

# KISSLING EXITS IN ANGER

**William A. Donohue**

Frances Kissling recently stepped down as president of Catholics for a Free Choice. It was not a quiet exit. In fact, she stormed out the door in total anger. The source of her anger made me smile. You're going to smile, too, when you read this article.

"The Catholic right is uglier and meaner than anyone on the religious right," she told Joe Feurherd of the *National Catholic Reporter*. "The viciousness of the [William] Donohues, the Deal Hudsons, the George Weigels and the [Fr.] Richard John Neuhauses is soul-numbing," she said.

This was to be expected. After all, we were among her main adversaries. What was not expected, however, was her tirade against her ideological friends.

As Feurherd accurately commented, "the 63-year-old Kissling saved some of her hardest-hitting barbs for those on the religious left, particularly, but not exclusively, Catholic progressives." Like many of her ilk, she was initially excited by the founding of Voice of the Faithful, the reform group that was established in the wake of the scandal. But now she writes them off as being ineffective. She notes, quite correctly, that donations to the group have dropped year after year, leaving Voice with a "paltry number."

Kissling spared none of her friends on the Catholic left. She blasted Call to Action, the Association for the Rights of Catholics, Dignity and the Women's Ordination Conference. Indeed, she has no respect for them, saying they are so weak that "the movement doesn't exist." All of these groups have long been at war with the Catholic Church's teachings on sexuality, celibacy, ordination and the like, and all have failed to attract young people to their dissident agenda.

They're dying out, and Kissling knows it.

A new left-wing Catholic group, Catholic Alliance for the Common Good, also merited Kissling's backhand. She said the group has gotten "a free ride" from the media, making absurd claims about its role in the 2006 elections. She failed to mention that the group was quick to give John Edwards a pass after the Catholic League exposed two anti-Catholic bigots on his payroll, thus further undermining its credibility. No matter, she is right to say that the group is pure "hype."

Kissling let the Democrats have it in spades. She is furious with the Democratic party for not having the guts to trot out gay rabbis and dissident Catholic feminist theologians. In a burst of candor, she complains that the Democrats call her and say, "Do you have a nun who still wears a habit who can show up at my press conference [or] can you send me a collar?"

That's right—you just heard it from the horse's mouth: The Democrats are exploiting the issue of religion for purely political purposes. At least Kissling is more honest in her approach.

And then there are the phony Catholics who love to champion abortion rights but prefer to lie about it in public. "My experience in the progressive movement in the church is that most of the people I work with are personally pro-choice and will simply not admit it publicly. They think it will be bad for their organization and they want to continue to have ties to the hierarchy, to parishes, and they know if they come out on abortion they are going to be totally marginalized within the institution, so it's the one [issue] on which they lie the most."

Kissling even told the *New York Times* that the reason she was stepping down was because she was on the "verge of becoming boring or predictable." The reporter added that Kissling "believed that her efficacy might soon wane," thus the time

had come to pack it in. This is quite a confession: She includes herself, along with her ideological soulmates, as failing to get the job done. Too bad she didn't throw the towel in earlier—perhaps fewer babies would have been aborted.

Our side has every reason to smile. Here we have one of the most powerful pro-abortion operatives in the nation admitting that her side has failed—not just on the abortion issue, but in upending the Catholic Church. Of course, our side has every reason not to be complacent as we are still in the midst of a culture war, both inside and outside the Church. But we should never forget that if the Kisslings of this world are mad as hell at our side, then we must be doing something right. After all, it is not our side that has to lie in public about its convictions, and it's not our side that has to adopt "God talk" so as to sound religious. That's their problem.

It is highly unusual for anyone who has headed an advocacy organization for as long as Kissling has to walk out the door swinging wildly at everyone in sight. That she hates the Catholic League, and loathes the ineffectiveness of her side, is something to savor. Thank you, Frances. You've made my day. And you've made all of us Catholic Leaguers smile.