

Yuval Levin Gets it Right on Embryonic Stem Cells

Today's New York Times includes an op-ed piece titled "A Middle Ground for Stem Cells." The author, Yuval Levin, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and former executive director of the President's Council on Bioethics, had this to say:

It is a simple and uncontroversial biological fact that a human life begins when an embryo is created. That embryo is human, and it is alive; its human life will last until its death, whether that comes days after conception or many decades later surrounded by children and grandchildren.

But the biological fact that a human life begins at conception does not by itself settle the ethical debate. The human embryo is a human organism, but is this being – microscopically small, with no self-awareness and little resemblance to us – a person, with a right to life?

Many advocates of federal financing for embryo-destructive research begin from a negative answer to that question. They argue that the human embryo is just too small, too unlike us in appearance, or too lacking in consciousness or sensitivity to pain or other critical mental capacity to be granted a place in the human family. But surely America has learned the hard way not to assign human worth by appearances. And surely we would not deny those who have lost some mental faculties the right to be regarded with respect and protected from harm. Why should we deny it to those whose faculties are still developing?

Frontline's "Hand of God"

Yesterday evening, the 90-minute documentary "Hand of God" aired on the PBS public affairs series "Frontline." In the piece, filmmaker Joe Cultrera explores the situation surrounding his brother being abused by a priest 30 years ago.

The Catholic League does not take issue with the documentary's theme: honest investigations into what led to and contributed to the abuse scandal do not trouble us. The problem with "Hand of God" is the disrespectful manner in which the filmmaker treats the Eucharist during a small portion of the program.

While his brother discusses the financial settlement he received from his diocese, Cultrera shows money pouring into a collection plate, intermingled with Hosts, some broken in jagged pieces. In another scene, hands are shown opening a package of unconsecrated Communion wafers. They are spilled across a table as a voice-over states, "So all this stuff. All of it. In some ways this film has been making itself before I ever picked up a camera. Layer upon layer and I am still trying to fit the pieces. The bread into the blood. The wine into the sauce."

For the movie to indict the behavior of those who contributed to the scandal is expected. However, Cultrera uses the occasion to denigrate Catholic belief in Transubstantiation. "Hand of God" could have easily been made without these attacks on the Eucharist. That it was not reveals a clear animus against the Catholic faith.

Washington Post's Harold Meyerson

On December 20, Washington Post columnist Harold Meyerson wrote, "John Paul also sought to build his church in nations of the developing world where traditional morality and bigotry, most especially on matters sexual, were in greater supply than in secular Europe and the increasingly egalitarian United States, and more in sync with the Catholic Church's inimitable backwardness."

Bill Donohue said Meyerson's statement "smacks of elitism, anti-Catholicism and racism"; his letter to the editor was published December 30.

On December 31, Washington Post ombudsman Deborah Howell labeled Meyerson's comment "a pretty broad statement."

So who was bent out of shape by Howell's slap on the wrist? MediaMatters.com. Its column of January 2 took Howell to task for mildly criticizing Meyerson. Not surprisingly, it had absolutely nothing to say regarding Meyerson's elitism, anti-Catholicism and racism.

The VA and Religion

From the Associated Press (1-10-07):

The Department of Veterans Affairs' increasing use of religion in treating ailing veterans does not violate the separation of church and state, a federal judge has ruled.

U.S. District Judge John Shabaz dismissed a lawsuit by the

Madison-based Freedom From Religion Foundation and defended the agency's practices in his decision Monday, saying religion can help patients heal and is legal when done on a voluntary basis....

The group's president, Annie Laurie Gaylor, said Tuesday it would appeal the ruling...

The lawsuit challenged the agency's practice of giving most patients spiritual assessments that ask questions about faith, such as how often they attend church and how important religion is in their lives. Agency officials say the assessments help them determine patients' needs.

The suit also targeted VA drug and alcohol treatment programs that incorporate religion, the integration of its chaplain program into patient care and the expansion of chaplain services for outpatient veterans instead of just those at VA hospitals.

The veterans' agency, which treated 5.3 million people at its facilities in 2005, acknowledged it believes spirituality should be integrated into care but said it allows patients to decide whether that involves religion.

[The judge said that] "The choice to receive spiritual care, the choice to complete a spiritual assessment, and the choice to participate in a religious or spiritually based treatment program always remains the private choice of the veteran...Accordingly, there is no evidence of governmental indoctrination of religion."

The ADL and Christmas Recess

From the Los Angeles Times (1-11-07):

Three newly elected school board members in southern Orange County want to rename the two-week winter vacation the “Christmas” recess...

Deborah Lauter, national civil rights director for the Anti-Defamation League, said she was dismayed by the trend, which she says values Christianity above other religions. “Public schools should seek to be welcoming and inclusive and respect all religions, or even those with no religion,” she said.

