

This rather long collection begins with a meditation on slander, by John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., a professor of philosophy at St. Louis University. It appeared in *America* magazine.

...Slander has emerged as a new genre for the Internet. I'm sure I am not the only one receiving "forward it on" e-mails from people alarmed at the coming downfall of our country, often with allusions to Hitler as a precursor to our present president. Whatever our political leanings or fears for the future may be, let us hope that there is not someone out there who, having been seduced by slanderous innuendo, really thinks Barack Obama is as bad as Bin Laden and as tyrannical as Hitler. It is painful to consider what could happen in the face of such imagined tyranny. And let us pray that such actions are not inspired by John Wilkes Booth or Timothy McVeigh, with their shared motto, "sic semper tyrannis." If a terrible assault on the president should occur, will Christians who advanced the slander of him be contrite? And will those of us who were silent be shamed?

[RTE News from Ireland reports on Bishop Walsh.](#)

[Walsh seeks female ordination debate](#)
November 14, 2009

The Papal ban on discussing the ordination of women has been challenged by Bishop Willie Walsh of Killaloe.

Bishop Walsh called for the debate on women priests in an interview with RTÉ News following an address to the Association of European Journalists in Dublin.

He said he would love to see another Pope John XXIII opening up discussion, particularly of exclusion.

The Bishop expressed sadness about his Church excluding homosexuals and refusing the Eucharist to couples in second unions.

Bishop Walsh recalled that Christ deliberately included people shut out by the religious authorities of His time.

He also urged discussion of mandatory priestly celibacy.

Earlier, Bishop Walsh challenged a lesser Vatican rule that almost completely excludes Protestants from its Eucharist.

He said he had never suggested to Church of Ireland members that they were not welcome to receive the sacrament in his churches.

The next two articles by Tony Equale can be found in their entirety on his blog at <http://tonyequale.wordpress.com/>

negating the via negationis

Duns Scotus' attack on the "way of negation" in knowing God, represents what must be recognized as the "majority opinion" that dominated Church practice throughout most of its history. It highlights the fundamental thrust of Western Christian religiosity (as opposed to Eastern): the West was invested in saying "God" was knowable. Aquinas taught that we can only say what God is not. Scotus' demolition of this via negationis reduces any corrections in our statements about "God" to the mere acknowledgement of super-eminence. It's either that, Duns says, or else we have to admit we don't know God at all. He dismisses "the way of negation" as fundamentally an admission of no-knowledge ... and then proceeds to reduce "analogy" to either super-eminence or no-knowledge. And by super-eminence he means that it is sufficient to say, for example, that "God is infinitely wise" and the word "infinitely" is enough to cover any scruples one may have about the inadequacy of applying "wise" to "God." Of course, the possibility that "no-knowledge" might be the only right answer was not even considered, despite the mediaeval enthusiasm for the apophatic doctrines of Pseudo-Dionysius. This was, after all, the Church. What would happen if it could not speak about "God"? ...

[Also by Tony Equale.](#)

AVOIDING THE "G" WORD

The "G" word, of course, is "God" and I avoid it by calling it "the Sacred." I am loathe to call it "God," not because I am not talking about "God," but because the word "God" has been so thoroughly corrupted with anthropomorphic imagery that I lose my bearings every time I use it. I may be wrong, but I suspect the same is true for everyone. The imagery appears to have a life of its own, and absolutely impervious to thought. Any attempt to redefine it fails. Increasingly I believe that those who claim I am trying to trick them, while they appear to not understand, simply have not been able to let go the imagery about "God" that dominates our imagination. So any mention of "the Sacred" as a substitute for "God" actually has the opposite effect: it conjures up the very "God" I would expunge from our imagination, as if "let in through the back door."

