to each other and to God. This explains why they are healthier and happier than most of us. It is not the alcohol-using, drug-addicted, bed-hopping narcissists who are at peace with themselves. Just read the obituary pages.

Everyone experiences tough times, but we Catholics have a major advantage over secularists: we have the example of Jesus. His death, the greatest expression of love the world

has ever known, was followed by his Resurrection, the greatest victory the world has ever known. This explains why we are an optimistic people: Catholicism understands suffering, but it remains confident that joy comes in its wake.

In particular, Catholics learn how to “offer it up.” When going through a tough patch, we are able to unite our sufferings with Christ. This is the essence of redemptive suffering. For instance, the number of saints who endured great suffering are legion, but in the end they all knew the beauty and joy of being with the Lord. Sadly, the idea of redemptive suffering is wholly unknown to agnostics and atheists. In times of trial, they are left to themselves, having nowhere to turn.

No segment of society has a monopoly on happiness, but the data conclusively show that the happiest are also the most religious; the least likely to be happy are their secular opposites. It is not money that buys happiness—it is living a faithful life. Those who attend church regularly also feel freer than secularists, and feeling free is tied to happiness. The happiest professional group are priests: more than anything else, celebrating the Eucharist accounts for their inner peace.

Among the least happy are celebrities and intellectuals. Alcoholism, drug use, multiple partners, multiple divorces, loneliness, depression, and mental illness are not stereotypes born of exaggeration: these qualities are a staple among the Hollywood crowd and intellectuals. Their self-absorption and self-destructive tendencies account for their misery, to say nothing of what they do to others.

To take one example, the number of intellectuals who have abandoned their children, and have seriously mistreated those closest to them, is shocking. That they typically wrote endlessly about championing the needy, while neglecting their own, is one of the most telling commentaries about them.

At the other extreme are the saints. While their lives are a veritable road map to heaven, they were not always virtuous; many lived lives of debauchery. But when they embraced Jesus they became a model of love. Who do the atheists have to emulate? The saints gave of themselves willingly, and tirelessly. Mother Teresa said that if love is real, it must cost us. That is not something the self-centered understand.

Surveys show that the most generous Americans are the most religious, and that the least generous are the least religious. If you are looking to see charitableness in action, go to Utah or Alabama; don't waste your time visiting New England. Does this mean that conservatives are much more generous than liberals? Yes, the data show exactly that.

Frederick Ozanam personified charitableness. He was the founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. When his atheist debating associates challenged him on what he was doing personally for the poor, he answered the challenge by enlisting his friends to dedicate their lives to one-on-one personal care for the needy. This is the essence of the Catholic notion of self-giving.

Altruism is not easy to measure, but those who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust have properly been chosen as exemplars. The evidence shows that it wasn't the self-absorbed who put their lives on the line—they were the least likely—it was those who had a clear sense of right and wrong, and duty to others. Catholics were prominently among them.

Secular intellectuals are split on the idea of heaven: some scoff at it altogether while others hold that heaven on earth can be achieved. Their efforts to establish utopia, however, have all ended in bloodshed.

Beginning with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the intellectual architect of the French Revolution, the quest for the "new

man”—human beings who are not self-interested—has yielded nothing but genocide. Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot were all visionaries who sought to create the “new man,” thus ushering in a utopian wonderland; similarly, Hitler thought he could reinstitute a new sense of community and rescue Western civilization.

All of these secular maniacs rejected original sin. That was their fatal flaw. They saw human nature as malleable, akin to putty: it could be shaped and reshaped at their will. So they thought. Heaven exists, but only in the afterlife.

All things considered, there really is a Catholic advantage. Exercising the Three B’s—beliefs, bonds, and boundaries—is the surest way to achieve the Three H’s of health, happiness, and heaven. But they cannot be “adopted.” That’s because the Three H’s are a residual, the natural byproduct of living the life of a faithful Catholic. To say it pays sweet dividends cannot be argued, even by agnostics and atheists.

RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES UNITE

Bill Donohue

Alliances are formed on the basis of mutual interests and needs, and the religious conservative alliance is no exception. There were forces external to each religious community, as well as forces within each community, that made the alliance possible. While today Catholic traditionalists, evangelical Protestants, Orthodox Jews, and others work together on social issues, it was not always that way. It is worth recalling how the current alliance unfolded, especially how Catholics and Protestants put aside theological differences to join forces in the cultural war.

There were two social issues, both the result of Supreme Court decisions, that eventually brought together traditional Catholics, evangelical Protestants and Orthodox Jews: the ruling banning school prayer in 1963 and the legalization of abortion in 1973. However, in neither case was it clear from the beginning that they would figure mightily in making for an alliance. Yale law professor Stephen Carter is right to say that "after the school prayer cases in the 1960s and the abortion decision in 1973, the banner of religious populism was raised once more." But before evangelicals could unite with like-minded Catholics, an awful lot of ugly historical problems had to be resolved.

In the early 19th century, the only real debate over the role of religion in the public schools was whether the government should fund denominational schools run by various Protestant churches or whether there should be "non-sectarian" schools that featured the King James Bible. Most Protestants eventually accepted the latter, being persuaded by Horace Mann that the common free public school system that he envisioned would not be prejudiced toward a specific Protestant denomination. For Catholics, however, it was a lose-lose proposition.

Not only were Catholic students taught the Protestant version of the Bible, they were assigned textbooks that called Catholics "deceitful," branding the pope a "man of sin, mystery, iniquity, son of perdition." Students were also taught that monasteries were "seats of voluptuousness" where "luxurious pleasures" abounded. Assigned texts on Irish Catholics were particularly vicious. *The Irish Heart* taught students that if the Irish continued to come to America, the nation risked becoming the "common sewer of Ireland." The book said that "the emigration from Ireland to America of annually increasing numbers, extremely needy, and in many cases drunken and depraved, has become a subject for all our grave and fearful reflection."

It was against this backdrop that Catholic schools were founded. No one was more adamant about the need for Catholic schools than New York Bishop John ("Dagger") Hughes. But he wanted more than parochial schools—he wanted a slice of state funding for schools to flow to Catholic schools—and that is where he met opposition. In a debate in 1840 before the Common Council, Hughes spoke for three hours: he eloquently outlined the anti-Catholic nature of the public schools and the inequitable conditions that Catholic parents had to endure. The opposition, however, proved to be too much, so he set out to establish a new political party to accomplish his goal. But this didn't last, so in the end he decided to go it alone. New York Catholics, many of them Irish and destitute, followed the lead of Bishop Hughes and managed to come up with the money needed to fund their own schools.

Matters got worse for Catholics in the 1850s, and it wasn't just the New York Irish who felt the brunt of things. The nativistic movement was in full swing as the Know Nothing Party gained ascendancy. In Massachusetts, they took control of both houses of the legislature, winning the governor's office as well. The anti-Catholic bigots quickly approved an amendment to the state constitution that barred the use of state funds in parochial schools; they also gained Protestant supremacy of the schools by mandating the King James Bible. Things got so bad in San Francisco that in 1855 Catholic kids were whipped in the classroom if they refused to read the Protestant Bible. No wonder Abraham Lincoln said that if the Know Nothings got their way, the Declaration of Independence would read "all men are created equal except Negroes and foreigners and Catholics."

What the Know Nothings had succeeded doing in Massachusetts—barring the use of state funds for sectarian schools—they sought to do everywhere. President Ulysses S. Grant joined this effort, but it wasn't until Senator James G. Blaine of Maine led the charge that Catholics lost in their

bid to secure state funding virtually everywhere. While Blaine failed to get a federal amendment barring public monies for sectarian schools, most state legislators followed his lead and enacted “baby Blaine” amendments of their own. By 1890, 29 states had passed such laws. Sadly, the fight to get these amendments overturned continues to this day. Indeed, dozens of states still have Blaine amendments on the books, all of them rooted in virulent anti-Catholic bigotry.

A step backward, followed by a step forward, took place in Oregon in the 1920s. In 1922, an initiative was adopted making it a crime for parents to send their children to anything but a public school. No one even tried to hide the anti-Catholic nature of the initiative, the biggest support coming from various Protestant councils and lodges. And, of course, the Ku Klux Klan was active, showing their love for Catholics. But resistance from Catholic quarters was given, especially by the Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. The Sisters sued, and in 1925 the U.S. Supreme Court agreed with them: it was unconstitutional for the state to create an educational monopoly. In a famous line from this case, the high court emphasized that *“The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.”*

Another mixed result, this time reversed—one step forward, two steps backwards—was rendered in the 1947 *Everson* decision. Public monies, the Supreme Court ruled, could be spent to provide bus transportation for parochial school students (it was seen as a safety issue), but there was a hitch: the establishment clause, said Justice Hugo Black in the majority decision, requires that neither the federal nor state governments “can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another.”

