

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS FOR HEALTH PROVIDERS

On December 18, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services issued a regulation that considerably strengthened the rights of doctors, nurses and other health care workers to practice according to their conscience; it affects those who work in federally funded health care institutions. This measure protects health care workers from being discriminated against if they refuse to perform or assist in abortions, as well as other morally contentious procedures. We were thrilled that the Bush administration pushed this along and asked President-elect Barack Obama to show prudence on this matter.

This regulation builds on the conscience rights for health care workers that was first broached in the 1970s by the Church Amendments, and later enhanced in 1996 by Congress. The December 18 regulation gives the men and women in the health care field the right to be free from discriminatory edicts invoked by those who have no respect for their conscience rights. No one in the health care field should ever be compelled by law to perform or assist in a procedure that violates his or her conscience. This should be an elementary right, yet there are those who want to trespass on it.

We have noted in the past that Barack Obama has pledged his support for the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), a bill so draconian that it would jeopardize the right of Catholic hospitals and doctors to refuse to perform abortions. The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice was so excited about this pledge that it sent him a letter calling on him to make good on this promise. If Obama does follow through on this pledge, it would lead, in the words of a Vatican official, to the "equivalent of a war."

To put it differently, if FOCA were to become law (it needs to

be introduced to the House), the culture war that the Vatican official was referring to would come to a boiling point. In practical terms, this would mean the closure of every Catholic hospital in the nation: No bishop would stand by and allow the federal government to dictate what medical procedures must be performed within Catholic hospitals.

Make no mistake about it; the bishops would shut down Catholic hospitals before acquiescing in the intentional killing of an innocent child. Were this to happen, it would not only cripple the poor who benefit from Catholic hospitals and health care, but it would cripple the Obama administration as well.

In our news release following the Health & Human Services announcement, we said it is imperative that Obama resists the appeal of pro-abortion extremists to overturn this regulation. These fanatics would literally force objecting Catholics, and others, to perform abortions as well as other morally objectionable procedures, if they could. We closed our release by saying, "Consistent with the prudence he has shown so far, Obama would be wise to ignore the zealots and allow today's regulation to stand."

We sincerely hope that Obama, who is a strong abortion-rights advocate, makes a critical distinction: it is one thing to be pro-abortion, quite another to compel health care workers to violate their conscience. Let's see what he does on January 22.

VATICAN REJECTS U.N.

DECLARATION ON GAYS

On December 10, the French submitted to the U.N. General Assembly a non-binding declaration that would decriminalize homosexuality. The Vatican opposed the document, citing its concerns over language that could impose same-sex marriage in law.

As soon as the Vatican noted its opposition to the declaration, its critics went ballistic. Italian newspapers branded the Catholic Church's position "total idiocy and madness," accusing it of being "obsessed with sin." Amnesty International weighed in against the Vatican and Time magazine branded Pope Benedict XVI "Scrooge" for resisting the French declaration. All of these boilerplate comments were off base.

When addressing the declaration, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, permanent observer of the Holy See to the U.N., made it very clear that the problem with the document was not that it seeks to protect homosexuals from being persecuted—the Church is obviously opposed to any such behavior—but that it opens the door to sanctioning gay marriage. His concerns are real: gay activists in support of the declaration already had said that this was the first step towards a binding U.N. resolution. And the problem with that is that it would ineluctably grease the slide towards gay marriage. As anyone who has seriously followed the gay rights movement would know, this is not a matter of conjecture—rather, it is part of the gay agenda.

The director of the Vatican press office, Father Federico Lombardi, also spoke to the issue. "Obviously, no one wants to defend the death penalty for homosexuals, as some would insinuate," he said. He cited the principles embodied in the *Catholic Catechism*s excluding "not only the death penalty, but all violent or discriminatory penal legislations in relation to homosexuals." What Lombardi wants, justly so,

is to maintain the “privileged place” of marriage as being between a man and a woman.

In our news release addressing the issue, we said it was time to call the Vatican’s critics’ bluff: Let them first pass a binding resolution against gay marriage before considering the French proposal.