Perhaps "the Sacred" is not the best term, but at least it's a start. It gets us away from the "G" word. It is not yet loaded with the baggage of "providence" and "person," "almighty" and "all-knowing," "divine will and command, reward and punishment" — ancient metaphors that have been taken literally for so long that now it's impossible to understand them as symbols. We are so utterly mesmerized by our traditional images that we can't even understand what anthropomorphism means and why its prohibition must be taken seriously. The warning that instructs us to say that God is not a person rather than to say "he" is, is simply unintelligible to most people. It is ignored and dismissed as theological mumbo-jumbo and we continue blithely to relate to a dangerous puerile product of our collective imagination. ...

[Daniel O'Rourke writes an open letter to the President. It appears in its entirety in *The Observer*, Dunkirk, NY, on November 12.](#)

The Observer, Dunkirk, NY, 11/12/09

Dear President Obama,

I know you're getting many recommendations on Afghanistan. Democrats and Republicans, Generals and politicians, liberals and conservatives are giving you advice. I'm about to add mine.

I'm pleased you're taking your time. This is the biggest decision of your presidency -- and a crucial decision for our country. I was proud to see you at the Dover Air Force Base in the pre-dawn darkness welcoming home the body of Army Sergeant Dale Griffin and at Fort Hoot on Tuesday honoring the fallen there. Please think of them and all who are dying in Afghanistan when the Generals urge you to send more troops.

Pay no attention to former Vice President Cheney who is accusing you of "dithering." He has a short and selective memory; you'll remember that he was greatly responsible for abandoning the war in Afghanistan because of his obsession with Iraq. As the columnist George Will observed, it's too bad we didn't have a little more "dithering" before Cheney and his neo-cons invaded Iraq.

Moreover, don't let Senator John McCain snooker you with the analogy about the success of the "surge" in Iraq. That succeeded not only because we sent more troops, but also because the Sunnis were tired of Al Qaeda's terror against them. We bought Sunni allegiance with money and weapons. That won't work in Afghanistan. Very few Al Qaeda are there and the Taliban, are mostly unified at least against us. The Taliban won't be bought off like the Sunnis.

Furthermore, don't be painted into a corner because of your August 2009 statement that Afghanistan was a "war of necessity." Be big enough to admit that mistake.

...don't look for consensus among your advisors and give us a half-baked compromise. You can't kick this can down the road. Mr. President. It will eventually detonate costing us even more lives. Instead remember the history of Afghanistan and Vietnam -- and remember Dale Griffin's flag-draped coffin.

Sincerely,
Daniel O'Rourke

Leonard Swidler, Ph.D., S.T.L., LL.D., LL.D., Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue, Co-Founder and President, Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church, writes to Episcopalian clergy and their spouses.

November 11, 2009

We, the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church (ARCC), wish to extend a warm welcome to our brothers and sisters of the Anglican/Episcopal communion who are clergy and spouses, as well as laity, discerning the call to become members of the Roman Catholic Church under the recently announced Apostolic Constitution.

As committed and enthusiastic Catholics working for the renewal of the Church in the spirit of the Second Council of the Vatican (Vatican II), we recognize the primacy of an

informed conscience in making your discernment and decision, To that end, we wish to offer the following observations, that you may be informed of the realities in the Roman Catholic Church of which you may choose to become a part.

You bring an experience of collegiality and subsidiarity at the parish and diocesan levels which, provided you are allowed to retain its practice, will bring a strong complement, even as it stands in polar opposition, to the top-down authority structure of the Roman Catholic Church, where collegiality and subsidiarity function only haphazardly, and almost exclusively at the international level.

You will find yourself members of a Church rich in the liturgy that flowed from the authentic conciliar tradition of Vatican II.

You will find yourself in a Church where at least 39% of marriages now take place across denominational lines, and where truly interchurch couples (who continue to worship together as much as possible in both their Christian traditions) offer an imperfect but real preview of the anticipated unity for which Christ prayed.

If you are a priest, you will find yourself a member of a Church where your Anglican/Episcopal priesthood, exercised with fidelity over the years, is considered “absolutely null and utterly void.” You will be required to question the validity of your earlier ordination and then seek re-ordination within the Roman Catholic Church.

