

COMMENTS ON TILLER'S DEATH

The comments below were found on the blogs of the Nation, the New Republic and NARAL following the death of Dr. George Tiller. All comments appear in their original form:

"Are you people kidding? The fetuses that Dr. Tiller aborted were going to be born without faces, or without a central nervous system. They were already dead and the mother was suffering for toxicity and shock. They were wanted pregnancies that would kill the mother or which would die almost immediately at birth."

"I am often amazed at how the 'Pro life' movement can even say they are pro life with a straight face. Most of them care nothing about life as you as I know it. They are all about imposing their stilted religious beliefs upon the rest of us in the form of laws. When I start seeing them adopt homeless street children from foreign countries, adopting children in this country, start caring about life outside the womb and start taking starvation and homelessness serious. I might actually change my mind about them. But, until that day happens their movement is misnamed. They aren't 'pro life' they are religious nuts who are stooping to terrorism as a means to an end."

"If Dr. Tiller's murder is due to his pro choice stance, hopefully anyone still on the fence about this issue will see what the other side is really like. They clearly don't have respect for life."

"To think that people who support the actions of the person who killed this fine man call themselves 'pro life!' What is 'pro life' about shooting a person in cold blood? Do these same 'pro life' persons, also, decry the needless war in Iraq, or the death penalty, or the over 30,000 people killed each year by GUNS?"

"From where I sit in my apartment, I know of at least a dozen children on 'my' block that would have been better off aborted instead of 'alive' and being abused as they are now. They have little or NO chance at a decent future and will more than likely only grow old enough to produce more unfortunates to abuse as that is about all they know."

"This just pushes me farther and farther away from organized religion and belief in a 'Big Daddy' God."

"This murder is no different from the drownings of witches at Salem or the Taliban's crashing into the World Trade Center. It is the result of religious vitriol-fundamentalist teachings that cause fear and hatred and incite violence in the name of God."

"Those who have chosen the slogan 'right to life' have made a mockery of the precious essence of human life."

"Forcing your beliefs on others is terrorism and not what we're supposed to be about in this Country."

"I am shocked, enraged, outraged over the violence in the hearts, minds, and actions of 'evangelical christian pro-life' fanatics."

"I'm Saddened by this violent senseless act by a weak and thoughtless individual sickened by the goofs and kooks who espouse hatred daily from the pulpits of our so called love connections the Christian church and many other religious organizations. These people are only happy when they can force their outdated beliefs on other weak individuals, true hypocrites to the core."

"Such events are a result of the religious right and their hateful ways that provoke these attacks. The leaders of the religious right want things like this to happen so they can progress their anti-separation of church and state / anti-gay rights / anti-women's rights agenda. Disgusting. Truly

disgusting. The extremists of the religious right? I view them no differently than I view the Taliban. Any and every American who cares about human rights, gay rights and women's rights must protest these hateful bigots. They are a threat to our national security in the same way that foreign terrorists are."

"These right wing a-holes, and the government do NOT belong in my uterus, & they have NO business with what goes on in my uterus. Only I control what happens in my uterus, & a doctor who has been in my uterus, goes in there, & does things with my consent. And THAT is between me, & my doctor!"

"The murder in Kansas shows how insane and intolerant proliferers are. Hopefully they have undone themselves with the general public with such a disgusting act..."

"We are hearing a lot about this 'heinous crime' or this 'barbarous' act in the mass media. We must now, finally, begin calling these acts what they are. They are religiously inspired acts of Christian Terrorism. They are carried out by the most extreme zealots of the Christian Taliban in America. They are enabled by any and all of the mass media and the churches in this land who claim that abortion is 'murder'. 'Faith' is a necessary (though not sufficient) cause of opposition to abortion, gay marriage, birth control, physician-assisted suicide, etc. Acts of violence against those who participate in any of these things are acts of Christian Terrorism. Christians who actually follow the teachings of their Saviour must understand and clearly face the reality that these acts are motivated by and committed on behalf of an extreme variant of their faith based on THEIR BIBLE."

HATE CRIMES BILL UPDATE

On June 16, we issued a statement examining the contention of *Factcheck.org* that the Congressional hate crimes bill does not jeopardize religious speech and does not include pedophilia as a protected class.

