

STEM CELL ISSUE REACHES A HOT POINT

The day before former President Ronald Reagan died, 58 senators sent a letter to President George W. Bush urging him to permit embryonic stem cell research. The senators were now insisting that with the death of President Reagan, the issue took on greater urgency. They cited the support that Nancy Reagan has shown for this type of research.

The Catholic League cautioned against any change in the current rules even as the issue reaches a hot point. The following is the text of our remarks as sent to the media:

“Senator Orrin Hatch, an advocate of embryonic stem cell research, has said of Nancy Reagan’s support for this procedure, ‘I believe that it’s going to be pretty tough for anybody not to have empathy for her feelings on this issue.’ That’s true enough, but it doesn’t settle the issue: what ultimately matters is whether embryonic stem cell research is the intentional destruction of human life. Since every person ever born began as an embryo, and since embryonic stem cell research is predicated on the acknowledgement that embryos are human (otherwise the research would be meaningless), it is incumbent that our society not sanction it.

“The same day the 58 senators sent their letter to President Bush, Pope John Paul II admonished Americans to reject such things as abortion, same sex unions, pornography and prostitution as ‘self-centered demands’; he could easily have chosen to add embryonic stem cell research to this list. The pope, who suffers from Parkinson’s Disease, might arguably have benefited from embryonic stem cell research had it been previously allowed. But the Holy Father recognizes, as all of us should, that it is immoral for one person to have his life extended at the expense of someone else’s right to life.

“One of the senators who signed the letter to President Bush is John Kerry, a man who calls himself a ‘practicing and believing Catholic.’ Given the fact that he supports partial-birth abortion and embryonic stem cell research, it would be instructive to know when Senator Kerry believes human life begins.”

PLAYING FAST AND LOOSE WITH THEOLOGY

Recently, an article by E. Michael Jones in the February 2004 edition of his magazine, *Culture Wars*, came to our attention. What begins as a review of Roy Schoeman’s book, *Salvation Is From the Jews*, ends up as an anti-Semitic rant playing fast and loose with Catholic theology. It should be unequivocally condemned.

The first important point to note is that there is nothing in Roy Shoeman’s book that would lead one to Jones’s conclusions; Schoeman is a Jewish convert to Catholicism, and his book, published by the mainstream Ignatius Press, has won praise from reliably level-headed Catholics. The problem lies with Jones, who uses his review of the book to engage in a freewheeling polemic against Jews.

At the outset, Jones’s history is skewed: “The overwhelming majority of Jews didn’t just ignore Christ, they actively sought his death.” While it is undeniable that some Jews did seek Christ’s death, declaring that an “overwhelming majority” did is just unwarranted. This, however, is not the worst of what Jones has to say.

According to Revelation 3:9, Jones says, Jews who do not

accept Christ are the “synagogue of Satan.” “In other words, the group which was called by God to prepare the way for the Messiah, rejected the Messiah and in doing that, became over the course of the ensuing centuries, a group that defined itself as anti-Christian.” Not believing Christ was the Messiah does not entail defining oneself as anti-Christian; that assumes that Jews see so little of value in their own religion that they must define themselves against Christians. Furthermore, it paints Jews with a broad brush, ignoring regional differences as well as individual traits. That is the very definition of prejudice.

Jones goes on: “The Jews who reject Christ now prepare the way for the coming of the anti-Christ every bit as much as the faithful Jews prepared the way for the coming of the real Christ. The Jews, because of their favored position and because of their rejection of Christ, now have a special role to play in the mystery of iniquity and its history on earth.” This sounds like dispensationalist theology, an umbrella term for various Protestant systems of biblical interpretation that, among other things, severely separates God’s plan for the Jews from His plan for the community of believers. It posits that Jesus failed in His mission to the Jews, and the Church was formed more or less as a “Plan B.” It is the basis for the *Left Behind* series of novels, and is anything but Catholic. Unaccountably, Jones faults the Catholic Schoeman for not mentioning any of this.