If you are a priest, you will find yourself in a Church where, if your wife dies, you will be called to be celibate, and forgo for the rest of your life the joy and solace of a loving spousal relationship.

You will find yourself members of a Church where at least 60% of its members are in favor of married clergy and the ordination of women, and 45% are welcoming of gay and lesbian unions.

You will find yourself likewise in a Church which defines homosexuality as an objective disorder, yet where some 20-30% of the clergy (bishops, priests and deacons) have that orientation.

You will find yourself in a Church with a rich variety of theologies and practices, some of which you will be in agreement with, while others will be difficult for you to accept, yet all of which are held under the banner of the Roman Catholic Church.

Should you accept all these things, and in conscience believe that the offer of priestly ordination within the Roman Catholic Church is from God, then we will warmly welcome you, for you will have accepted the Church as it is, rather than the sentimental or imagined Church of integrity which some would have you believe.

[Mike Sweitzer-Beckman proposes a new theology of divorce.](#)

Tom Roberts, NCR editor at large, recently wrote about an upcoming document from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops on marriage, and the threats to marriage . The threats ranged from cohabitation to same-sex partnerships, to birth control pills,

condoms and other forms of artificial contraception. There is a lot to question here given what sociology, biology and 21st century experience contribute to the dialogue. The threat to marriage that I would like to think more about is divorce.

Here is what Roberts reports about what the bishops have to say about divorce: Divorce is a reflection of original sin, "which disrupted the original communion of man and woman," the document states. Acknowledging that the stresses of modern life and ordinary disagreements and quarrels that occur can jeopardize marriage, the bishops urge "couples in crisis to turn to the Lord," as well as to programs and ministries offered by the church, for help in solving problems.

This all sounds well and good on paper. But what happens when a couple turns to the Lord and is led to getting a divorce in order to live a happier life?

My parents were married in the Catholic church in 1976, about a year out of college. They had me three years later and my sister two years after that. In the mid-1980s, my parents separated for six months and then moved back in together. We all went to church every week, and my parents both taught CCD classes. They participated in church programs and ministries, including hosting a woman from Nicaragua who needed medical attention in the United States. By the late 1990s, even after countless sessions of counseling as a couple and a family, they just weren't very happy together. Looking back, none of us were going to be able to reach our potential for happiness in life on this earth. They got divorced near the end of my junior year in high school.

My dad got remarried about a year later, and my mom took her time and got remarried last year. Neither of them got married in the church for the second time. That doesn't mean that the people present, including the Protestant minister, couldn't see that love existed here. A wonderful addition to my life in the past decade a stepbrother to cheer on at tennis and a stepsister to bond with. We didn't exactly have the same childhood and I am a bit older, but I've embraced having them as part of my family life. It's not what the church imagined for family vacations but it seems to work fine for all of us.

The pastor at my childhood church was not very supportive of their situation. I haven't talked to them too much about it, but I imagine it would be about as easy for them to hear how they should have remained married from a celibate man as much as it would be for a priest to take advice on the particularities from his job from someone who has never done it. For me, as a child of divorced parents, there has always been a real disconnect between the documents that the bishops' conference produces on divorce and who writes them. I wouldn't recommend that anyone writes policy initiatives for a country they have never visited, and I wouldn't recommend anyone comment on marriage and divorce without the experience of living it.

I know that the stat that floats around is that 50 percent of marriages in the United States ends in divorce. I have no official confirmation, but various studies on the Internet point to it being similar for Catholic marriages as the rest of the population. What this shows me is that it doesn't matter if you are married in the Roman Catholic church or if you are married on the courthouse steps downtown -- there is a chance that your life and the life of your spouse will change so much in the coming years and you will decide it is better to go your own ways. In my mind, it doesn't matter how much preparation you have, how many people you date before you land the person you think is just right -- life will continue to happen after the wedding day and unravel in ways that we as humans

cannot ever fully predict nor comprehend.