In 2007, when the hate crimes bill was being considered, Rep. Louis Gohmert asked Rep. Art Davis whether a minister who preached against sexual relations outside marriage could be held liable for the violent actions of someone who attributed his behavior to the clergyman; Davis did not deny that this could happen. This is what gave rise to the concerns of religious conservatives, something never mentioned by *Factcheck.org*. Moreover, while there is language in the Senate version of the bill that does afford the kind of constitutional protections that religious conservatives have asked for, it is not certain whether these caveats will be included in the final version.

Factcheck.org was correct to say that the “plain meaning” of the term sexual orientation does not include pedophilia, but it was disingenuous to imply that the fears of religious conservatives are therefore without merit. When this subject came up in April in the House Judiciary Committee, an amendment to the hate crimes bill that would have excluded pedophilia from the definition of sexual orientation was defeated by the Democrats along party lines. So why would the Democrats insist on protecting child molesters, treating them as indistinguishable from homosexuals? *Factcheck.org* did not address this issue.

In other words, *Factcheck.org* skewed the discussion, the effect of which was to make light of the concerns of religious conservatives. Those concerns are rooted in experience and are not the product of conjecture, something a check of the facts easily confirms.

The day after our statement on *Factcheck.org*, we issued another one; this time we went after U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder. The reason we came out against Holder is because he remarked that a new hate crimes bill is needed because of the recent killings in Wichita, Kansas and Washington, D.C.

Holder said, "We will not tolerate murder, or the threat of violence, masquerading as political activism." It would be more accurate to say that the U.S. doesn't need a political activist masquerading as Attorney General.

The wife of Scott Roeder, the ex-convict who killed abortionist George Tiller, said that while Roeder himself didn't think he was mentally ill, "everyone else did." Roeder's brother David agreed with this assessment.

Virginia Gerker, cousin of James von Brunn, the ex-con who killed a security guard during a shootout at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, said that her entire family believed he was mentally ill.

Roeder was never involved in any pro-life organization, and von Brunn is an old man who is as much anti-Christian as he is anti-Semitic. In other words, it is nothing if not demagogic for Holder to exploit these two recent tragedies—committed by madmen, not political activists—as a rationale to promote this highly politicized piece of legislation.

The reason why we continue to be concerned about this bill is due to the fact that we still don't have assurances that religious speech won't be punished if it passes. While it is true that the Senate version has language protecting religious speech, the House version does not. Holder should be spending his time endorsing the Senate version instead of stoking the primordial fears of Obama activists.

DOES RELIGIOUS LIBERTY EQUAL HOMOPHOBIA?

Recently New Hampshire Governor John Lynch said that he would not sign a bill that ordered same-sex marriage unless it strengthened religious provisions. Led by advocates of gay marriage, the House voted against amending the bill to insure religious liberty protections.

Helping to lead the fight for gay marriage in New Hampshire was Rep. Steve Vaillancourt. He proved why champions of religious liberty must resist gay marriage: he worked to kill the bill because it provided too much insulation for religious institutions.

In other words, it was not good enough for Vaillancourt to secure a win on gay marriage—he had to have it all. And having it all meant denying the right of religious institutions not to sanction homosexual marriage. Indeed, he said the religious liberty amendment would “enshrine homophobia into the statutes of the New Hampshire legislature.”

So this is what we have come to in America: religious objections to homosexuality, rooted in the Bible, natural law and the teachings of most religions, is nothing more than a pernicious phobia. Not too long ago, such objections simply constituted common sense.

A few days after voting against strengthening the religious provisions, language was added to the same-sex marriage bill. The new clause gained the approval of Gov. Lynch: “Each religious organization, association, or society has exclusive control over its own religious doctrine, policy, teachings and beliefs regarding who may marry within their faith.” A clause

was also added stating that a fraternal group connected to a church could refuse to participate in same-sex marriages if the group's purpose is educational or charitable.

With this language added to the bill, it passed both the House and Senate and was signed into law by the governor in early June.

HOLOCAUST PARK SHUNS POLISH CATHOLICS

Recently the City of New York authorized five new markers in Brooklyn's Holocaust Memorial Park to represent five groups of non-Jews who died in the Holocaust. The new markers that were proposed honored homosexuals, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, the disabled and political prisoners; Polish Catholics were ignored. The person behind this campaign was Rick Landman, co-chair of the International Association of Lesbian and Gay Children of Holocaust Survivors. Dov Hikind, a New York State Assemblyman whose mother is a Holocaust survivor, strongly opposed this effort.