See Jones’s next statement: “If salvation comes from the Jews who prepared the way for Christ and accepted him when he came, what comes from the Jews who rejected Christ? The answer is clear: what comes from this group is the opposite of salvation, namely, the work of Satan culminating in the arrival of the Antichrist.” Jones’s conclusion just does not follow from his premises. Again, Jones is attempting to pass off dispensationalism as Catholic doctrine. Jones has the gall to add, “The answer is not only clear; there is no other

possible answer to this question.”

Jones claims that through much of Christian history, “What happened was precisely the Jewish participation in iniquity which their pertinacious and ongoing rejection of Christ made a necessity.” He adds that “the logic is inescapable.”

Clearly, logic is not Jones’s strong suit. Is Jones asserting that there can be no righteous non-Christians? No, he is saying something even more ridiculous: that there is something inherent in the Jewish people that makes them unique instruments of evil. If that is not anti-Semitism, then nothing is. He even outrageously blames the Jews themselves for the Holocaust and pogroms: “Messianic politics has been a recipe for disaster... and the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews was a reaction to Jewish Messianism (in the form of Bolshevism) every bit as much as the Chmielnicki pogroms flowed from the excesses of the Jewish tax farmers in the Ukraine.”

Jones takes on the tone of a conspiracy theorist, noting “the Jewish/Bolshevist takeover of Russia and large segments of Eastern Europe, which in turn set up the mechanism of reaction against that reign of terror, namely, National Socialism under Hitler. That in turn led to the creation of the state of Israel, and the rise to power of the Jewish media elites in the United States, which in turn led, after over 50 years of antagonizing Islam to 9/11 and the current spate of never-ending wars in the Middle East.” In keeping with the dispensationalist tendency to interpret prophecy in terms of current events, Jones comments, “So it looks more and more like Armageddon every day now. The outline of human history seems to be taking on a more and more biblical configuration with each passing day...” In the context of “Paul Wolfowitz’s plan to march through the middle east; George Bush’s recent over the top messianic speeches in England, or Ariel Sharon showing up at the Temple Mount and inaugurating the intifada,” Jones concludes, “The contemporary Synagogue of Satan, whether

in America or Israel, now poses the greatest threat to world peace.”

The Catholic League condemns Jones’s anti-Semitism and repudiates his efforts to justify it in the name of Catholic theology. One thing is clear: there are many choice terms one can use to describe Jones’s view of salvation history; “Catholic” is not one of them.

MARRIAGE AMENDMENT NEEDED

When asked on June 25 whether the Catholic League would sign a statement of support for a Federal Marriage Amendment, league president William Donohue quickly did so. In doing so, the Catholic League agrees with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that nothing less than a constitutional amendment can stave off the radical gay rights agenda.

The specific language of the statement that the Catholic League supports, which was written by Maggie Gallagher, includes a concern for the autonomy of religious institutions. In the event same-sex marriage were to be legalized, religious institutions that do not support gay marriage may have their tax exempt status jeopardized. In addition, if the courts label marriage between a man and woman as a form of “discrimination” against gays, those who teach the Catholic faith may be accused of fomenting bigotry.

In short, there is much at stake in this hot-button election year issue.



OFFENSIVE CARTOON YIELDS APOLOGY

Editor:Mike Ritter's cartoon, depicting a bishop labeled "Vatican" holding the Eucharist over a Catholic politician while telling him to "roll over," is out of line (5/5/04). Bishops have the right to refuse Communion to those public figures who ignore core Church teachings. Ritter is dragging an internal matter of the Church—who is and isn't fit to receive Communion—onto the editorial page, where it does not belong.

Sincerely,
Joseph De Feo
Associate Director of
Communications
Catholic League for
Religious and Civil
Rights
*St. Augustine
Record (FL), 5/21/04*

On an editing note, I'm not in the habit of apologizing for political cartoons, which regularly offend one group or another. But I am sorry that a recent syndicated cartoon regarding the Catholic Church offended so many local people, who felt the cartoon could have made its point less directly. I agree.—Jim Baltzelle,
Editor, *St. Augustine Record*, 6/6/04

“I’M PERSONALLY OPPOSED, BUT...”