GAY HYSTERIA OVER VATICAN U.N. POSITION

After the Vatican declared its opposition to the French declaration, the reaction among gay activists was hysterical. The following are some examples of their hysteria:

- The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation said the Vatican “brushed off accusations of supporting violence against gay[s]”
- “The Catholic General leading the dirty war” on gays is what the Rainbow Sash Movement had to say about Pope Benedict XVI
- Arcigay, an Italian gay rights group, accused the Vatican of saying “That it is normal to kill a homosexual”
- Peter Tatchell, an English activist, said, “The Holy See is so viciously homophobic” that it won’t oppose “the murder” of gays
- A San Francisco “alternative” media outlet, *beyondchron*, opined in a post that the “Vatican Doesn’t Care About Execution of Gays”
- The *bigqueer* blog said, “The Vatican doesn’t think that we

should stop persecuting, or let's just say, killing, GLBT people"

- The *daddydanforth* blog had a piece entitled "Vatican Thinks LGBTQ Are Criminals"

- The blog *ozwayssomething* accused the Vatican of "condoning those countries that impose the death penalty upon homosexuals"

- "Catholic Church Opposes U.N. Resolution to Stop Homosexual Executions" was a headline on *lesbianofcolornews*

- A story titled "Vatican Would Rather Gay People Were Executed Than Married" was posted by the National Secular Society

In addition to these slanderous remarks, three dissident Catholic groups condemned the Vatican: Dignity, Call to Action and New Ways Ministry. The anti-Catholic group, Catholics for Choice, also chimed in on the Church's decision. All of the above maliciously distorted the Vatican's position.

CHURCH-SUING DISCIPLINED

LAWYER

John Aretakis, one of the nation's most outspoken attorneys suing the Catholic Church over cases of sexual abuse, was disciplined for his behavior. He had his practice suspended for one year following a decision by the Committee of Professional Standards in Albany, New York for professional misconduct. Aretakis was accused of engaging in "frivolous conduct by making false accusations against judges" and for

“undignified and discourteous conduct degrading to the court.”

The real story here, however, is not some unethical lawyer out to rip off the Catholic Church. The real story is the way his colleagues at the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) reacted—with deadening silence. Their relationship includes more than joint protests outside Catholic churches: When Aretakis announced in April 2008 that he was running for Congress (he lost), he was introduced at the press conference by Mark Lyman, SNAP’s Capital Region Director.

We should hold SNAP officials to the same ethical standards it holds others. And by that measure, we gave this professional victims’ group an “F.” Their hero is a disgrace and so are they.

WITCH HUNT AGAINST CHICAGO ARCHDIOCESE

Prior to becoming House Chaplain, Father Daniel Coughlin was a minister to troubled priests in Chicago. Although Father Coughlin did nothing wrong, the so-called victims’ advocacy group, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), accused the priest and Chicago Archbishop Francis Cardinal George of wrongdoing.

There is no other organization in the United States that has made more wildly unsubstantiated accusations against the Catholic Church than SNAP. With its November 19 accusation that Coughlin helped conceal felonies during his time ministering to troubled priests, SNAP proved delirious once again. Although SNAP made a tough accusation, the group could not offer one iota of evidence that the priest ever broke the

law.

On November 20, SNAP claimed that Coughlin “oversaw pedophiles” during his time in charge of the troubled priests. Moreover, SNAP’s comment that “There’s no evidence that he [Coughlin] called police or warned parishioners about them” is too cute: SNAP had no evidence that Coughlin was ever in a position requiring him to call the cops or issue warnings about anything. SNAP may just as well have said there is no evidence Coughlin ever called the fire department about a church fire.

SNAP, which is largely unemployed these days given the reforms of the Catholic Church, is now pointing fingers at Cardinal George. Unfortunately, there were some in the media—like those who covered SNAP’s November 20 press conference—who gave credence to this witch-hunt. We called on SNAP to either put up or shut up. Moreover, we said it would be great if the media did a “60 Minutes” piece unmasking SNAP.

Father Coughlin and Cardinal George are great men who have served the Catholic Church with great distinction. They did not deserve this attack.

There are some Catholics who, ashamed of the scandal, feel it is wrong to criticize an organization that represents victims. Well, we are not happy with the way things were handled either, but this is no excuse for irresponsibility on the part of victims’ groups.

ROLL CALL SMEARS INNOCENT

PRIEST

On November 20, we responded to an article in the influential Washington, D.C. newspaper *Roll Call*, which smeared House Chaplain Father Daniel Coughlin; the Chicago priest has held the position since 2000.