Since the Founding, it had been understood that if a law benefited all religions, it could pass constitutional muster.

But now the high court was saying something novel: even if all religions benefited equally, it was still unconstitutional for the government to aid religion. Black came up with the idea that the establishment clause "was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and State" that must be kept "high and impregnable." Jefferson, of course, had penned the "wall" metaphor in a letter he wrote to Danbury Baptists in 1802, but it took until 1947 before such a notion became law.

Two years later, it looked like federal aid to education would be provided to parochial schools. A bill authorizing such aid passed the Senate easily, but it ran into trouble in the House. Entering the fray was New York Archbishop Francis Cardinal Spellman, an avid supporter of federal aid for parochial education. His main opposition came from Eleanor Roosevelt.

The former First Lady wrote in her syndicated column that religious schools "should not receive federal funds; in fact, no tax funds of any kind." In another article, she lectured the Cardinal that the political activities of church leaders "lead people to believe that they are not interested mainly in the spiritual side of the church, but that they have a decided interest in temporal affairs." Spellman shot back accusing her of "a record of anti-Catholicism," a charge that was hardly unfounded given the former First Lady's affection for the work of Paul Blanshard, a notorious anti-Catholic bigot. A compromise of sorts was brooked when Cardinal Spellman settled for funding of "auxiliary services," such as non-religious textbooks, and other "incidental expenses involved in education." Mrs. Roosevelt, though suspicious, accepted the new proposal.

The Protestant opposition to any kind of school choice initiative, whether it be in the form of vouchers or tuition tax credits, fizzled in 1963. This was when the Supreme Court outlawed the public recitation of prayers in the schools; it sent a shock wave through evangelical and fundamentalist

quarters. The upshot was the founding of Christian schools. Just as Catholics had founded parochial schools when faced with implacable odds, many Protestants—now faced with adversity—came to the same conclusion and established their own schools. By 1975, Christian schools were being established at the rate of three a day.

Not everyone, however, was on board yet. At the Southern Baptist Convention in 1978, a resolution was adopted asking President Jimmy Carter to veto any bill that allowed for tuition tax credits, citing First Amendment objections. By the mid-1980s, however, Southern Baptists were pressing President Ronald Reagan to permit tuition tax credits. To show how remarkable this about-face was, consider what Richard Land, head of the Christian Legal Society, said in 1997. Explaining his support for a school choice program in Milwaukee that allowed for state funding of religious schools, Land said of the group's brief that "This case is not about tuition tax credits and vouchers. It is about religious freedom and government discrimination against religion."

Two years later, Richard Cizik, director of the Washington office of the National Association of Evangelicals, admitted that his organization had "really done a 180" on school choice initiatives. But the big news was the alliance between Catholics and evangelicals on this issue. Commenting on this development in 1999 was Grant Wacker, professor of religious history at Duke University Divinity School: "One of the most remarkable changes of the 20th century is the virtual evaporation of hostility between Protestants and Catholics." Wacker understands why. "I don't think it's because Baptists have come to have a great respect for Tridentine theology," he said. "It's because they see Catholics as allies against graver problems."

Wacker is exactly right. The religious conservative alliance is not propelled by theological convictions, but by social developments. No longer at each other's throats, Catholics and

evangelicals find common cause against secular supremacists who want to reorder the schools. It is not Protestants who are fighting to keep the Blaine amendments on the books these days—it's secular activists.

Nathan J. Diament, director of public policy for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, puts the blame where it is deserved: He cites the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Jewish Congress, and the NAACP (against the wishes of most blacks) as the principal culprits.

The Catholic League has a proud record of establishing alliances with people across faith lines. The culture war cannot be won by our side by going it alone. Fortunately, we have progressed to the point where theological differences do not act as a deterrent to working together on social and cultural issues.

DEBUNKING THE “MASS GRAVE” STORY

To read Donohue's full account of this story, see the “Special Reports” section on the Catholic League's website. [[Click Here](#)]

One of the key players in the “mass grave” story about the Tuam home is Catherine Corless, a local historian. Her research “suggested 796 babies were buried in a tank outside the former Tuam Mother and Baby Home, in Co. Galway, once run by the Bon Secours nuns in Galway.” Research that suggests an outcome is hardly unimportant, but it is not dispositive. Furthermore, while it is entirely fair to surmise what happened, it is quite another thing to declare exactly what

happened.

What is not in dispute is the fact that between 1925 and 1961, 796 children died at this home in Tuam. An initial investigation concluded that "No one knows the total number of babies in the grave." On June 5, the *New York Times* said the local police discounted the "mass grave" story as myth. "These are historical burials going back to famine times," the police said. They added that "there is no confirmation from any source that there are between 750 and 800 bodies present." Yet that is precisely what many media outlets, and activists, said.

Eamonn Fingleton, writing in *Forbes*, notes that "experts believe that the babies were buried in unmarked graves within the grounds of the orphanage." This was not uncommon in Ireland in the first half of the 20th century; this is the way church-run orphanages and workhouses buried their dead.

In many ways, the observations of Brendan O'Neill are the most impressive. He is an Irish atheist with no dog in this fight, save for telling the truth. O'Neill is anything but politically correct. He saw through the malarkey about the Magdalene Laundries, and he has been equally courageous in challenging tales of "mass graves."

"On almost every level," O'Neill said in his June 9 article in *Spiked*, "the news reports in respectable media outlets around the world were plain wrong. Most importantly, the constantly repeated line about the bodies of 800 babies having been found was pure mythmaking. The bodies of 800 babies had not been found, in the septic tank or anywhere else." The myth was the product of Corless' "speculation" that the children who died in the home were buried in a mass grave.

O'Neill is adamant in his conviction that "it's actually not possible that all 800 babies are in this tank-cum-crypt, as pretty much every media outlet has claimed." He cites a story

in the *Irish Times* that says “the septic tank was still in use up to 1937, 12 years after the home opened, during which time 204 of the 796 deaths occurred—and it seems impossible that more than 200 bodies could have been put in a working sewage tank.”

Tim Stanley is another reliable source from the U.K., and he is also convinced that the popular understanding of what happened is false. “It is highly unlikely, if not physically impossible,” he wrote on June 7, “that 796 bodies would have been placed into one septic tank.” He takes note of the fact that “the tank was only in use between 1926 and 1937,” thus undercutting wild accusations that the vile nuns treated dead children like raw sewage for decades.

Fingleton draws on his own experience to question the veracity of the conventional wisdom. He does not mince words: “For anyone familiar with Ireland (I was brought up there in the 1950s and 1960s), the story of nuns consciously throwing babies into a septic tank never made much sense. Although many aforesaid nuns might have been holier-than-thou harridans, they were nothing if not God-fearing and therefore unlikely to treat human remains with the sort of outright blasphemy implied in the septic tank story.”

Adding considerable weight to the observations of O’Neill, Stanley, and Fingleton is Dr. Finbar McCormick. He teaches at the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology at Queens University in Belfast. He berates the media for using the term “septic tank” to describe the child burials at the home. “The structure as described is much more likely to be a shaft burial vault, a common method of burial used in the recent past and still used today in many parts of Europe.” He specifically says that “Many maternal hospitals in Ireland had a communal burial place for stillborn children or those who died soon after birth. These were sometimes in a nearby graveyard but more often in a special area within the grounds of the hospital.”

So if the public has been duped, how did this story begin? It began innocently enough in 2010, but it took on a strong ideological bent in early 2014. The key players are Corless and Martin Sixsmith.

In 2010, Catherine Corless read an article in the *Tuam Herald* that caught her eye. The piece, "Stolen Childhoods," recounted the fate of a former resident in the Mother and Baby home in Tuam that was run by the Bon Secours Sisters. She had already done research on this home, so she naturally followed up and contacted the man identified in the article. This provided her with other leads. Two years later, in November 2012, Corless published her findings in a local journal.

What is most striking about Corless is not what she said in 2012, but what she is saying today. In her journal article, there is no professed anger at the nuns, or the Catholic Church. But today she is in rage. While she does not explain her change in tune, it is evident that her encounter with Sixsmith earlier this year proved to be a game changer.

Sixsmith is the English atheist who wrote the patently dishonest book about Philomena Lee; the movie about her life was based on his work. Since then, he has taken every opportunity to fan the flames of anti-Catholicism, and even arranged to include the "mass grave" hoax in a documentary about the horrors of Irish nuns. Once he hooked up with Corless, she became increasingly strident in her denunciations of the nuns and the Catholic Church.