It is an historical farce for a Holocaust memorial to not single out Jews: they were the only ethnic group that was exclusively targeted by the Nazis. To that extent, the Holocaust was a Jewish event of monumental significance. But any time Holocaust victims who were not Jewish are dismissed altogether, it is another historical farce: Polish Catholics, for example, suffered badly.

Six million Polish citizens were killed in the Holocaust—three million of them were Jews, the other three million were Catholic. Poland was the only country where the Germans gave

official death orders for any Pole who helped a Jew. And more Poles were killed for assisting Jews than anyone else in the world.

The SS did not take note of the religious affiliation of its prisoners, with the exception of Jehovah's Witnesses. But this does not justify dismissing or ignoring Catholic victims. After all, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum pays tribute to Polish Catholics, and so should all memorials.

To put all Holocaust victims on an equal plane with Jews is wrong, but it is equally wrong to pretend that Catholics, especially those of Polish descent, were not among Hitler's many victims.

HYSTERIA OVER IRISH CLERGY ABUSE

At the end of May and after nine years of investigation, Ireland's Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse published its findings. More than 30,000 children, most of them delinquents, passed through one or more of Ireland's Catholic-run institutions from the 1920s through the 1980s.

Reuters reported that "Irish Priests Beat, Raped Children," yet the report did not justify this wild and irresponsible claim. Four types of abuse were noted: physical, sexual, neglect and emotional. Physical abuse included "being kicked"; neglect included "inadequate heating"; and emotional abuse included "lack of attachment and affection." Not nice, to be sure, but hardly draconian, especially given the time line: fully 82 percent of the incidents took place before 1970. As the *New York Times* noted, "many of them [are] now more than 70

years old.” And quite frankly, corporal punishment was not exactly unknown in many homes during these times, and this is doubly true when dealing with miscreants.

Regarding sexual abuse, “non-contact including voyeurism” (e.g., what it labeled as “inappropriate sexual talk”) made the grade as constituting sexual abuse. Moreover, one-third of the cases involved “inappropriate fondling and contact.” None of this is defensible, but none of it qualifies as rape. Rape, on the other hand, constituted 12 percent of the cases. As for the charge that “Irish Priests” were responsible, some of the abuse was carried out by lay persons, much of it was done by Brothers, and about 12 percent of the abusers were priests (most of whom were not rapists).

The Irish report suffers from conflating minor instances of abuse with serious ones, thus demeaning the latter. When most people hear of the term abuse, they do not think about being slapped, being chilly or being ignored. They think about rape.

By cheapening rape, the report demeans the big victims. But, of course, there is a huge market for such distortions, especially when the accused is the Church.

NYC TO OKAY MUSLIM HOLIDAYS IN SCHOOLS; CATHOLICS STONEWALLED

In June, news broke that the Education Committee of the New York City Council had approved two new Muslim holidays, Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha, to be added to the school calendar.

On January 14, Bill Donohue testified before the very same committee requesting equal rights for Catholics: Jewish and Islamic religious symbols are displayed in the schools every December, but Christian symbols are banned.

With the exception of Councilman Tony Avella and a few others, the Education Committee showed no interest in appeasing Catholics. But its members are apparently capable of demonstrating great sensitivity to Muslims. Speaker Christine Quinn, who was raised Catholic—and who has shown no interest in the push for parity that we want—is now urging all city councilmen to vote for this new round of Muslim rights.

What's at work is the politics of multiculturalism: tolerance for some, intolerance for others. But this fight isn't over yet.

OKAY TO FUND CHURCHES OVERSEAS; NO MONEY FOR D.C. VOUCHERS

On June 4, President Obama's Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships met for the first time via conference call.

The only item of real interest to the Catholic League was the agency's commitment to extend foreign aid to such civil institutions as churches, mosques and temples. We commended them on this proposition, but noted that it smacked of hypocrisy: United States taxpayers are expected to foot the bill for religious institutions overseas but there is no money for poor kids down the block from the White House who would like to have a voucher to attend a Catholic school.

The argument that we have a Constitution to deal with at home is a canard: vouchers are not unconstitutional. Moreover, if helping civil institutions, including religious ones, is a proper goal for the U.S. to pursue abroad, why is it not a proper one to pursue at home? To be sure, constitutional issues must be respected, but the Constitution does not put a straightjacket on the right of government to offer assistance of all kinds to religious institutions. Indeed, the very establishment of this agency is testimony to this point.