We had always held *Roll Call* in high regard, but following this hit job on Father Coughlin, we no longer could. What the newspaper did was classic yellow journalism.

On November 19, *Roll Call* made a big splash on its website with a “Breaking News” story on Father Coughlin. The headline, “Chaplain Managed Abusive Priests,” gave the impression that Coughlin either did something illegal or something immoral. The fact of the matter is that he did neither.

In the November 20 print edition, *Roll Call* discussed how Coughlin ministered to troubled priests in Chicago. For example, it said that he played the role of “caretaker, providing services ranging from room and board to spiritual support and advocacy.” Coughlin admits to “pastoring priests” and the article mentions that he “was not responsible for overseeing the men.”

Now it seems plain that in every segment of the population there would be men and women who go astray. It also seems plain that if the communities or organizations in which these troubled souls live actually care a whit about them, services would be offered to deal with their malady. Indeed, to do nothing would suggest callous indifference to their fate.

So that was the story. Father Coughlin, before being named House Chaplain, tended to the needs of troubled priests. Instead of being smeared—which in fact *Roll Call* did—Coughlin should have been applauded.

We issued a release calling on Morton Kondracke, the executive

editor of *Roll Call*, to extend an apology not only to Father Coughlin, but to the Catholic community as well for exploiting the issue of priestly sexual abuse.

Kondracke refused to apologize, but the fact that this story died a quick death, with no follow up piece, suggests he got the message. Hopefully, he will have learned something.

NATIVITY SCENES VANDALIZED NATIONWIDE

Every year we are flooded with reports from across the nation about nativity scenes being vandalized. This year was no different.

Here is a list of some of the incidents that came to our attention:

- In Sandusky, Ohio a 50-year old figure of the Baby Jesus was stolen from a downtown park; it was found a few days later hanging from a ceiling fan in the apartment of the thief who stole it
- A Christian pastor in Loma Linda, California was beaten and left in critical condition while decorating his church
- In Orange County, Florida a Christian church's drive-through nativity scene was completely demolished by vandals
- The Blessed Virgin figure was stolen from a nativity scene in front of a home in Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Twice within a couple of weeks, the crèche in Norwood, Massachusetts was vandalized

- A Baby Jesus and manger were stolen from the Beta Sigma Phi sorority in Eureka Springs, Arkansas; the statue was recovered a few days later damaged and covered with a Hitler mustache and satanic and anti-Semitic graffiti
- A drive-through nativity built by a Christian church in Stone Mountain, Georgia was destroyed
- In Waggaman, Louisiana, a 38-year old man, accompanied by a 15-year old and an 11-year old, trashed Christmas decorations at five homes
- A 50-year old statue of a shepherd was beheaded in a nativity scene in downtown Kingsport, Tennessee
- Five figures of the Baby Jesus were stolen within a week in Cape May County, New Jersey, including one from a funeral home and another from the Cape May Courthouse
- The Holy Family was stolen from a crèche outside of a home in New Albany, Indiana
- A Baby Jesus was stolen from a Catholic church in Brookline Village, Massachusetts and found a few days later smashed to pieces
- A sheep worth \$10,000 was stolen from a nativity display in Malibu, California
- The nativity scene in front of a Christian church in Christoval, Texas was splattered with red paint
- Nativity scenes were damaged at homes in a neighborhood in Wenatchee, Washington
- Christmas decorations were destroyed and strewn over a yard in Melbourne, Florida
- Figures of the Baby Jesus were stolen from homes or churches in Fawn Township, Pennsylvania; Memphis, Tennessee; Grand

Haven, Michigan; Ashland, Kentucky; Littlestown, Pennsylvania; Valrico, California; Akron, Ohio; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Andover, New York; Somerset, Kentucky; Sumter, South Carolina; St. Charles, Illinois; Fishkill, New York; Sandy Creek, Pennsylvania; Moberly, Missouri; Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Roslyn, Washington; Lehighton, Pennsylvania; Lower Township, New Jersey; Alameda, California; Rowlett, Texas; Franklin, Tennessee; Stony Point, New York; Bismarck, North Dakota; Webster, Connecticut; Omaha, Nebraska; Paw Paw, Michigan; North Richland Hills, Texas; La Crosse, Wisconsin; Ketchikan, Alaska; Dublin, Georgia; Arlington Heights, Illinois; Fort Mill, South Carolina; Red Lion, Pennsylvania; Fort Collins, Colorado; Wichita, Kansas; and Independence Mall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

All of this was bad enough, but we got sick when we read the following by Deborah Lauter, national civil rights director for the Anti-Defamation League: "If Baby Jesus is removed, it tends to be seen as a prank. Vandalism or theft of a menorah is just more sensitive. You feel like you're really being targeted for your religion."

