

# PROFESSORS AND THE POOR

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

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House Speaker John Boehner was selected to give the commencement address at Catholic University on May 14, and three days before the event, a letter taking him to task was released; it was signed by over 75 Catholic professors. Their complaint? The Ohio Republican was chastised for not following the teachings of the Catholic Church on helping the poor. Indeed, Boehner was painted as anti-poor.

Immediately, comments were made contrasting this letter—which did not call for Catholic University to rescind the invitation—with complaints made in 2009 when it was announced that President Barack Obama would receive an honorary degree from the University of Notre Dame. Liberal pundits congratulated Boehner's liberal adversaries for not trying to prevent him from speaking.

When I learned that Obama was going to be honored by Notre Dame, I went on TV arguing that it was entirely proper for him to speak there, but it was singularly wrong to honor him. My reasoning was quite simple: the Catholic Church teaches that abortion is “intrinsically evil,” and no president in American history has been more pro-abortion than Obama. Indeed, when Obama was in the Illinois state senate, he lobbied for a bill that would deny health care to children born alive as a result of a botched abortion. In other words, Obama supports selective infanticide.

When this issue arose, I had the opportunity to debate it on TV. My central point was that no one who is a racist, or an anti-Semite, or a champion of abortion rights, should ever be honored by a Catholic university. Liberals are with me on the first two, but always balk when it comes to abortion.

The fact is that liberal Catholics are infinitely more upset over racism and anti-Semitism than they are abortion. Consider that one of the professors who wrote the anti-Boehner letter, Stephen F. Schneck of Catholic University of America, signed a letter a few years ago defending the nomination of Kathleen Sebelius as Secretary of Health and Human Services. Sebelius was a perfect choice for Obama: she received tens of thousands of dollars from the late partial-birth abortionist, George Tiller, a man who killed 60,000 babies.

Now it would seem logical, from an ethical point of view, for a professor who is pro-poor to defend the most oppressed among us, but, of course, that is not the case. Indeed, most liberal Catholic professors whom I've known—and I've known many of them—are very sympathetic to the plight of the poor, but not the unborn.

Schneck is no ordinary liberal. He was enraged when Catholics voted with the rest of the country last November to oust liberal Democrats from office. For Schneck, this meant that the electorate had “dealt a blow” to the Church's commitment to the poor.

Of course, what most Americans objected to was the spending rampage that the president and many members of Congress were on, without yielding positive economic results. This was not a vote to crush the poor; it was a call to accountability. It must also be said that under Obama, the poverty rate has climbed to the highest level since 1994, so to defend him as the champion of the poor is not persuasive.

What was perhaps the most galling aspect of the letter was the arrogance of the professors: they not only called out Boehner for being anti-poor, they said his voting record “is at variance from one of the Church's most ancient moral teachings.” They even cited the Magisterium of the Church as its contemporary source, and charged that the House Speaker was operating either out of “lack of awareness or dissent.”

Well, this was certainly breaking news. Never before have so many Catholic dissidents pledged their fidelity to the teaching body of the Church, and never before have they indicated displeasure with dissent. If only they were believable. Sebelius, Schneck's hero, was called on the carpet by the last three archbishops of Kansas City because of her open dissent from the Magisterium. Schneck also applauded those Catholics who undermined the efforts of the bishops who campaigned against Obamacare because of its abortion provisions. Fidelity didn't seem to matter then.

The most important contribution of the Catholic Church to the amelioration of poverty is Catholic schools. Legions of poor blacks and Hispanics have become upwardly mobile precisely because of parochial education. John Boehner, a daily communicant, is the most pro-school voucher congressman in the Congress; he is the one who shepherded through the D.C. scholarship program, extending vouchers to poor blacks. And who worked against him? Obama (who sends his girls to an elite private school) and his supporters. And they call themselves "pro-poor"?

Finally, it must be said that it is a myth to believe that most government anti-poverty programs work. They do not. The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 did more to free the poor from dependency, and poverty, than any other public policy measure. And we know who lobbied against it: the same "pro-poor" professors who have demonized Rep. Boehner.