Beginning with New York Governor Mario Cuomo, literally hundreds of local, state and federal Catholic executives and lawmakers have said that they are personally opposed to abortion, but are nonetheless obliged to take a pro-abortion position. Cuomo’s attempt to carve out a middle ground on this issue, however, was no more successful in 1984 than it has proved to be today for presidential hopeful John Kerry. Indeed, it’s a minefield ready to explode.

Consider that when Cuomo was governor, he vetoed legislation that allowed for capital punishment because he said he was personally opposed to the death penalty. Now listen to what Kerry said on May 17 when asked why he is opposed to same-sex marriage: “I personally believe that marriage is between a man and a woman.”

So why is it that their personal belief was also their public position on the issues of capital punishment and gay marriage, but not abortion? Put differently, both Cuomo and Kerry do not believe that their opposition to these behaviors creates a church and state dilemma, even though their personal beliefs coincide with the beliefs of the Catholic Church. Yet when it comes to abortion, their positions collapse: now they feel compelled to go against their personal beliefs for fear of imposing the teachings of the Catholic Church.

This begs the question: Why is it acceptable for a Catholic politician to ratify the Church’s teaching on the death penalty and marriage but not abortion? Alternatively, why is it possible to avoid a church-state dilemma when voting to

affirm the Church's teaching on one public policy issue, but not another?

It's time that Catholic pro-abortion politicians stopped with the dishonesty. This is not a partisan issue. For example, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, as well as current New York Governor George Pataki, both Republicans, are in favor of legalizing partial-birth abortion. So are the two Massachusetts Senators, John Kerry and Ted Kennedy, both of whom are Democrats. All of these Catholics are creating a straw man, and they know it.

Here is how the Catholic League explained its position to the media: "As long as the issue is a public policy concern, and not a peculiarly sectarian interest (e.g. dietary laws), lawmakers of faith can easily reconcile their personal beliefs—grounded in an informed religious conscience—with the votes they cast. Thus, the mere invocation of a church and state dilemma does not reflexively settle the issue. What may be at play is pure politics, having nothing to do with any alleged constitutional question."

Pope John Paul II, not surprisingly, has said it best: the Catholic Church is not seeking to impose anything; rather, our goal is to propose. And that is something we are not only allowed to do, it is something we are obliged to do.

CARDINAL GEORGE REBUKES GAY ACTIVISTS

Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago, notified all his pastors in May not to give Communion to gay members of the Rainbow Sash Movement. Members of the group, who publicly

reject the teachings of the Catholic Church on homosexuality and same-sex marriage, announced that they were going to wear rainbow sashes on Pentecost Sunday at many churches in Chicago, as well as in other parts of the country.

The Catholic League rushed to the defense of Cardinal George by issuing the following press release:

“Anyone who politicizes the Mass, for whatever cause, has placed himself outside the community of faith. In doing so, such persons show nothing but contempt for the Church’s greatest prayer—the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Thus do they leave bishops and priests with little choice but to ostracize them from fully participating in the Mass.

“This is not the first time this band of homosexual extremists has sought to upend the Mass. For example, they’ve been known to stage protests at the Mass attended by U.S. bishops at their annual meeting in Washington; for this they have been turned away at Communion. Now they’re back, ready to disrupt the Mass again. Their preferred tactic upon being denied the Eucharist is to return to their pew and remain standing.

“Cardinal George is not politicizing the Mass—the Rainbow Sash fanatics are. Their goal is to exploit the Mass by turning it into a forum of dissent. That is why they have left Cardinal George with no alternative, and they know it.

“Some pundits will inevitably compare this to the decision of some bishops to deny Communion to pro-abortion politicians. But this is all the more egregious because it constitutes nothing less than a shakedown of the Catholic Church. Nothing can justify a sacrilegious mutiny, and that is exactly what this demonstration is all about.”

ANOTHER SCANDAL?

In late June, the *Dallas Morning News* ran a series of articles alleging that another scandal had unfolded: the Catholic Church was now guilty of moving molesting priests overseas. For 18 months, the newspaper tracked these runaway priests. It concluded that “Nearly half of the more than 200 cases we identified involve clergy who tried to elude law enforcement.”

Bill Donohue was asked to respond to the series in an op-ed; it appeared on June 27. It is reprinted below.

