

OBAMA REMAINS SUSPICIOUS OF CHRISTIANITY

An exchange between President Barack Obama and author Marilynne Robinson was published in the November 5 edition of the *New York Review of Books*.

The subject was Christianity. Here is a question that President Obama asked Robinson:

“How do you reconcile the idea of faith being really important to you and you caring a lot about taking faith seriously with the fact that, at least in our democracy and our civic discourse, it seems as if folks who take religion the most seriously sometimes are also those who are suspicious of those not like them?”

If the subject were Islam, it is not likely the president would make an analogy between religion and intolerance, even though there are grounds to conclude that devoutness in the Muslim world is associated with terrorism. No, it is Christianity that worries him. He made this clear in 2008 when he connected Christianity to those who “cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who are not like them.”

Some will defend the president saying there is evidence that Christians are more intolerant of others than the unaffiliated are. In 1991, Bill Donohue reviewed all the major surveys on tolerance, beginning with the Stouffer study in the 1950s, and found that most indeed came to this conclusion. But Donohue also found that these studies never challenged verities held by secularists. To be specific, “tolerance” means “to put up with.” Given the secular bias of most social scientists, measurements of tolerance always seek to grade respondents on whether they are offended by attacks on traditional moral values. Ergo, secularists appear more tolerant—not because

they are (if they were then Hollywood would be a bastion of tolerance)—but because it is easier for them “to put up with” attacks on these moral values.

Ironically, even though Obama sat through 20 years of listening to the intolerant sermons of Rev. Jeremiah—“God Damn America”—Wright, he is no more suspicious of this brand of Christianity than he is of Islam.

POPE FRANCIS DEFENDS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Calling religious freedom “one of America’s most precious possessions,” Pope Francis pointedly embraced the efforts of American Catholics, led by their bishops, to defend religious freedom against government encroachment.

The Holy Father spoke following President Obama’s welcoming address at the White House. The president, while detailing the horrific persecution of Christians and others in various parts of the world, made no mention of domestic attacks on religious freedom being perpetrated by his own administration, such as the HHS mandate requiring religious entities to cover abortion-inducing drugs, or family-owned businesses being forced to participate in same-sex wedding ceremonies.

Pope Francis made clear that the protection of religious freedom is a vital concern to Catholics in America.

“With their fellow citizens,” he said, “American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust

discrimination. With countless other people of good will," he said, "they are likewise concerned that efforts to build a just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and their right to religious liberty. That freedom remains one of America's most precious possessions. And, as my brothers, the United States Bishops, have reminded us, all are called to be vigilant, precisely as good citizens, to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it."

OMISSIONS IN PRESIDENT'S WELCOME TO POPE

As he welcomed Pope Francis to the White House, President Barack Obama spoke eloquently about the Catholic Church's contributions to America and the world. He praised Pope Francis' "profound moral example" and thanked him for the "great gift of hope."

Yet as the president spoke about religious liberty and the dignity of the human person, there were two glaring, if predictable, omissions.

"You remind us that people are only truly free when they can practice their faith freely," the president told the pope. Then, reciting a litany of horrific persecutions of Christians and others around the world, he said, "we stand with you in defense of religious freedom."

Here in the United States, however—while we are certainly not threatened with the lethal violence that terrorizes Christians in other parts of the world—the Obama administration has itself been on the attack against religious liberty. The

Little Sisters of the Poor and other religious entities are being told they must provide insurance coverage for contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs. Catholic agencies are being forced out of foster care and adoption services because they will not place children with same-sex, or unmarried, co-habiting heterosexual couples. And family-owned businesses are being forced to participate in same-sex wedding ceremonies that violate their religious beliefs.

The president also praised the pope's commitment "to ensure that every human being is able to live in dignity—because we are all made in the image of God."

Stirring words—that ring rather hollow when we reflect that Obama is the most pro-abortion president in American history. Today, he stands with those in Congress defending taxpayer funding for Planned Parenthood, America's leading abortion provider, which has now been caught out selling the body parts of aborted babies—"made in the image of God"—for profit.

President Obama said the pope's "moral authority comes not just through words, but also through deeds." So must the president's.

POPE'S U.N. SPEECH IS WIDE RANGING

In a wide-ranging speech before the United Nations General Assembly, Pope Francis' central message was fraternity: the obligations that men and women have to each other, and to the environment.