Corless was now on a tear. Her previous comments on the possibility of a mass grave, which were tentative, gave way to absolute certainty. "I am certain there are 796 children in the mass grave." Just as important, she was now convinced of the mendacity of the Catholic Church. "I do blame the Catholic Church," she said. "I blame the families as well but people were afraid of the parish priest. I think they were brainwashed." No longer a Catholic, she confesses, "I am very,

very angry with the Catholic church.”

The notion that a mass grave existed in the site of the Home is oddly enough credited to the same person who says there never was one. His name is Barry Sweeney. Here’s what happened.

In 1975, when Sweeney was 10, he and a friend, Frannie Hopkins, 12, were playing on the grounds where the home was when they stumbled on a hole with skeletons in it. Corless had heard about some boys who found skeletons there, but did not know their identity until this year. On St. Patrick’s Day, Sweeney was drinking at Brownes bar, on the Square in Tuam, when he learned of Corless’ research. The two subsequently met.

In her journal article, Corless makes mention of a “few local boys” who “came upon a sort of crypt in the ground, and on peering in they saw several small skulls.” So how did she make the leap in 2014 that she is “certain” there are 796 bodies in a mass grave when just two years ago she wrote about “several small skulls”? The leap, it is clear, was not made on the basis of the evidence.

More important, Corless did not jump to the conclusion that “the bones are still there” because she learned from Sweeney about some new evidence. We know this because he contradicts her fantastic story. He is quoted in the *Irish Times* saying “there was no way there were 800 skeletons down that hole. Nothing like that number.” How many were there? “About 20,” he says.

It is a credit to Douglas Dalby of the *New York Times* that he did not bury this new information the way most other media outlets did. On June 10, he wrote that “some of the assumptions that led Ms. Corless to her conclusion [about the mass grave] have been challenged, not least by the man she cited, Barry Sweeney, now 48, who was questioned by detectives

about what he saw when he was 10 years old. 'People are making out we saw a mass grave,' he said he had told the detectives. 'But we can only say what we seen [sic]: maybe 15 to 20 small skeletons.'"

It does not speak well for Corless that she is flatly contradicted by one of the few persons whose credibility no one questions. Any objective researcher would have adjusted his thesis after encountering a central figure such as Sweeney. Even more bizarre, her initial assessment was sober in analysis. But meeting Sweeney was too late to matter: Corless had already met Sixsmith, and she wasn't about to let the facts get in her way. Ideology, as we have seen repeatedly in history, has a way of trumping the truth.

It is not just writers such as Fingleton who see an anti-Catholic bias at work (he calls the whole story a "hoax"). Dalby quotes a member of the committee that was organized to memorialize the dead children, Anne Collins, as saying she has had it with the ideologues. "Ms. Collins said the news media and 'church bashers' had hijacked the situation, and she disagreed with the widespread condemnation of the nuns."

Tim Stanley is right to finger a double standard that is present among elites. "Whenever a Muslim does something cruel or barbaric (such as female genital mutilation), politicians and the media are quick (rightly) to assert that this is a cultural practice rather than a religious one. But whenever a Catholic is guilty of a crime, it is either stated or implied that it is a direct consequence of dogma."

Finally, let's assume that a mass grave of dead babies on the grounds of the Tuam home were found. This would be cause for harsh criticism. But why is it that when aborted babies are taken to a "waste to energy" facility, and then incinerated as "clinical waste" by British hospitals, there is little outrage? This isn't a horror story out of the early 20th century: It was reported on March 14, 2014. The headline

in *The Telegraph* read, “Aborted Babies Incinerated to Heat U.K. Hospitals.”

The Sixsmiths of this world are not at all angry about the mass killings and the mass burnings of unborn babies going on today right before our eyes. No, they are too busy fabricating stories about nuns sexually assaulting young women, stealing their kids, and dumping their bodies in septic tanks. It tells us a great deal about the current state of anti-Catholicism that such bull is not only accepted, it is welcomed as affirmation of the venality of the Catholic Church.

THE MEDIA, THE POPE, AND DISINFORMATION

Ronald J. Rychlak

On March 22, 2014, Pope Francis received a group of Italian broadcasters at the Vatican. In an unscripted address, he defined the virtues, mission, and sins of the communication media. While encouraging the broadcasters to carry out their work along the paths of truth, goodness, and beauty, he also warned them about three sins embodied in the media, which he called “the road of lies.” Those three sins are: “disinformation, slander, and defamation.” According to the pope, slander and defamation are serious, but not as dangerous as disinformation.

Pope Francis calls disinformation “the most dangerous sin embodied by the media” because it is a partial truth told for political expediency. With the other two, he explained, truth can eventually be discerned and the error corrected. With disinformation, however, “those who watch the television or

listen to the radio are not able to arrive at a perfect judgment, because they do not have all the elements necessary to do so, and the media do not give them." Stated differently, disproving a false charge is hard, but eventually reasonable people can see through the charges. Disinformation – a misleading partial truth that comes from a seemingly reliable outlet – is much harder to overcome.

The Catholic Church frequently has been the victim of disinformation. Regular readers of *Catalyst* are well aware of campaigns designed to portray all priests and bishops as pedophiles while ignoring issues related to predatory homosexuality. Recently, the motion picture "Philomena" was peddled as a true history when, in fact, it was incredibly misleading and deliberately cruel to Irish nuns. In the recent television series, "Cosmos," host Neil deGrasse Tyson's portrayal of the Catholic Church as being opposed to science was far off base. This, of course, is just the tip of the iceberg.

Pope Francis himself has been the target of disinformation campaigns about his role in Argentina's "dirty war." In 1976, the military kidnapped and tortured two priests. The argument is that Francis (then Fr. Bergoglio) contributed to their suffering, either by refusing to defend them prior to the kidnapping or by failing to help afterwards. Actually, Bergoglio tried to remove them from harm's way, and his later intercession with dictator Jorge Rafael Videla may have saved their lives. Two days after Bergoglio became Pope Francis, the surviving kidnapped priest strongly denied that Francis was in any way at fault for his suffering.

Francis' predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, was often assailed in the press for having been a member of the Hitler Youth when he was a boy. It was less often mentioned that he refused to attend meetings, never joined the Nazi party, deserted the army, and eventually became a prisoner of war.

Pope John Paul II was the target of an elaborate disinformation effort early in his papacy. In 1983, Polish intelligence agents crafted a phony diary purportedly written by a former lover of Cardinal Wojtyla, the future John Paul II. They used the identity of a woman he would have known but who was by then dead. The plan was to leave the diary hidden in an apartment where it would be found during a police raid. Reporters would assume that it was legitimate and write about it as such. As it turned out, however, the agent assigned to plant the fake diary got drunk and was involved in an automobile accident. In an effort to avoid arrest, he explained who he was and exposed the plan. One can only wonder what would have happened had the pope's credibility been damaged early in his pontificate by that disinformation scheme.

No individual Catholic figure has been a greater target of those peddling disinformation than Pope Pius XII, who led the Church from 1939 to 1958. Some things about him were simply made-up, like charges that he met with Hitler, blessed German troops, or tried to kidnap Jewish children. In the 1960s, the play "The Deputy" was shaped, promoted, and produced by Soviet disinformation experts seeking to damage the Church. More recently, the book "Hitler's Pope" used a doctored photograph on the cover, a butchered quotation from Thomas Merton in the front matter, and was largely based on a six page letter that was reduced with ellipses to a few lines that – thanks to misleading translations – makes the future pope seem anti-Semitic. Disinformation like that is hard to counter, and it takes on a life of its own.

Consider how Pius XII's reputation was impacted by overt disinformation created to discredit someone else. During WWII, Croatian Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac was a staunch opponent of the Nazi puppet regime that took charge of his nation (the Ustaša). After the war, Croatia, then part of Yugoslavia, fell under Soviet domination. When Stepinac became a problem for

the new government, authorities charged him with collaboration with the Ustaša. In anticipation of his 1946 trial, the Communist Party published a book that purported to contain documentary proof. The documents, of course, were forged or edited in order to do as much damage as possible. The result of the trial was foreordained. Stepinac was convicted and eventually poisoned to death while under house arrest.

In the 1960s, Italian writer Carlo Falconi sought permission from the Yugoslav authorities to do research in Croatian archives for a book that he was writing on Pope Pius XII. Party officials were in a quandary. If they gave Falconi access to the archives, he would see how the evidence had been manufactured and how documents had been altered. They eventually handed over *some* documents and provided a copy of the book that they had produced prior to trial. On the basis of these documents, Falconi wrote his book, *The Silence of Pius XII*, which shaped much scholarship on Pope Pius XII.