Greg Scott, a spokesman for the conservative Alliance Defense Fund in Scottsdale, whose attorneys have advised districts that they can call the vacation “Christmas” break, dismissed Lauter’s concerns. “It is a sad day in America when it is controversial to put Christmas on the school calendar,” he said. “It’s not leaving anybody out. It’s honoring a federal holiday.”

Glenn Beck

On January 5, CNN’s Glenn Beck invited supermodel Janice Dickinson to talk about her life and career. In the course of the discussion, she mentioned that her father was a pedophile who tried to molest her when she was young. She advised everyone who has been molested to “tell a neighbor, tell a friend, tell a priest. Not a priest, they’re all pedophiles, but tell someone.” [Our emphasis.] Beck let her off the hook by saying—with a smile on his face—“I don’t think that’s necessary.”

On January 8, Beck discussed a movie about a pedophile priest and said that tales of sexual abuse by priests “are increasingly common these days.” This is flatly wrong: most of the molesters were homosexual priests—not pedophiles—and most of the damage was done in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. The most recent data (for 2005) show that .02 percent of priests had a credible accusation made against them.

In a day and age when it is common for everyone on TV to watch their P’s and Q’s about making sweeping statements of a negative kind, the one exception continues to be Catholic priests.

Michigan Atheists’ Admission

The state director of Michigan Atheists, an affiliate of America Atheists, has admitted she mislead the public when she “claimed in a letter to Howell schools that the curriculum of the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools has been found to be unconstitutional in four states. The council’s curriculum has never been found to be unconstitutional” ([The Detroit News, 1-6-07](#)).

Newsday Strikes Again

The letter below was written by Bill Donohue is response to an article, “I’m not a racist, but...,” that appeared in today’s Newsday.

January 5, 2007

Mr. James Klurfeld

Newsday

235 Pinelawn Rd.

Melville, NY 11747-4250

Dear Mr. Klurfeld:

Randy Blazak's article about hate speech is the most politically correct piece written on the subject I have seen in some time ("I'm Not a Racist, But...", 1-5). He seems only to recognize bigotry against Jews, homosexuals and African Americans, blaming, of course, straight white Christians for everything. Like Blazak, I am a sociologist (I previously taught sociology and political science), but unlike him I do not make accusations without offering empirical evidence.

Blazak finds great meaning in the fact that one menorah was knocked down on Long Island while a Christian display was left unharmed. "Hate crimes have a defensive religious motive behind them," he writes. Too bad he didn't mention the scores of nativity scenes that were vandalized this past Christmas—some in places where menorahs were left unharmed—and then speculate as to who might be responsible. But then again, in his mind, there is no war on Christmas. Funny how the work of the Catholic League detailing this war was picked up by AP and reported in dozens of newspapers, here and abroad. Indeed, we posted a "Christmas Watch" listing on our website offering example after example.

Nor does Blazak seem to know that in his home state, Oregonians strongly rejected a referendum in 2004 approving gay marriage. In his mind, "racist skinheads" are the only ones who disapprove.

Blazak's quip that "Santa Claus has been winning the war on Hanukkah" is quite revealing. There is no Christian war on

Hanukkah, but there is a secular war on Christmas. It is not menorahs that are barred from display in New York City schools, just crèches. Interestingly, the ADL has filed an amicus brief in support of this discriminatory policy.

“Suburbs are the new battleground as straight white Christian men are told that somebody is trying to take their privileges away,” he writes. Again, more bashing—done in the name of fighting bigotry. Yup, it’s those straight white Catholics and Protestants who are the problem. Sorry—just those who are male. Moreover, it would be nice to know what “privileges” these guys have and who gave it to them. Are Asians, who proportionately have more college degrees than any other ethnic group, another example of a people who have been “privileged”? Or did they just happen to earn their success? Since homosexuals earn, on average, more than heterosexuals, can we assume that they, too, have been “privileged”? Or is it just those straight white Christian male types who have been “privileged”?

If Blazak wants to know where he can find real intolerance, I suggest he visit the faculty lounge and bring a tape recorder. Better yet, have a student record his own classroom lectures and then post it on the Internet. After all, I’m posting this letter on the Catholic League’s website.

Newsday does not enjoy a great reputation among many Catholics. Wonder why.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue
President

cc: Randy Blazak

Lou Dobbs on the Church

One can sympathize with CNN's Lou Dobbs over his anger at some Catholic officials who want a totally open-ended immigration policy, but this doesn't justify his remark of January 3rd taking the Catholic Church to task for talking about "a very secular matter." The First Amendment protects freedom of speech and religious liberty, two rights that all members of the clergy enjoy, independent of the content of their speech. Looks like Lou needs a refresher course in Civics 101.

Blasphemy Challenge

MSNBC is featuring a piece from the January 8 Newsweek about a campaign run by atheists trying to get young people to deny the existence of God. BlasphemyChallenge.com is the site of this project. "The particular form of the challenge was chosen because," the article says, "by one interpretation, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, a part of the Christian Trinity, is the only sin that can never be forgiven."

The Catholic League is delighted to learn that even atheists know which religion is the one true religion.