In other words, if the Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships initiative is to succeed, then it must be judged by what it does at home, as well as abroad.

OBAMA PIVOTS ON CONSCIENCE RIGHTS

In his address to the 2009 graduating class at the University of Notre Dame, President Barack Obama said that he supports conscience rights for healthcare workers. “Let’s honor the conscience of those who disagree with abortion,” he said, “and draft a sensible conscience clause, and make sure that all of our health care policies are grounded in clear ethics and sound science, as well as respect for the equality of women.”

We issued a news release applauding the president’s statement and we weren’t the only ones who were grateful. Cardinal Francis George, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, commended the president’s promise to “honor the conscience of those who disagree with abortion.” He continued, “Caring health professionals and institutions should know that their deeply held religious or moral

convictions will be respected as they exercise their right to serve patients in need.” Obama’s statement also fired up U.S. Reps. James Sensenbrenner and Chris Smith who in a letter called on the president to “commit to defending conscience protections in future rule-making.” Rep. Smith made it clear that they were simply asking him to make sure “that his deeds match his words.”

Last August, the Bush administration strengthened the conscience rights of healthcare workers in a new set of guidelines issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). But in March, the Obama administration said it was going to rescind these rights. It specifically said, “The Department [HHS] is proposing to rescind in its entirety the final rule.”

As this issue of *Catalyst* went to press, no final decision has been made. But given what President Obama said at Notre Dame, it seems clear that he is prepared to rescind the decision that was made in March. For this he should be commended. We look forward to reading the revised proposal.

OBAMA CHOOSES VATICAN AMBASSADOR

In choosing professor Miguel Diaz to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, President Obama selected a man whose writings do not address such hot-button issues as abortion, embryonic stem cell research, doctor-assisted suicide and gay marriage. In that regard, it appears this was a safe choice.

It is disconcerting, nonetheless, to learn that Diaz supported Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius for the position of

Secretary of Health and Human Services. Sebelius is so extreme on abortion that she has been publicly criticized by the last three bishops of Kansas City, Kansas. Moreover, when the current archbishop, Joseph F. Naumann, asked her to name a single instance in 30 years of public service where she supported restrictions on abortion, she could not name one. Thus, his decision to request that she not present herself for Communion.

It is a lame argument to say that it is morally acceptable to promote abortion-reducing public policies while jettisoning all legal remedies. If we applied this same logic to racial discrimination, no one would regard someone who worked to reduce the incidence of discrimination while abandoning all legal strategies as a bona-fide opponent of racism. Both approaches would be demanded.

It is a sad commentary on the Democratic Party that out of the entire country they can't field a candidate to represent the U.S. to the Vatican who is unequivocally opposed to abortion-on-demand.

PBS RELIGION BAN CARRIES A STENCH

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) banned its member stations from carrying new religious TV programs; the few existing religious programs were allowed to continue.

The stated reason for censoring new religious programming went like this: (a) a ban on sectarian programming has been in place since 1985 but was never enforced, (b) PBS started to review its rules last year when the transition to digital TV

was being contemplated, and (c) PBS expressed concerns that having religious programming may imply official endorsement. None of these reasons is persuasive.

A rule that is not enforced is a non-starter, much like jay walking statutes in New York City—everyone knows that non-enforcement means that it's legal. Citing church and state concerns is also pure bunk: there is no federal law banning religious programming by PBS. As for the review being sparked by the move to digital, the record shows that more was at work than this.

In December 2005, PBS aired a few shows with mildly religious overtones that angered its anti-religious viewers. Renee Fleming sang Christmas songs in between comments about the importance of Christmas; a three-part documentary retracing the routes taken in the first five books of the Bible, "Walking the Bible," aired; a month later, a documentary with a veneer of religious trappings was shown about two troubled teenagers in rural America who pulled themselves out of poverty; and a year-end Pledge Drive feature Dr. Wayne Dyer, a self-help guru opposed to organized religion who nonetheless carries "spiritual baggage." It was after these shows aired that PBS Ombudsman Michael Getler felt the heat and the in-house conversation began.

It never takes much to push secular buttons, but caving in to the voices of intolerance is shameful. That the religious gag rule is taking place in the age of Obama is not something that has escaped our notice. The stench is unmistakable.