In 1985, Stepinac's prosecutor, Jakov Blažević, acknowledged that Stepinac had been framed and that he was tried only because he refused to sever the ties between Croats and the Vatican. About that same time, one of the former governmental officials who had put together the case against Stepinac explained: "The indictments were designed rather more for publicity than for legality." In 1992, when Croatia came out from under the thumb of Communism, one of the first acts of Parliament was to issue a declaration condemning "the political trial and sentence passed on Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac in 1946."

Unfortunately, the damage had been done; the disinformation was out there, and it remains much cited to this day. In his book so critical of Pope Pius XII (and Pope John Paul II) *Hitler's Pope*, John Cornwell, who could easily have uncovered the truth, cited Falconi by name nine times and praised his "painstaking" research. That is the power of disinformation.

Until recently, Pope Pius XI was the “good pope” against whom Pope Pius XII was compared, but he has now become the target of disinformation that tries to link him with Mussolini. The kernel of truth, of course, is that the Catholic Church had to survive in Rome under Mussolini, but the claim that Pius XI was friendly with Mussolini is absurd. In 1931, while Mussolini was still being favorably profiled in American publications, his “black shirts” regularly beat up Catholics, prompting Pius XI to issue the encyclical *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*, in which he speculated about Italy’s “ultimate goal of domination” of the Church.

His modern critics argue that Pius XI supported Mussolini’s aggression during Italy’s war with Ethiopia. Their argument is that the pope hoped it would expand the Church’s influence. In reality, however, prior to the invasion of Ethiopia, he spoke out on at least three occasions, condemning Italy’s aggression and calling it a crime against the moral law. Later, when Mussolini ordered Rome illuminated to celebrate Italian victories, Pius kept Vatican City dark.

Mussolini issued his “Aryan Manifesto” in July 1938, calling on Italians to proclaim themselves racists and acknowledge that Jews do not belong to the Italian race. The very next day, Pius XI branded the Manifesto “a true form of apostasy,” and he said that “the entire spirit of the doctrine is contrary to the Faith of Christ.” At least twice more in the following weeks Pius reiterated this position, and his question about “why Italy should have felt a disgraceful need to imitate Germany,” was reprinted on the front page of the Vatican newspaper. He also ordered Catholic universities to refute these false teachings, and he appointed several Jewish scholars to positions of importance in the Vatican, saying: “All human beings are admitted equally, without distinction of race, to participate, to share, to study and to explore truth and science.”

On September 6, 1938, in a statement which—though barred from

the Fascist press—quickly made its way around the world, Pope Pius XI said:

“Mark well that in the Catholic Mass, Abraham is our Patriarch and forefather. Anti-Semitism is incompatible with the lofty thought which that fact expresses. It is a movement with which we Christians can have nothing to do. No, no, I say to you it is impossible for a Christian to take part in anti-Semitism. It is inadmissible. Through Christ and in Christ we are the spiritual progeny of Abraham. Spiritually, we are all Semites.”

The *New York Times* carried a front page story on the statement, and in January 1939, *The National Jewish Monthly* reported that “the only bright spot in Italy has been the Vatican, where fine humanitarian statements by the Pope have been issuing regularly.” The Feb. 1939 issue of *The National Monthly*, published by *B’nai B’rith*, put Pope Pius XI on its cover, along with the headline: “Pope Pius XI attacks Fascism.” Inside the journal, under the title “Pope Assails Fascism,” it stated: “Regardless of their personal religious beliefs, men and women everywhere who believe in democracy and the rights of man have hailed the firm and uncompromising stand of Pope Pius XI against Fascist brutality, paganism and racial theories.” The United States Congress even passed a joint resolution acknowledging Pius XI as a symbol for “the re-establishment of the rule of moral law in human society.” Yet, modern purveyors of disinformation try to discredit the Church by making false accusations against him.

The Catholic Church has often been the victim of disinformation, but there are other victims as well. Today, anyone with a laptop and access to the Internet can reach a large audience. Misleading stories from unproven sources, however, usually can be exposed. The greatest danger comes from sources that we trust. We rely on newspaper and magazine editors to edit out the falsehoods. We expect book publishers to do the same. We need all media professionals to help us

find the truth. That is what Francis meant when he encouraged broadcast journalists to carry out their work along the paths of truth, goodness, and beauty and to avoid the sin of disinformation.

Ronald J. Rychlak is the Butler, Snow Professor and Lecturer in Law at the University of Mississippi School of Law and a member of the Catholic League's Board of Advisors. His most recent book, co-authored with Ion Mihai Pacepa, is "Disinformation: Former Spy Chief Reveals Secret Strategies for Undermining Freedom, Attacking Religion, and Promoting Terrorism."

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR VOUCHERS

Rick Hinshaw

The upheaval over New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's attack on charter schools highlights the urgent need for more alternatives to failing public schools in our inner cities and other areas of poverty; for greater parental choice in determining the best schools for their children; and—in order to both empower parents and broaden their alternatives—for fairer, less politically volatile methods of allocating educational resources.

What the current situation cries out for is an educational voucher system.

For years parents looking for alternatives to failing inner city public schools turned to Catholic schools to provide their children with the rigorous academic standards, discipline, core values, and parental involvement essential to a quality education. But because they were denied access to

public funds to educate their children, many such parents—despite the fact that per-pupil expenditures to educate a child in Catholic schools are well below those of public schools—were simply unable to afford Catholic school tuition. So many inner city children remained trapped in failing public schools, while many high-performing Catholic schools have been forced to close.

Over the last two decades, charter schools have stepped into the breach, offering, according to noted New York writer Seth Lipsky, “a compromise effort to save public schools” through modest reforms —primarily freeing these schools from the stranglehold of the teachers’ unions. In doing so, charters have clearly followed the successful Catholic school model, from academics and parental involvement to discipline and values—right down to the importance of school uniforms. Obviously missing is the spiritual component, which has allowed charter schools to sidestep the bogus “church-state” issue used—by anti-Catholic bigots, yes, but more cynically by the teachers’ unions that have exploited such bigotry to maintain their monopoly on educational tax dollars.

We saw this again just weeks ago in New York State, when the state legislature—“despite explicit support from the vast majority of the state’s elected officials,” according to Cardinal Timothy Dolan—omitted from the state budget an Education Investment Tax Credit opposed by the public school teachers’ unions. This proposal would have allowed tax credits for donations to public schools as well as to scholarship programs for private or parochial schools. “Once again, Catholic school kids get kicked to the curb,” said Dolan—despite the fact that Catholic schools save New York taxpayers \$9 billion a year.

As de Blasio has now made clear, however, charter school parents are always one election—or one large teachers’ union campaign contribution—away from having their children’s high-performing schools ripped out from under them. So charters

too, like Catholic, private and other parochial schools, need a more stable system for allocating public funds than one that places their children's education at the mercy of shifting political winds and opportunistic politicians.

Again, Seth Lipsky: "A true voucher system would give parents, who are the customers of the school system, far greater choice," allowing parents to direct the money being spent on their child's education to the school of their choice—whether it be a charter or traditional public school, or a private or parochial school.

As Adam Emerson of the Fordham Institute for Advancing Educational Excellence reports, some 16 voucher programs nationally already direct state funds to families "to help offset the cost of a private (mostly religious) education." And Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) recently proposed a federal educational voucher program. But most of these voucher plans are severely restricted—by income levels, locations, or limitations of allocated funds. As such their impact, while positive, has been very limited. Ideally, the state would determine the total amount of public funds to be spent per student, and issue a voucher to every parent to direct that money for their child to the school of their choice.

Of course, charter school leaders might be resistant to the idea, as the current system, whereby they have access to public funds, gives them a decided advantage over private and parochial schools. But given the long waiting lists for charter schools virtually anywhere they exist—and the limits on their number imposed under current funding systems—a true, comprehensive voucher program, by allocating tax dollars in direct proportion to the demand for each type of school, would free up money for expansion of charter schools, private or parochial schools—or traditional public schools, if that's where the increased parental demand was.

It would also engender a competition for the education dollar

that could only stimulate the pursuit of excellence in all types of schools, where any school closures would result from level of performance, not, as is the case today, from political favoritism, union strong-arming, and religious discrimination.

And a comprehensive voucher program would also secure the rights of parents who want spiritual formation to be an integral part of their children's education –"a freedom," Emerson notes, "guaranteed by federal and state courts alike."

"It's time," writes Lipsky, who is Jewish, "to start addressing the legal legacy of the kind of bigotry that was turned on Catholic education in the 19th century." It is "time to make it easier for religious schools to help educate our children."