Interestingly, he did not call for all nations in the

international community to have an equal voice; rather, he emphasized equity, or fairness. Moreover, instead of calling upon nations to expand their powers, he called for them to exercise restraint. The “effective distribution of power,” and the creation of an impartial “juridical system for regulating claims and interests,” he said, “are one concrete way of limiting power.” That he said this to an assembly of potentates was something to relish.

Pope Francis spent much time exhorting the nations of the world not to abuse the environment, for when we do, the poor suffer the most. He graphically described their condition as a “culture of waste.”

Without mentioning Islam by name, he emphasized the right to education—“also for girls (excluded in certain places).” He also condemned radical Islam, without naming it, for Christian persecution in the Middle East and disrespect for the rights of religious minorities.

The Holy Father’s condemnation of “the marketing of human organs and tissues” was an oblique shot at Planned Parenthood. By punctuating how “we recognize a moral law written into human nature itself, one that includes the natural difference between man and woman, and absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions,” he made clear his rejection of the conventional wisdom on this subject. Similarly, he railed against “an ideological colonization” which seeks to impose “anomalous models and lifestyles”; he called them “irresponsible.” This was a veiled shot at cohabitation and gay marriage.

POPE FLAGGED RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Everywhere Pope Francis went, religious liberty was his most consistent theme.

He opened his trip by addressing religious liberty at the White House, arguing that we are called “to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it.” If there were any doubt about what he meant, it was removed altogether when he made his unscheduled visit to the Little Sisters of the Poor later that day. That was a direct shot at the Obama administration’s HHS mandate.

The next day, he admonished Congress of the necessity of “safeguarding religious freedom.” At the U.N. on Friday he emphasized “religious freedom” again, calling attention to “natural law.” He saved his most extensive remarks on this subject for Philadelphia.

On Saturday, Pope Francis spoke outside Independence Hall, summoning the crowd to embrace an expansive interpretation of our first freedom. “Religious liberty, by its nature,” he said, “transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families.” Thus did he shoot down the Obama administration’s position that we should be satisfied with freedom to worship. Similarly, the pope lashed out at attempts “to reduce it [religious freedom] to a subculture without the right to a voice in the public square...” He wants a full-throated exercise of religious expression, one that is not marginalized by secular elites.

Aboard the plane on his way home on Sunday, Pope Francis was asked about Kim Davis, the Kentucky county clerk who refused, on religious grounds, to issue a marriage license to a gay couple. The pope contended that “conscientious objection is a

right—it is a human right.” He added that all human beings are entitled to human rights, including conscience rights.

The Catholic League stood with Archbishop William Lori in commending the pope for his steadfast support of a robust understanding of religious liberty.

POPE’S UNSCHEDULED MEETINGS TELL ALL

The pope made several impromptu stops and visits while in the United States: he hugged disabled children on the street; he visited orphanages; and he stopped by St. Joseph’s University. But beyond these pastoral gestures, he made two very important cultural statements: he visited the Little Sisters of the Poor and he greeted Kim Davis.

The Little Sisters of the Poor are suing the Obama administration for forcing them to sanction the distribution of abortion-inducing drugs in their health care plan. The pope’s visit was a clear rebuke of the heavy-handed tactics of the administration’s HHS mandate. Indeed, he encouraged the brave sisters to stand fast.

Then we learned that the pope met privately with Kim Davis, the Kentucky county clerk who refused, on religious grounds, to issue a marriage license to a gay couple. “Thank you for your courage. Stay strong.” These words by the pope need no interpretation. Moreover, his invocation of conscience rights as a fundamental human right can only be read as a statement against the Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage.

These two unscheduled meetings by Pope Francis should convince

everyone that he is an ardent advocate of life, religious liberty, and marriage (properly understood). He didn't have to make himself available to the Little Sisters of the Poor or Kim Davis, but he did.

Kudos to Pope Francis.

IS THE POPE'S BASE DESERTING HIM?

The Catholic and secular Left are beside themselves. They thought they owned the pope, and now they are in a state of disbelief.

Charles P. Pierce at Esquire called the Holy Father's meeting with Kim Davis "a sin against charity," and the "dumbest thing this Pope has ever done." Nice to know he acknowledges the existence of sin. But to say that it was "dumb" of the pope to meet with this heroine, or to characterize it as a "hamhanded blunder," is to seriously misread Pope Francis. He is, after all, a real Catholic, not a "pretend Catholic" (the pope recently used this term to describe the Mayor of Rome, a gay marriage enthusiast).