SOUTH CAROLINA POLITICIAN RIPS CATHOLICISM

In late November, Beaufort County Councilwoman Laura Von Harten blasted the Catholic Church for its strictures regarding the priesthood and its teachings on abortion. She took the occasion to vent at a scheduled hearing regarding a zoning request by a local Catholic church, St. Gregory the Great in Bluffton, South Carolina, that would allow it to expand. Several area residents quickly denounced her for her

comments; when the vote was taken, she recused herself.

Von Harten ripped the Catholic Church for not allowing women priests and for its anti-abortion position (what she called “uterus rights”), saying they were “an affront to my dignity and all womankind.”

When we caught wind of Von Harten’s rant, we quickly issued a statement saying: “Without the slightest provocation, Laura Von Harten decided to bash Catholicism. This suggests an animus so deep as to call into question her fitness for public service. She should do more than recuse herself on matters Catholic—she should resign from her post as councilwoman.” We ended our news release stating, “There is no legitimate role for bigots in public life.”

The good news is that Von Harten apologized and sent a statement to the Catholic League. We trust she will not offend Catholic sensibilities again. We are even more confident she will not mess with the Catholic League again.

BILL MAHER STRIKES AGAIN

On the season finale of the HBO show, “Real Time with Bill Maher,” the bigoted comedian said the following:

“A Catholic priest in South Carolina has told his congregation: If you voted for Obama you can’t receive Communion. That’s right. The cracker won’t let you get the cracker. He said supporting Obama constitutes material cooperation with intrinsic evil. Then he proceeds to pass around the plate so everyone could chip in to payoff the child f***ing lawsuits.”

Maher has a long and ugly history of bashing Catholicism, and he typically goes for the jugular. This was no exception. In this episode, he managed to mock the Eucharist, paint priests as molesters, call a priest he knows nothing about racist and seriously misrepresent what this South Carolina priest said about voting for Obama (note: Father Jay Scott Newman did not say what Maher attributed to him).

HBO would never allow a comedian to continually disparage any one of a series of highly protected classes of persons (persons protected by the politically correct police, that is). But when it comes to Catholics, it's a whole different story—they're fair game. Ironically, on the exact day Maher struck again, a survey was released showing that 61 percent of Americans believe that "Religious values are under attack in this country." It could also be said that no religious values are under more attack than those espoused by Roman Catholicism. And for that we can thank bigots like Bill Maher, and his executive friends at HBO.

KATHLEEN PARKER'S PROBLEM

In one of the most infamous articles ever written about people of faith, Michael Weisskopf called evangelical Christians "largely poor, uneducated and easy to command." He wrote that in the *Washington Post* in 1993. Fast forward 15 years to the Internet site of the same newspaper and what we had was another stab at evangelicals, only this time the goal was more wide ranging: Kathleen Parker wants to privatize religion.

Parker labeled conservative evangelicals "oogedy-boogedy" people with their "armband religion," the kind of folks that "used to be relegated to wooden crates on street corners." She

wanted to know why anyone would pay attention to such slugs, or what she called the “lowest brows” among us. Then she set her sights higher by saying that religion must be “returned to the privacy of one’s heart where it belongs.”

When Pope Benedict XVI was in Washington in April, he said, “Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted.” He was right. That’s what they do in Castro’s Cuba—they privatize religion.

Traditional Catholics, evangelical Protestants and Orthodox Jews, as well as most Mormons and Muslims, are joined at the hip in the culture war. They will continue to fight the good fight and will not be deterred by those whose inflated perch sits above the “lowest brows,” including those raised on “wooden crates on street corners.” Not only will they not recede from public life, they will bring their religious values to bear in the public square with increased vigor.

Maureen Dowd has inspired a flock of female wannabes. Whatever might be said about Dowd, at least the woman knows how to write a cogent piece. Would that her imitators, i.e. Parker, at least aspire to her level.