Rick Hinshaw is editor of the Long Island Catholic magazine.

OBAMA'S WAR ON RELIGION IN THE RANKS

After reading an article by Kansas Congressman Tim Huelskamp on the state of religious liberty in the military, I asked a staff member to contact his office, requesting permission to reprint it. It was happily granted. It is the best summary of this subject I have seen.

We have been tracking this issue for some time, and we are especially concerned about the undue influence that Mikey Weinstein has had in bullying the armed forces to walk his secular line. Weinstein is the president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation. Earlier this year his lawyers

tried to bully me when I criticized his work, but to no avail: I told them to take a walk.

As president of the nation's largest lay Catholic civil rights organization, and as a U.S. Air Force veteran of the Vietnam era, I take great umbrage at those who seek to squash the First Amendment rights of servicemen and women. Things have gotten out of control, and that is why I threw the support of the Catholic League behind Rep. Huelskamp's bill, the Military Religious Freedom Protection Act.

For decades, a movement has been under way to secularize our culture and our social institutions. We, along with others, have been pushing back, and have scored a number of victories. But the assault on the military, in the form of political correctness, is not just another turf war: it's a pernicious effort to drive religion away from those who rely on it for life and death reasons.

This article was originally published on August 1 by Breitbart.com. Please pass it around to your family and friends, especially to those in the military, and veterans. Thank God we have congressmen like Rep. Huelskamp, a Roman Catholic, to represent us.

Bill Donohue

Congressman Tim Huelskamp:

If Army chaplain Emil Kapaun served in Afghanistan today rather than Korea six decades ago, President Obama would probably give the Catholic priest discharge papers instead of the Congressional Medal of Honor.

In Obama's Army, the Pentagon brass is ordained in the priesthood of political correctness, while devout Christians such as Medal of Honor recipient Emil Kapaun are shunned and ostracized. At all times between the presidential terms of George Washington and George W. Bush, the open practice of

Christianity in the ranks was widespread and the open practice of homosexuality was deemed incompatible with military service. In the Obama era, the reverse is true.

President Obama is a wartime Commander-in-Chief. No, I don't mean the obvious (Iraq or Afghanistan). I'm talking about his preference for waging a race war, a gender war, class warfare, generational warfare, and – with escalating aggression and mounting casualties – a culture war. With the exceptions of free enterprise and traditional marriage, no institution has been more “radically transformed” by the Obama regime than our Armed Forces. Given President Obama's notorious contempt for Americans who “cling to their Bibles” and “guns,” perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by his Administration's hostility to service members who espouse traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs.

The persecution of Christians and conservatives has become increasingly brazen and pervasive since the President took office four and half years ago. To “protect patients” from proselytizing or prayer, Walter Reed Army Medical Center banned wounded warriors' family members from “bringing or using Bibles” during visits. The Department of Veterans Affairs barred Christian prayers at a National Cemetery. The President signed the law that repealed “Don't Ask, Don't Tell,” the Attorney General refused to defend the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in court, and the Department of Defense authorized unholy “matrimony” ceremonies at military installations even before the Supreme Court struck down part of DOMA.

A war games scenario at Ft. Leavenworth identified evangelical Christian groups as a national security threat.

A field grade officer listed the American Family Association and Family Research Council as “domestic hate groups” and directed his subordinate officers to monitor soldiers who might be supporters. Evangelist Franklin Graham was un-invited

from the Pentagon's National Day of Prayer service. A training exercise funded by the Department of Homeland Security portrayed home-schooling families as the domestic terrorists.

Last year, I introduced the Military Religious Freedom Protection Act. The bill requires the military to accommodate service members' moral principles and religious beliefs so long as they don't "threaten good order and discipline," forbids the military from using an individual's beliefs as the basis for an adverse personnel action, and forbids the military from forcing chaplains to perform homosexual marriage ceremonies. My bill's language was included in the National Defense Authorization Act passed by Congress last December.

When President Obama signed it into law, he claimed the conscience protections I authored were "unnecessary and ill-advised." But recent events confirm the new law was necessary, well-advised, and prophetic. These episodes exemplify the new military culture, one that rebukes those who practice Christianity and rewards those who worship at the altar of political correctness.

Army Master Sergeant Nathan Sommers' superiors told him to remove the conservative, Republican, and scripture-quoting bumper stickers from his personal vehicle. He was told he must avoid being seen reading books authored by Mark Levin, Sean Hannity, or David Limbaugh while in uniform. He was investigated for serving Chick-fil-A food at his promotion party to express his support for traditional marriage. In retribution, the Army is pursuing trumped up disciplinary charges against him.

The Utah Air National Guard cancelled the six-year re-enlistment contract of Tech Sergeant Layne Wilson because he told a chaplain he thought the chapel at West Point shouldn't be used for a homosexual wedding. An Air Force officer was required to hide from view the Bible he once kept on top of his desk. An Air Force chaplain's video tribute to sergeants

was banned for fear it would offend an “agnostic, atheist, or Muslim.” The chaplain’s video narration said: “On the eighth day, God looked down on His creation and said, ‘I need someone who will take care of the Airmen.’ So God created a First Sergeant.”

Coast Guard Rear Admiral William Lee told a National Day of Prayer audience that Christian service members are being told to hide their faith and religious liberty is being threatened by Pentagon lawyers. Army Reserve training materials listed Evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, and Orthodox Judaism as extremist religious groups alongside Al-Qaeda and Hamas. This is especially outrageous since the Obama Administration continues to classify the mass shooting at Ft. Hood (in which 13 people were killed by Army Major Nidal Hasan) as “workplace violence” rather than admit it was a terrorist attack carried out by a radicalized Muslim.

In April, several Generals consulted Mikey Weinstein—the anti-Christian zealot dedicated to attacking men and women of any faith—to solicit his help writing Air Force policies concerning “religious tolerance.” If there’s one person whose advice the Pentagon brass shouldn’t solicit, it is that of Mr. Weinstein, a man who says the military ranks are full of “Christian fundamentalist monsters” whose evangelizing constitutes “spiritual rape,” “a national security threat,” and “sedition and treason.” After Weinstein telephoned the Pentagon to complain about a painting displayed at Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho, it was removed less than one hour later. The painting bore the word “Integrity” and the citation “Matthew 5:9” (the verse says: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God”).

Mr. Weinstein bragged to the *Washington Post* that the Defense Department expressed its willingness to ban proselytizing (i.e., evangelizing, sharing one’s faith, or spreading the Gospel) and added, “We need half a dozen court-martials real quick.” Days later, the Pentagon issued a statement to the

news media that announced: "Religious proselytization is not permitted within the Department of Defense." After reading about this alarming situation on my Facebook page, a Sergeant First Class posted the following comment: "This is why I am retiring. ... The liberals are destroying our values." One wonders how long before the radical Weinstein and his Pentagon pals find and punish this Sergeant.

These revelations highlight the fact that Obama's war on God-fearing servicemen is not only morally repugnant, but also threatens the long-term soundness of our voluntary military. Who wants to join an organization that increasingly caters to homosexuals and atheists, meanwhile denigrating Christians and traditional marriage? If you care nothing at all about the constitutional free exercise rights of our servicemen, surely you can at least see the dangers to military readiness posed by such harassment and persecution.

In April, I attended the White House ceremony at which President Obama presented Ray Kapaun with the Congressional Medal of Honor awarded posthumously to his uncle, Chaplain (Captain) Emil Kaupan. A farm boy from my congressional district in Kansas, the "Patriot Priest of the Korean Conflict" saved countless lives of fellow soldiers on the battlefield, along the death march to the Pyoktong Prisoner of War camp, and during the seven months of captivity that preceded his murder by communist Chinese guards in May 1951.

I can only imagine what Mr. Weinstein would say about the "how to witness Christianity" proselytizing clinic that Fr. Kapaun put on in the POW camp or this report of repatriated American soldiers: "He was their hero – their admired and beloved 'padre'. He kept up the G.I.'s morale, and most of all [caused] a lot of men to become good Catholics."

It speaks volumes that Fr. Kapaun had Protestants, Jews, and atheists saying the Rosary, singing the Lord's Prayer, and praying together at the Easter sunrise service he led, all in

defiance of the communist camp guards who ridiculed his devotion to faith and punished him for it. In a detailed account of the priest's life, Arthur Tonne wrote: "He has transmitted to every one of us a new appreciation of America, and a keener, more realistic understanding of our country's greatest enemy – godlessness."