The bishops' approach to dealing with divorced couples is disheartening. I have a friend whose mom was married in the church, endured years of domestic violence, and got divorced. She is now remarried and happy. Would God have wanted her to stay in that first marriage, continue to endure abuse, and not find happiness in another unitive, procreative relationship where she and others involved could more fully feel God's love? She attempted to file for annulment of the first marriage, but it meant having to recount all the times she was abused in order to complete the paperwork. It wasn't worth it. It's not that she's not committed to the church -- she still attends daily Mass and doesn't participate in the Eucharist. She's continued to play by the rules. I'm sure she'll approach the pearly gates, and God will forgive her for not filling out some paperwork -- and I imagine if God doesn't forgive her, it will be because she never sinned in the first place for getting out of this marriage and finding one where she could live God's call.

In another case, a friend of mine got married in his 20s, and after about five years, his wife became unfaithful. It was a devastating blow to their marriage, and they both agreed that they were better off going their separate ways. She wanted to be with another man, and he never wanted this experience in marriage. Over a decade later, while earning his Masters of Divinity degree with hopes of working at a Catholic church doing youth ministry, he met a new love of his life. He attempted to get the first marriage annulled. His first wife was happy to participate in the process of filling out a lot of paperwork (and writing checks for filing fees of several hundred dollars). He respected the church's process at the time, and it helped him to more deeply analyze his first marriage. The local tribunal rejected the filing, saying that he didn't fully prove that love never existed in the marriage (anyone who gets married to someone they love can tell you that you can't disprove that at a later date -- you have to go with what you know at that time). The tribunal told him that he could always appeal the process -- and pay hundreds of dollars more -- but he figured out what he needed to from this process. He is now happily remarried outside the church, raising a kid, and working at a Catholic church as a youth minister. However, he will probably never fully participate in Church life again -- until, I imagine, when he passes on, and God deals with him appropriately (or doesn't deal with him at all since it's possible he made no mistakes in God's eyes).

There needs to be a new inclusion in the theology of divorce that more fully allows divorced Catholics to articulate their faith. I imagine that the bishops do solicit opinions and support for their documents on marriage and other moral issues. However, I don't think that they solicit the opinions of my friend's mom and my friend, who want nothing more than to fully participate in the church but decided they found more fulfillment through love in their lives elsewhere.

[Another article, this one from Father Delmar S. Smolinski, J.C.L., S.W.L., discusses the canonical role of married priests in the Catholic Church.](#)

A state of emergency occurs in the Church when there is a threat against the continuation or the essential activities of the Church. At this time in the history of the Catholic Church, a shortage and unavailability of celibate priests has caused emergency situations regarding the Christian faithful's constitutive (Baptismal) "right to be assisted by their Pastors from the spiritual riches of the Church, especially by the word of God

and the Sacraments" (Can. 213). A reversal of this shortage of celibate priests and its consequent emergency situations is quite unlikely for the future. In fact, most studies and prognoses of the vocational picture for the celibate priesthood (including those sponsored by the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops) indicate that the crisis will only grow worse in the years ahead, resulting in increasingly fewer opportunities for Christ's faithful to celebrate the Sacraments, as well as fewer and older celibate priests to serve increasingly larger numbers of the faithful. The merging or closing of parishes generally is not an acceptable answer to the crisis from the viewpoint of local faith communities. Accordingly, such pastoral emergencies call for the emergency kinds of sacramental administration that are permitted by the Code of Canon Law, such as In cases of "danger of death" (Can. 976 and Can. 883:3), "necessity or genuine spiritual advantage" (Can. 844:2), "reasonable cause" (Can. 1003:2), "grave inconvenience" (Can. 1116 and Can. 1323:4), and "just reason" (Can. 1335). Perhaps unknown to some, the Christian faithful do not need further permission to act in order to fulfill their pastoral needs in emergencies. Empowerment to act lies within the emergency Canons themselves, which flow from what must always be the supreme law of the Church: the salvation of souls (Can. 1752).

