

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, 2012.

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.