When Fr. Kapaun was being carried to the "Death House" (i.e., isolation without food or water), the Muslim POWs from Turkey stood at attention to honor him. According to witnesses, Fr. Kapaun blessed the very guards who were murdering him by saying, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." President Obama should be earnestly and prayerfully seeking more such men, not forging a military where they are not welcome, or where the very actions that once earned them the Medal of Honor are now forbidden by the Commander-in-Chief.

Congressman Tim Huelskamp represents the Big First District of Kansas.

UNSUBSTANTIATED ACCUSATIONS

Bill Donohue

The Catholic Church has many teachings that touch on public issues, and it's only fair that they be subject to critical analysis. But it's hardly too much to ask that its critics substantiate their charges. Unfortunately, the tendency of the media to swing wildly became commonplace once it was learned that Pope Benedict XVI had resigned.

Take, for one example, a recent front-page story in the *New York Times*. Reporter Laurie Goodstein wrote a piece containing factual errors and blatant omissions; she also used many

sources with damaged credentials.

Goodstein claimed that Benedict “put children at risk by failing to report pedophiles or remove them from the priesthood.” This is thrice incorrect: (a) many priests have been removed from ministry under Benedict (b) children have not been put at risk and (c) pedophiles have never been the problem.

Rev. Marcial Maciel was rightly cited as “a pathological abuser and liar,” but for Goodstein to mention his name while contending that the pope never removed a molesting priest from ministry, was positively astonishing. Who does she think dumped Maciel in 2006? Moreover, the pope not only removed him, he put the entire order of priests he founded, the Legion of Christ, in receivership.

Goodstein’s claim of children being at risk under Benedict while citing pedophilia as the problem, has been undercut by many scholars, including one she cites, psychology professor Thomas G. Plante. Plante found that “80 to 90% of all priests who in fact abuse minors have sexually engaged with adolescent boys, not prepubescent children. Thus, the teenager is more at risk than the young altar boy or girls of any age.”

In other words, the scandal—which ended more than a quarter-century ago (most abuse cases occurred between the mid-60s and mid-80s)—rarely involved children. This finding is consistent with the work of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, which found that less than five percent of molesting priests were pedophiles. In almost every case, it’s been homosexual priests hitting on teenage boys, the most common offense of which has been “inappropriate touching.”

Unfortunately, for politically correct reasons, even those who honestly collect data, including Plante and the John Jay professors, are reluctant to discuss the role homosexual priests have played in molesting minors. In fairness, it’s

important to keep in mind that while most molesting priests have been homosexuals, not pedophiles, most homosexual priests have never been molesters. One reason this problem is almost non-existent today is because Benedict made it very difficult for practicing homosexuals to enter the priesthood. The results are in the numbers: in the last ten years, the annual average number of credible accusations made against over 40,000 priests has been in the single digits.

It needs to be said that the *New York Times* doesn't exactly come to the table with clean hands on these matters. Consider Mark Thompson. On November 12, Thompson took over as the president of the *New York Times* Company, following a trail of accusations that when he was BBC chief, he failed to report child rapist Jimmy Savile, the BBC icon who worked there for decades.

Thompson denies hearing of Savile's predatory behavior. Yet last September, his lawyers wrote a letter on his behalf threatening the London *Sunday Times* with a lawsuit if it ran a story implicating him in the Savile scandal.

Most astoundingly, he then claimed knowing nothing of the letter's contents! So when it comes to pointing fingers about a sexual cover-up, the *Times* should be the last to do so.

One of the most irresponsible critics of the Catholic Church on this matter is Judge Anne Burke. She is quoted by Goodstein as blaming every single cardinal for this problem. "They all have participated in one way or another in having actual information about criminal conduct, and not doing anything about it." Ideally, she should be sued for libel. But she knows that no cardinal is going to do that. So she continues to throw mud.

In 2006, Burke said priests aren't entitled to constitutional rights, and should be removed from ministry on the basis of a single unsubstantiated accusation. Anticipating criticism,

Burke said, "We understand that it is a violation of the priest's due process—you're innocent until proven guilty—but we're talking about the most vulnerable people in our society and those are children." But her alleged interest in child welfare didn't allow her to say whether non-priests should be denied their civil liberties when accused of wrongdoing.

Goodstein likes to use Terry McKiernan's name as a credible source. McKiernan is director of a website tracking abuse cases. At a 2011 SNAP conference, he said, without a shred of evidence, that New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan was "keeping the lid on 55 names" of predator priests. This is an out-and-out lie: Dolan isn't covering for any priest.

If Dolan is guilty, then McKiernan himself should be willing to disclose the names of the 55 priests, but he refuses. This is typical of him. Like Burke, he has a different standard for accused priests: in 2011 he said they should be removed from ministry before an accusation is even investigated. Not surprisingly, when the John Jay study was released, McKiernan condemned it the day before it was issued.

The last critic Goodstein cites is SNAP director David Clohessy. In the *New York Daily News*, he is quoted saying, "We're trying to keep this issue front and center." He needs to—he's broke. On February 23, SNAP sent a desperate e-mail to its donors saying, "We are barely meeting our everyday expenses."

One reason why SNAP is in bad shape is that Clohessy has had to come up with the big bucks to pay for lawyers after being sued for refusing to turn over SNAP records about his allegedly shady operations. Although he demands transparency from the Church, Clohessy refuses to disclose his own funding sources (we know that much comes from Church-suing lawyers like Jeffrey Anderson). As dishonest as they come, Clohessy was asked before a Missouri court in 2011, "Has SNAP to your

knowledge ever issued a press release that contained false information?" He didn't blink. "Sure."

For decades, Clohessy has thrown rhetorical bombs at the Church, arguing what a crime it is for anyone in the Church not to report a suspected molester. But when it comes to himself, it's a different story. In the 1990s, he knew about the predatory behavior of a molesting priest and never called the cops. That priest was his brother Kevin. This is no matter of conjecture—he's admitted it.

No one with any sense of dignity should ever seek to defend the behavior of a molester. It must also be said that when such a serious issue like this is being discussed, no one with any sense of dignity should make irresponsible charges or sweeping generalizations.

Unsubstantiated accusations aren't limited to the *Times*. Over the past several weeks, most of the big city newspapers have carried stories hurling wild accusations at the Catholic Church. Nor is the problem confined to the U.S.

On the eve of the conclave, two Australian newspapers, *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, ran a story by Barney Zwartz indicting Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney. It cited accusations by Dr. Paul Collins that Pell had "long [been] dogged" by charges of sexual abuse, thus disqualifying him as a serious papal candidate. This is a pernicious lie.

First of all, Collins is an ex-priest who resigned in 2001 after clashing with the Vatican; he has a long record of defending every dissident on a wide range of subjects. Second, Pell was completely exonerated of allegations that he abused a teenager in the 1960s. Third, Zwartz knew Pell was innocent: in 2010, he wrote that "an independent investigation by a retired non-Catholic judge cleared him." Fourth, for Zwartz to cite accusations made by SNAP, the wholly discredited so-called victims' group, showed how irresponsible he is. Fifth,

CathNews, a prominent Catholic Australian media outlet, picked up the trashy story and then had to apologize for making “unfair, false and seriously defamatory allegations against Cardinal Pell, who has worked hard to eradicate the evil of sexual abuse.”

All of this is despicable. Zwartz used an embittered ex-priest to slam Cardinal Pell, knowing full well he’d been cleared of all charges. Most distressing was the work of the Catholic media. This isn’t the first time Catholic dissidents masking as Catholic journalists have sundered the reputation of a high-ranking member of the Church, but it’s one of the most egregious. Pell was so angry he threatened to sue the culprits.

The problem with yellow journalism is that once a false story is disseminated, especially in this day and age of Internet bloggers and social media, it’s difficult to root out. Corrections are sometimes printed in newspapers, but are rarely posted by bloggers. In the case of the false stories about Catholic leaders, it’s almost impossible to correct the record: believing the worst rumors about Catholicism isn’t a hard sell these days.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *New York Times v. Sullivan* that public persons (those who are in the news), as opposed to private citizens, didn’t have the same rights for suing when their reputations were unfairly damaged. There’s a certain logic to this that’s commendable: how can there be a robust media when authors, writing about public persons, must extreme caution in what they say?

Under the ruling, people who believe they’ve been libeled must prove that those doing so knew what they said was inaccurate, and acted with malice. That’s a high bar to clear, but it protects the reporter’s right to free speech. It also plays into the hands of unscrupulous journalists who know they can get away with almost anything.

Is there more yellow journalism? Yes, but we shouldn't put too much emphasis on *Sullivan*. What explains the surge in unprofessionalism is found in our culture, not in law. Frankly, the politics of destruction—making ad hominem attacks designed to smear one's reputation—reflects our culture of radical individualism, a culture long on rights, but short on responsibilities. The social results aren't pretty.