PERTINENT CANONS

Can. 292, which is concerned with restricting the right of a priest to exercise the power of orders (i.e. to administer the sacraments) is a merely ecclesiastical law (a man-made disciplinary law) of the Roman Catholic Church. Can. 1037, which requires the obligation of celibacy for priests, likewise is a merely ecclesiastical law. Such laws are of human origin and can be altered or eliminated by human initiative in view of the changing pastoral circumstances of Christ's faithful. Can. 213 which expresses the right of the faithful to receive assistance from the sacred Pastors out of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the Sacraments, is of divine origin through Baptism in Jesus. Such a law is constitutive (essential) for the baptized and cannot be altered or eliminated by human initiative. It likewise is correct to say that fulfillment of such a law must not be neglected by those who serve as Pastors in the Church. Under the circumstances caused by a shortage of celibate priests, Can. 213 has priority over Cans. 292 and 1037. This is the reasoning and logic behind other canons which deal with the needs of Christ's faithful in emergency situations, such as Can. 976 which allows a priest without faculties to hear confessions in danger of death, even with an approved priest present, or Can. 883:3 which allows any priest to administer Confirmation likewise in danger of death, or Can. 1003:2 which allows any priest to administer the Anointing of the Sick for a reasonable cause, or Can. 1116 which calls for the presence of another priest or deacon in a Marriage celebrated before witnesses only, when the presence of or access to an authorized minister is impossible without grave inconvenience. This is the reasoning and logic likewise behind Can. 844:2 which allows reception of Penance, Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick from any validly ordained minister (not just those of the Orthodox Church, as some would interpret), whenever necessity requires or spiritual advantage suggests it. This is the reasoning and logic also behind Can. 1335 which allows Sacramental ministry even by a censured/suspended priest who may have married without formal ecclesiastical permission, whenever the faithful make such requests out of necessity or for any just cause. Finally, this is the reasoning and logic behind Can. 1323:4 whereby a person cannot be penalized when he/she has violated a merely ecclesiastical law or precept, who acted out of necessity or serious inconvenience in regard to matters that are not intrinsically evil or harmful to souls. Regarding Can. 843:1 which is about sacred ministers not being able to refuse the

Sacraments to the faithful, it seems reasonable and logical that asking for the Sacraments from a validly ordained, married Roman Catholic priest, out of spiritual need, when no celibate priest is available, is a request that is as opportune/appropriate as can be. After all, the Sacraments are the Christ-instituted, sine qua non means for accomplishing the sanctification of humankind now (Can. 840), not in the afterlife. Some, from their canonical perspective, feel obliged to defend the status quo with a more restrictive and less generous interpretation of the above canons on pastoral needs in emergency situations. The problematic consequence of such a defense, however, is a failure to fulfill the demands of Can. 213 regarding the constitutive right of Christ's faithful to the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the Sacraments. From the laity's perspective, it is like offering your car to a friend to get to the store for groceries, while simultaneously withholding the ignition key. Whether the authors of the 1983 Code of Canon Law realized the full implications of their product or not, utilization of the canons therein by the Christian faithful via married priests is certainly in keeping with Can. 1752 which states that the supreme law in the Church must always be the salvation of souls. Sometimes, perhaps especially in pastorally transitional times, we have to reply along with Peter and the Apostles: "Obedience to God (fulfillment of need for Sacraments) comes before obedience to men (singular method of ministry that is no longer effective) (Acts 5:29). We ought also to keep in mind this statement of Canon Law Professor Ladislav Orsy, SJ, of the Catholic University of America, when he addressed the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome in 1992: (Theologians) "must intuit and determine the values that the community needs to sustain its life and growth . . . The ecclesial vocation of canon lawyers is to be trustees of the values necessary for the life of the community, and to be administrators of the process by which the community can appropriate them." The *sensus fidelium*, the actual, Spirit-led, pastoral experience of local Christian communities of faith is a true *locus theologicus-canicus*, a genuine and indispensable source of learning theology and producing appropriate canon law.