Pierce was so despondent with the pope that he said the Davis meeting "undermines his pastoral message, and it diminishes his stature by involving him in a petty American political dispute. A secret meeting with a nutball?" It would be more accurate to say that the meeting elevated the pope's stature with real Catholics. Not surprisingly, Pierce did not see calling Davis a "nutball" as "a sin against charity."

Gay activist Michelangelo Signorile ripped the pope as "a more

sinister kind of politician,” one who “secretly supports hate.” Signorile has a reputation of being quite open about his brand of hate speech, so that may account for his aversion to secrets. It drove him mad that the pope broke bread with this courageous woman, which is why he said the meeting “is only encouraging the bigots.” By “bigots” he meant practically every man and woman who ever walked the face of the earth, up until the day before yesterday.

Bless the Holy Father for being so inclusive that he reached out to Kim Davis. If the “pretend Catholics” who consider themselves his base get nasty, they will be answered by the Catholic League.

ACLU’S CATHOLIC HOSPITAL FIXATION

The ACLU’s passion for abortion is matched only by its hatred of Catholicism. When these two enemies—unborn children and the Catholic Church—come together, the ACLU kicks into high gear. This explains its recent lawsuit against Trinity Health: its hospitals refuse to perform abortions. Two years ago, the ACLU filed suit against the bishops’ conference in a similar case; it was dismissed in June.

What accounts for the ACLU’s obstinacy? It’s due to two things: ideology and money. The ideological reasons extend back to its founding: in 1920, it listed all the rights mentioned in the First Amendment save for religious freedom. This was no accident. Roger Baldwin, the founder, was an atheist who grew up in an anti-Catholic home (he told me this in June 1978 when I interviewed him in his home in New York

City). Promoting abortion is not only a sincere conviction, it pays handsomely. Just read its hysterical fundraising letters.

Moreover, of the last 20 statements made about the Catholic Church on the ACLU's website, 16 deal with healthcare issues; the other four address cases involving gays. These days it leaves most of the fights over religious expression to atheist groups and their ilk. By contrast, it concentrates on the big prize—forcing Catholic hospitals to kill kids.

The ACLU is part of MergerWatch, a coalition of organizations dedicated to winning the big prize. It was co-founded by Frances Kissling, formerly of Catholics for Choice, a dummy group funded by the Ford Foundation and other elites; these same foundations grease MergerWatch. Interestingly, MergerWatch is located in the same building that houses *Commonweal*, the dissident Catholic magazine. Both are clients of the Interchurch Center: on its website it boasts that it is “affiliated primarily with its tenant agencies, many with which it co-sponsors events and programs.”

NEW YORK TIMES SCREWS UP BADLY

Anyone can make a mistake, but when five reporters from the *New York Times* are assigned to one story, and they screw up the facts, it makes one wonder what is going on. The two principal writers, Jim Yardley and Laurie Goodstein commented on the pope's unscheduled visit to the “Little Sisters of Charity.” Wrong. Pope Francis met with the Little Sisters of the Poor.

These same reporters said that the pope “never mentioned same-

sex marriage" in his speeches in Philadelphia. Wrong again. Speaking about marriage, the pope cited the "unprecedented changes" that we are faced with, specifically warning about the "social, cultural—and sadly now juridical—effects on family bonds."

What in the world did the Times reporters think he was talking about when he mentioned the "juridical" effects on the family? "Until recently," the pope said, "we lived in a social context where the similarities between the civil institution of marriage and the Christian sacrament were considerable and shared. The two were interrelated and mutually supportive. This is no longer the case." Is it not clear what he meant?

Goodstein, along with two other reporters, also wrote a skewed story about the homosexual scandal. "The scandal has hardly died down in the United States," she wrote. In fact, the scandal ended 30 years ago: most of the abuse took place between 1965 and 1985. She cited one gay priest [as always, she does not identify him as gay, yet his victims were 14-year old males] who was recently convicted of abusing Honduran teenagers. She did not mention that in the last five years there have been 6.8 credible allegations made against approximately 40,000 priests. No institution has a better record than that. Nor does she mention that it is in the public schools and Orthodox Jewish community where the problem is most acute these days.