It's important to understand the social context that gives rise to unsubstantiated accusations, but ultimately there's no excuse. The guilty know what they're doing, and they should be held accountable.

RYAN, BIDEN, AND THE BISHOPS

The following article is adapted from Bill Donohue's article on this subject that was posted on Newsmax.com on September 26.

The conventional wisdom holds that both vice presidential candidates, Rep. Paul Ryan and Vice President Joe Biden, are roughly equal in terms of their Catholic standing: Ryan is good on the life issues, but weak on social justice; the reverse is said to be true of Biden. But is it a draw? Not even close: only one of these Catholics—Biden—has been criticized, reprimanded, and sanctioned by the bishops. Make that 17 bishops.

Before detailing all the trouble Biden has gotten into with the bishops, some debunking of the conventional wisdom is in order. Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of NETWORK, a Catholic dissident organization, is responsible for much of the mythology about Ryan.

Sister Simone began her speech at the Democratic National Convention saying, "Good evening. I'm Sister Simone Campbell, and I'm one of the 'nuns on the bus.'" The fact of the matter is there were hardly any "nuns on the bus" (only two made the entire trip, and at no time were there more than six). In other words, the "nuns on the bus" story was a colossal media scam.

Sister Simone made more news when she said, "the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stated that the Ryan budget failed a basic moral test, because it would harm families living in poverty."

To put it politely, Sister Simone overreached. There was one bishop, Stockton Bishop Stephen Blaire, who wrote a letter on April 16 to two congressmen, Rep. Frank D. Lucas and Rep. Collin C. Peterson, leaders of the Committee on Agriculture, asking them to resist "unacceptable cuts to hunger and nutrition programs." Nowhere in the letter is Rep. Paul Ryan's name mentioned.

Bishop Blaire is the chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and he did speak on their behalf. But by saying on national television that the bishops had condemned the Ryan budget, Sister Simone was, in the words of theologian George Weigel, being "either woefully ignorant or willfully malicious."

After distorting the record, Sister Simone proclaimed, "We agree with our bishops." What is so remarkable about this statement is that it comes from the leader of NETWORK, a group hardly known for practicing fidelity to what the bishops say. In fact, when Sister Simone was asked at the Democratic National Convention if she supports laws that ban abortion, she took a page from her hero, President Obama, and replied, "That's beyond my pay grade. I don't know."

NETWORK was founded in the early 1970s by radical nuns professing a strong belief in social justice but no interest whatsoever in abortion. It is so radical and disrespectful of what the bishops say that it has butted heads many times with the Church hierarchy in the U.S., as well as in Rome. In 1983, it took the side of a dissident nun who refused to denounce publicly funded abortions; when the nun refused, the Vatican stepped in to force her to leave her order. The very next year, Sister Marjorie Tuite, a founder of NETWORK, was herself threatened with expulsion from her order for her pro-abortion activities. I mentioned all of this to Sister Simone on a radio show earlier this year but she refused to comment on it.

In other words, it is not Rep. Ryan who has been called out by the Vatican for his dissident views—it is Sister Simone's group.

The nonsense that Ryan's budget was condemned by the bishops was floated by Dana Milbank in the *Washington Post* on April 27, just eleven days after Bishop Blaire's letter was released. In his article, Milbank said, "the bishops sent letters to Congress" about Ryan's budget. But the link he provides is only to Blaire's letter. Similarly, on August 11, Melinda Henneberger wrote in a Washington Post blog that "the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops took the unusual step of repudiating the deep cuts envisioned in Ryan's budget"; the link is to Milbank's piece. Then on August 20, Robert P. Jones did an article for the same site saying "the bishops sharply repudiated the Ryan budget"; predictably, he linked to Henneberger's post.

The Washington Post earns an "A" for getting its talking points down with precision; too bad it fails the test for accuracy. Their grade is actually worse than this: not only is it inaccurate to suggest that more than one bishop was upset with Ryan's budget, it is intellectually dishonest not to mention those bishops who have spoken favorably about the Wisconsin congressman's work. And unlike Bishop Blaire, Ryan's

supporters mentioned him by name.

Just before Milbank got the anti-Ryan train running, Ryan's own bishop, Robert Morlino of the Diocese of Madison, wrote a column commending him. Bishop Morlino cited Ryan's "accomplishments as a native son, and a brother in the faith." In a subsequent radio interview, he said Ryan is an "excellent Catholic layman of the very highest integrity," adding that he "understands the principles of Catholic social teaching" and applies them "very responsibly."

More recently, Bishop Thomas J. Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois spoke in Green Bay, Wisconsin, saying, "Congressman Ryan is undoubtedly correct in asserting that the preferential option for the poor...does not entail 'a preferential option for big government.'" Similarly, the president of the USCCB, Timothy Cardinal Dolan of the Archdiocese of New York, has written favorably of Ryan's commitment to Catholicism.

When it comes to Vice President Joe Biden, it's a different story. To put it mildly, he has incurred the wrath of the bishops, and on more than one occasion.

Biden got into big trouble with the bishops after his infamous 2008 appearance on "Meet the Press." Tom Brokaw asked Biden if he agreed with the Catholic Church on abortion. "I'm prepared as a matter of faith to accept that life begins at conception. But that is my judgment. For me to impose that judgment on everyone else who is equally and maybe even more devout than I am seems to me is inappropriate in a pluralistic society." He also said that in the Catholic Church there has long been a "debate" on when life begins.

Following the interview, the bishops weighed in with vigor:

- Cardinal Justin F. Rigali, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Bishop William E. Lori, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Doctrine, issued a joint statement "to correct the

misrepresentations” of Church teachings advanced by Biden. Indeed, they argued that “the Senator’s claim that the beginning of human life is a ‘personal and private’ matter of religious faith, one that cannot be ‘imposed’ on others, does not reflect the truth of the matter.”

- Speaking explicitly of Biden, as well as those Catholic politicians who share his position, Bishop Samuel Aquila of Fargo, North Dakota said, “they really should not be presenting themselves for Holy Communion because it is a scandal.”
- Bishop Gregory Aymond of Austin released a statement by the bishops’ Administrative Committee, the highest authority of the USCCB outside the conference’s plenary sessions, affirming support for the position as outlined by Cardinal Rigali and Bishop Lori. “As teachers of the faith, we also point out the connectedness between the evil of abortion and political support for abortion.”
- Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput said of Biden that “I certainly presume his good will and integrity and I presume that his integrity will lead him to refrain from presenting himself for Communion.”
- Bishop Paul S. Coakley of Salina said, “Senator Biden confused the matter [of abortion] further by saying that he ‘knows when (life) begins for me,’ but that this is a ‘personal and private issue.’ That life begins at conception is a scientific fact, not a personal or subjective or philosophical or religious opinion.”
- Denver Auxiliary Bishop James D. Conley joined with Chaput in accusing Biden of “poor logic” and “bad facts.”
- Milwaukee Archbishop Timothy Dolan accused Biden of taking it upon himself to “explain Catholic teaching on abortion to the nation—and blundered badly.”
- Bishop W. Francis Malooly of Wilmington labeled Biden’s position “simply incorrect.” He said, “The Didache, probably the earliest Christian writing apart from the

New Testament, explicitly condemns abortion without exception.”

- When Bishop Joseph F. Martino of Scranton was asked what he would say to Biden, he restated his position that “No Catholic politician who supports the culture of death should approach Holy Communion.” He added, “I will be truly vigilant on this point.”
- Bishop R. Walker Nickless of Sioux City slammed Biden for using a “false argument to justify [his] cooperation with evil.”
- Boston Archbishop Sean Cardinal O’Malley complained that he finds it “disturbing when politicians and others try to dismiss us [the bishops] as people with merely an ecclesiastical or religious sectarian point of view or opinion.”
- Bishop John Ricard of Tallahassee-Pensacola said Biden’s position indicated “a profound disconnection from [his] human and personal obligation to protect the weakest and most innocent among us: the child in the womb.”
- Bishop Edward Slattery of Tulsa blasted Biden for his “erroneous beliefs” about the beginning of life and for creating a “division” between “privacy and social responsibility” that was “tenuous.”
- Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Washington chastised Biden for not recognizing that “When life begins is not a matter of faith, but a matter of science.”

These 15 bishops are not alone. Prior to the “Meet the Press” fiasco, Biden was banned by his own bishop from speaking in Catholic schools. In 2006, Wilmington Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli also intervened to stop a building that was to be named after Biden at the Catholic high school he attended. In 2008, he said that if Biden were to become Vice President, he would still be barred from speaking at Catholic schools.

