

**Time magazine addresses a fundamental issue:  
Priests Spar Over What It Means to Be Catholic**

by Amy Sullivan, with reporting by Jeff Israely, from Rome

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The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church traditionally couch even the harshest disagreements in decorous, ecclesiastical language. But it didn't take a decoder ring to figure out what Rome-based Archbishop Raymond Burke meant in a late-September address when he charged Boston Cardinal Seán O'Malley with being under the influence of Satan, "the father of lies."

Burke's broadside at O'Malley was inspired by the Cardinal's decision to permit and preside over a funeral Mass for the late Senator Ted Kennedy. And it has set the Catholic world abuzz. Even more than protests over the University of Notre Dame's decision to invite President Barack Obama to speak, disputes over the Kennedy funeral have brought into the open an argument that has been roiling within American Catholicism. The debate nominally centers on the question of how to deal with politicians who support abortion rights. Burke and others who believe a Catholic's position on abortion trumps all other teachings have faced off against those who take a more holistic view of the faith. But at the core, the divide is over who decides what it means to be Catholic. ...

Friends of O'Malley's say the cardinal was stunned by the criticism. The 65-year-old O'Malley is temperamentally Burke's opposite, a shy man who dislikes celebrity and shuns politics — a major reason he was appointed to the sensitive post in Boston. With his full beard and preference for wearing the brown robe of a Capuchin friar, the man who goes by "Cardinal Sean" is not easily identified as a Prince of the Church. When O'Malley received his red hat in 2006, he persuaded some friends to go out for a late-night snack in Rome after a long day of ceremonies. But he ran into some trouble when he tried to return to his quarters. The Vatican guards didn't believe that the casually attired man who smelled of pizza was a newly minted Cardinal.

Though he has presided over the difficult task of closing parishes and schools within the archdiocese, O'Malley is well liked in Boston and the broader Catholic community. He celebrated his inaugural Mass in Boston at a Spanish service, and he once joked that his scarlet Cardinal's robes would come in handy if Dick Cheney ever invited him to go hunting. O'Malley, however, should not be mistaken for a liberal member of the hierarchy. He is a conservative on matters of doctrine, and for the past few years, he has been the face of the church's opposition to Massachusetts' gay-marriage law.

But O'Malley did not hesitate to push back against the uproar that surrounded the Kennedy funeral. In a Sept. 2 post on [CardinalSeansBlog.org](http://CardinalSeansBlog.org) — he is the only Cardinal with a blog — O'Malley wrote, "In the strongest terms I disagree" with those who believe Kennedy did not deserve a funeral Mass. "We will not change hearts by turning away from people in their time of need and when they are experiencing grief," he continued. "At times, even in the Church, zeal can lead people to issue harsh judgments and impute the worst motives to one another. These attitudes and practices do irreparable damage to the communion of the Church."

It was the first time a Cardinal had directly and publicly challenged the Burke position. O'Malley's statement was followed by another from Bishop Robert Morlino of Madison, Wis., who lamented that "the death of Senator Kennedy has called forth at least an apparent rejection of mercy on the part of not a few Catholics." It was inevitable that Burke would emerge to fire back. At a Sept. 18 dinner in Washington sponsored by the conservative media outlet Inside Catholic, Burke declared that "neither Holy Communion nor funeral rites should be administered to [pro-choice] politicians." The audience gave Burke a prolonged standing ovation.

The American hierarchy has been divided before, most recently in the 1990s by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's argument that abortion is not the only issue in the "seamless garment of life" that Catholics are called to promote. But the current debate, which is expected to surface again when the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) holds its general meeting later this month, is the bitterest yet. A minority faction of bishops had hoped Pope Benedict XVI would lead the way in punishing those who dissent from church teaching. His preference for avoiding the political fray has both frustrated them and emboldened them to act on their own.

The question now is whether the Vatican will move again to muzzle Burke. When he criticized Washington Archbishop Donald Wuerl last spring during a videotaped interview, he was forced to apologize less than 24 hours after the video aired. In early September, the bishop of Scranton, Pa. — a Burke protégé — abruptly resigned after a stormy tenure and was not reassigned. Veteran Vatican watchers took it as a sign that some Burkean antics — such as threatening to refuse Vice President Joe Biden Communion and disparaging the USCCB — would not be tolerated.

Rome has been silent about Burke's most recent public statements. In late September, O'Malley was named to the Pontifical Council for the Family, a minor and expected appointment, but also a reminder that the Boston Cardinal has friends in high places. "From the point of view of doctrine, Benedict has absolute firmness," says a Vatican insider. "But he does not want to see it play out in a confrontational way." ...

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