The *Dallas Morning News* deserves credit for exposing the transfer of molesting priests overseas. Molesters, be they priests or plumbers, deserve to be punished, and not put on a plane. But the series is not something most Catholics are prepared to hyperventilate about, and for good reason: the stories are mostly anecdotal and the timeline is mostly pre-scandal.

Social scientists distinguish between the episodic and the systemic. The former is unexceptional; the latter is problematic. In this regard, the series disclosed specific cases of moral delinquency, but it did not uncover a systemic pattern of delinquency. To be specific, what made the story in Boston so dramatic was the extent and depth of the cover-up; the overwhelming evidence tying senior church officials to it; and the fact that it occurred over decades. On this score, the *DMN* series pales by comparison.

If some molesting priests (almost all of whom are homosexuals, not pedophiles) were moved around locally, it is not surprising to learn that some were also moved around globally. In every case, those who authorized the transfer should be subjected to the full force of the law. But policing a religious order priest, like the Salesians, is not the same as policing a diocesan priest: the former is not under the direct

supervision of a bishop; the latter is.

The series touches on the question of why molesting priests were kept in ministry after their superiors learned of their offense. Readers should know that the advice to subject such priests to treatment—instead of kicking them out—is exactly what the Vatican was told earlier this year by a panel of sex abuse experts drawn from around the world, not one of whom was Catholic. In short, the role of the psychological community must be addressed if this issue is to be resolved.

Finally, if the transfer of miscreant priests were commonplace after the scandal broke in January 2002, then that would be cause for alarm. But since this is not the case, it is not likely the series will create the same furor.

HBO SPECIAL ON “CELIBACY” MALIGNS CHURCH

The HBO series “America Undercover” aired a special documentary, “Celibacy,” on June 28. It purported to be an examination of celibacy as it is practiced in the world’s religions. After a cursory glance at celibacy in eastern religions, it focused almost exclusively on Roman Catholicism. The overall theme was voiced at the outset: “The worldwide crisis in the Catholic Church begs many questions: Is sexual denial healthy? Or can it become something dangerous? Is there any link between enforced celibacy and an apparent epidemic of child abuse by the clergy?”

Here is what Catholic League president William Donohue said about it to the media:

“It is not for nothing that the term ‘enforced celibacy’ or ‘imposed’ is repeated constantly. By doing so, the message of coercion is made explicit. For example, we learn that the Catholic Church formally invoked the discipline of celibacy in 1139 as ‘a powerful tool for controlling its army.’ Similarly, we discover that ‘The need to suppress the most powerful drive on this planet is the key to understanding many Catholic practices and rituals.’ To drive the point home, a bloody video of self-flagellating Filipinos on Good Friday is shown.

“The viewer is also treated to the perspective of an embittered ex-priest, Richard Sipe, who asserts that homosexuals and sociopaths are drawn to the celibate priesthood, a comment that should go over big in the gay community. Moreover, stories of sexual abuse are described in graphic detail, if only to contrast them with happy tales of priests who bolted and married. Then there is Robert, a pedophile priest who admits that castration set him free.

“Finally, there is Archbishop John Foley, a Vatican official who is set up to appear foolish. After distorting the travails of Galileo, the clincher question is delivered: ‘How long will it take the Church to come to terms with the nature of human sexuality?’ The video cuts immediately to Archbishop Foley, who says, ‘I do not see any connection between mandatory celibacy and inappropriate sexual activity.’

“In short, the HBO special on ‘Celibacy’ is to truth telling about the Catholic Church what Michael Moore’s ‘Fahrenheit 9/11’ is to truth telling about the U.S.-Iraqi war. Both are masterpieces of deception and propaganda.”

J. LO DUBBED “STRICT CATHOLIC”

In June there were plenty of media reports alleging that actress Jennifer Lopez had secretly married singer Marc Anthony. What caught our eye was the way the media characterized J.Lo: she was dubbed a “strict Catholic” in over a dozen reports.

Lopez, twice divorced, was supposedly pregnant and, according to news stories, would never have a child out-of-wedlock because she’s such a “strict Catholic.” Never before had J.Lo been labeled as such. So now we know what the celebrity gossip gang thinks a “strict Catholic” looks like.