

STANDING FAST FOR PRIESTS' RIGHTS

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The average detainee in Guantanamo Bay has more rights than the average accused priest in America does today. Those who doubt this to be true can begin by naming all of the left-wing activist organizations and civil libertarian groups that are defending the rights of accused priests. By contrast, accused Muslim terrorists in Gitmo don't lack for such support.

It's actually worse than this. Where are the conservative Catholic activist organizations defending the rights of accused priests? Who, besides the Catholic League, even wants to discuss the issue of clergy sexual abuse?

There are many Catholic organizations that never miss a chance to go to Rome for big celebrations. They are master cheerleaders. They are also quick to issue a statement on happy news. But when things turn south, when the going gets tough, they run for the hills. Living in the comfort zone, 24/7, must be nice. But it's not for us.

As you can see from this edition of *Catalyst*, the Catholic League has been standing fast for priests' rights. We won in the Supreme Court in Pennsylvania, and we successfully exposed the *Boston Globe* for its fraudulent study on the bishops.

It is this kind of action—getting things done instead of talking about them—that inspired the Oxford Union to invite me to partake in a debate in late February in the U.K. There will be three persons on each side: two prominent persons and one student. Unfortunately, we will not be able to report on the debate until the April edition of *Catalyst* as the event will take place after the March edition goes to press.

Debating is what I do best. I cut my TV teeth on CNN's "Crossfire" in the 1980s, and later with "Hannity and Colmes" on Fox News. PBS hosted a show in the 2000s, "Debates, Debates," where I was featured many times.

One of the greatest accolades I ever received came from Warren Steibel when he told me that I was the greatest debater he had ever seen. What he said mattered: He was the long-time producer of the PBS show, "Firing Line," hosted by William F. Buckley Jr. He told me this prior to Buckley's last panel show on "Firing Line" (I was on Buckley's team against the ACLU) in 1998.

The Brits are putting me on the defensive, which is fine by me.

"This House Believes The Catholic Church Can Never Pay For Its Sins"

That is the motion I am asked to address. Good luck to my challengers—they will fare no better than Christopher Hitchens did when we debated.

The invitation makes plain what the House thinks about the Catholic Church. Here is how the President of the Oxford Union, Daniel Wilkinson, put it to me:

"In the wake of the Pennsylvania grand jury report, the Catholic Church has once again been put under the public spotlight for its actions. Following revelations about prolific child sexual abuse and the false imprisonment within the infamous Magdalene laundries, the church has taken steps to accept responsibility for the actions of its members including public apologies, expelling priests, and limited payout programs for victims. Whilst living up to a message of repentance is something of clear importance to the Church's new leadership, critics argue that based on the scale of damage done, efforts continue to be insufficient. In light of this we ask, can the Catholic Church ever pay for its sins?"

This is going to be fun. As someone who is both an American and an Irish citizen (my mother ordered me to become a citizen of Ireland and I did not argue with her), I am tempted to ask if the Oxford Union might entertain a debate on the resolution, "The House Believes The English Can Never Pay For Its Sins Against The Irish."

I am often asked by reporters and pundits how I can defend the Church today. It's really not that hard. To begin with, I defend the Church against wrongdoers; I do not defend wrongdoing done by the Church. Secondly, unlike most people, friends and foes of the Church alike, I actually read the studies and the reports done on the Catholic Church. I also have a nose for bogus stories.

So when I read about the *Boston Globe* study on the U.S. bishops (see p. 7), I had a hunch something was amiss. Which explains why I asked to see the raw data upon which the newspaper concluded that more than one-third of current bishops are tied to the cover-up. I was denied the right to even read the transcripts of the interviews.

There are bad guys in the Catholic Church and they need to be shown the gate. But most priests and bishops should never be lumped in with them, which is why defending *most of them* is not a hard thing to do. We should never lose sight of that, even in these frenzied times.