Subsequent to his “Meet the Press” interview, Biden was told in 2010 by Bishop Emeritus Henry Gracida of Corpus Christi

that he “crossed the line as a Catholic” when he lobbied for a pro-abortion law in Kenya. Referring to Biden’s two aneurysms, the bishop said, “Perhaps God, who knows whether or not Biden’s brain was permanently damaged by his brain surgery, will not judge him too harshly, but the Church, which does not have that kind of knowledge should certainly speak out and reprimand him.”

The record is clear: there is absolutely no comparison between the Catholic standing of Rep. Paul Ryan and Vice President Joe Biden. Biden’s public defiance of Catholic teachings has gotten him into hot water with the bishops. Ryan, on the other hand, has never been punished by the bishops, and has indeed won the plaudits of many.

MORALITY AND MARKETS

Fr. Robert Sirico

“Freedom rightly understood is not a license to behave like spoiled adolescents but rather the noble birthright of creatures made in the image of God,” says Fr. Robert Sirico in his new book *Defending the Free Market: The Moral Case for a Free Economy*. “As long as we refuse to sell this birthright for a mess of materialist pottage, hope remains.”

Fr. Sirico, president of the Acton Institute, recently talked to *Catalyst* about how markets can be made moral, the Christian’s role in health care, and why consumerism is incompatible with capitalism.

What does it mean for a market to be “moral”?

FR. SIRICO: The human person is the center of the market so

the morality of a market is rooted in the morality of the human person. The market itself is neither moral nor immoral, but it becomes a vehicle for the moral and economic expression of the acting human person, who has the free will to choose good or bad. A moral market is therefore a market in which humans are making moral economic choices.

What does theology have to do with economics?

At its most fundamental level, economics is not about money—it's about human action. How we answer the big questions—Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is man?—has an enormous impact on every facet of our lives, including how we work and buy and sell, and how we believe such activities should be directed. Much more than numbers are at stake here: intrinsic human dignity, flourishing and rights hang in the balance. That is why our theological commitments, particularly how we understand man, influences how we think about economics.

But economists don't usually incorporate such theological commitments into their theories do they?

No, not directly. But their theological commitments are reflected in their anthropological presupposition, a view of man that I'd call *homo economicus*—economic man.

Homo economicus is the theoretical construct that appears frequently in the work of mainstream economists. Economic man is self-interested. His sole purpose in life is to maximize utility. He never stops calculating costs and benefits, and he's anxious to render these in monetary terms so they can be put on a balance sheet and bought or sold in a market. The results dictate the choices he makes in life.

While *homo economicus* serves a purpose in the economics literature, we need to be careful not to mistake this economic caricature for an accurate representation of man. In real life, people are motivated by much more than what

economists describe as “maximizing utility”—especially where “utility” is understood in narrowly materialistic terms. What might be called “the economic truth of man” is true enough, but it is not the whole truth about who we are as human beings. That is why a theological understanding of man—a Christian anthropology—is necessary for developing a truly moral economy.

How would starting with a Christian understanding of man, rather than economic man, change our approach to economics?

Any man who was only economic man would be a lost soul, a physical being without transcendence. And any civilization whose markets and other institutions were filled by such economic men would soon enough be a lost civilization. Fortunately, this is not how human beings really are. We find ultimate fulfillment not in acquisition but in developing, sharing, and using our God-given creative capacities for good and giving of ourselves to others—for love.

While this is a Christian understanding of man, it’s not just the pie-in-the-sky thinking of a Catholic priest. There is hard data to back it up. For instance, researchers have found that sudden, unearned wealth does not permanently alter one’s level of happiness. What does tend to make people happier is earned success—in other words, the feeling of accomplishment that comes with a job well done, a job others find valuable.

Failing to understand that man is more than economic man leads to major errors in addressing social problems. If we treat only the symptoms of social ills—slapping more meddlesome regulation, government spending, or targeted tax cuts onto the surface of a problem without nourishing the wellsprings of human happiness—our solutions will fail. We need the more robust understanding of man that comes from the Christian tradition.

In your book you argue that the market can do a better job of

taking care of people's material needs than can a government safety net. Can you explain what you mean?

One thing we know about markets from a wide array of economic studies is that the less taxed and regulated a society is, the more prosperous it is. We also know the material needs of people are best met in societies that are prosperous, both in terms of the abundance of economic opportunities available and the amount of superfluous wealth that can be used generously to support the needs of those unable to provide for themselves.

How would you respond to critics who claim that defending capitalism is defending "big business"?

Too often when people object to "capitalism" what they are really against is the effects of crony-capitalism—the close relationships between "big business" and "big government." I'm against this too.

Those who act from within the bureaucratic mentality are looking to conserve or advance their sphere of power and so will favor their friends and political allies. When linked to business, this dynamic in effect politicizes economics so that the businessperson is no longer attempting to serve the consumer but is attempting to increase their political power. The result is that businesses hire lobbyists to approach politicians and their representatives to curry favor in order to do business. This is not a phenomenon of markets but of politics.

Many Christians are skeptical about capitalism because it seems to encourage consumerism. But in your book you argue that consumerism actually makes capitalism "impossible over the long term." What do you mean?

Many confuse a market economy with consumerism because they see a buy-buy-buy mentality as the outcome and goal of economic liberty. But consumerism is the muddled idea that

only in having more can we be more. Consumerism is wrong not because material things are wrong. Consumerism is wrong because it worships what is beneath us.

Far from a synonym for capitalism, consumerism makes capitalism impossible over the long term, since it makes capital formation all but impossible. You can't have sustainable capitalism without capital and you can't have capital without savings. A consumer culture isn't a saving culture; it isn't a thrift culture. It's too fixated on buying the next toy to ever delay gratification, to ever save and invest for the future. If people are running around spending everything they've earned, you may have a consumerist society but you don't have a capitalist one.

Another common perception is that advocates of free enterprise are supporters of the greed and selfishness popularized by the atheist novelist Ayn Rand. Even GOP vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan has expressed his admiration for Rand. What is the attraction of her philosophy and why, as you mention in your book, is this problematic?

Since the 1940s Rand has had a strong appeal, especially to the young in search of heroes and idealism. Her idea of man is noble, and she is second to no one in defending freedom in the face of the totalitarian impulse, which she saw firsthand as she grew up in the newly formed Soviet Union. She also wrote passionately about man's creative capacity and entrepreneurial potential, and about the need for social conditions that protect man's freedom to be creative. These themes can be riveting and inspiring in Ayn Rand's novels—they inspired me when I was in my twenties. But her foundational belief in radical individualism—an autonomy that precludes social obligation and responsibility—is obviously problematic.

Fortunately, most of the people I know who read her when they are young outgrow her. I suspect that is true of Congressman Ryan too. When he talks about what he likes about Rand all his

references are to what we might call the “Good Rand.” Ryan is certainly not a “Randian.” In fact, Ayn Rand would despise much of what Ryan believes in, such as his pro-life views and his Catholic faith. It would not take a great imagination to construct what Rand would say about Ryan.

Rand rejected the Christian view of man, which holds that society consists of unique, unrepeatable humans, each made in the Image of God in such a way that each contributes something to society that no other individual could. People complement each other through their varied strengths and weaknesses so that all may survive and flourish.

In your book you discuss the role the Church played in developing hospitals and the modern health care system. How has the role of Christianity in health care changed in recent decades?

The Christian, and specifically, the Catholic influence on health care has suffered as government has taken a larger role. The establishment of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965 was perhaps the defining moment in the federal government’s becoming a permanent player in the health market. Since then the government’s participation has increased to the extent that there is virtually no truly free market for health care in the United States today. The effect has been that the role that Christian mercy once played has been replaced by anti-Christian values. By legalizing, condoning, and then subsidizing practices such as abortion and, increasingly, euthanasia, the federal government sends the message that these practices are morally permissible, and even a basic human right.

Consider the recent attacks on Catholic conscience by the Obama administration. The infamous HHS mandate that Catholic hospitals provide morally objectionable “services” such as contraception and abortion drugs is essentially a requirement that they give up their Catholic identity.

Unfortunately, the public has been slow to recognize this threat. Catholic health providers face the daunting challenge of convincing people the federal government is wrong in condoning and supporting such immoral actions. The Church will also have a difficult time continuing to provide the high quality health care that has emerged over the centuries, while attempting to avoid the federal government's backlash. The challenges that we face—and let us be clear, this involves Catholics and non-Catholics alike—and the social unrest they may cause, should highlight the importance of religious freedom and economic freedom for the preservation of a just and flourishing society.

[Back to Top](#)