DEVELOPING PASTORAL LAW

Pope Paul VI, on November 20, 1965, in an address to the Pontifical Commission for the revision of the Code of Canon Law stated that Canon Law must be accommodated to the new manner of thinking (*novus habitus mentis*) in accord with Vatican II, which stresses very much pastoral ministry. Canon Law must, therefore, consider the new needs of the people of God. The celibate priest shortage has created new needs among the Christian faithful - married priests are being asked by the Christian faithful to respond to their new needs. The preface of the Latin Edition of the 1983 Code of Canon Law states that "To foster the pastoral care of souls as much as possible, the new law, besides the virtue of Justice, is to take cognizance of charity, temperance, humanness. And moderation, whereby equity is to be pursued not only in the application of the laws by pastors of souls but also in the legislation itself. Hence unduly rigid norms are to be set aside and rather, recourse is to be taken to exhortations and persuasions where there is no need of a strict observance of the law on account of the public good and general ecclesiastical discipline." Jesus' word to John was, "Anyone who is not against us is with us." (Mark 9:39). These principles and directives of Pope Paul VI and the Code Preface are precisely what a growing number of married priests (Worldwide there are over 100,000 married priests, over 20,000 in the USA alone.) are following and implementing in their response to the pastoral-Sacramental needs of Christ's faithful. This contemporary experience of Christ's faithful is of no small significance, because throughout the history of the Catholic Church practice leads to custom and custom leads to law-a living law both generated and received by the faithful to realistically meet their

spiritual needs. The signs of the times call for listening with open mind and heart to Bishop Lawrence Burke, SJ, of Nassau, Bahamas, who delivered a pertinent message to the 1990 World Synod of Bishops in Rome on the formation of priests: "Although it is easier to achieve unity through uniformity, the challenge facing the Church today is to achieve unity through legitimate diversity. The temptation to centralize and control must be avoided. We should learn from the history of the Church. The role of bishop and priest developed as the needs of the people of God changed. There have been different theologies and different models of priesthood throughout the centuries. At one time the emphasis may have been juridical, at another time it may have been cultic, at still another time it has been monastic or pastoral. Clearly, diversity and adaptation have been staple features in the history of the priesthood. Priesthood exists to serve the Church, not the other way around. We cannot be complacent with static notions of the priesthood while thousands of Catholics throughout the world are in need of evangelization and the sacraments. The Church should not just lament the incursion of the sects, but must herself take some responsibility for that incursion. Have not our fixed notions of the priesthood and of who should qualify as priests contributed to this undesirable situation? People are spiritually hungry, and where the Church fails to provide leaders and sustenance for the flock, the flock will seek nourishment wherever it finds it...."

CONCLUSION

In view of a shortage and unavailability of celibate clergy, the use of married priests to provide pastoral-Sacramental ministry to Christ's faithful is a measure that is valid, lawful, and appropriate for our time. Perhaps just as important, the return of a married priesthood ministering to the faithful, side by side with a celibate priesthood, in the third millennium of Christianity, is a pastoral development and wholesome balancing whose time has come. St. Paul put it well: "As your co-workers we beg you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For God says, 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, on a day of salvation I have helped you.' Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!"(2 Corinthians 6:1-2)

The two following articles can be found in their entirety on the Time magazine Web site. They were produced in cooperation with CNN.

Nov. 08, 2009

Priests Spar Over What It Means to Be Catholic

By Amy Sullivan

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.

...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."

There are other signs that the word has gone forth, at least for now. In years past, the annual Red Mass held the Sunday before the U.S. Supreme Court's term opens has been so heavily steeped in pro-life rhetoric that Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg now declines to attend. This year's service, however, featured a homily by the new chair of the bishop's pro-life committee that included only the subtlest of references to abortion. More striking was the image of Biden taking Communion without incident.

[With reporting by Jeff Israely, from Rome](#)

May. 03, 2008

Is Liberal Catholicism Dead?

By David Van Biema

He may not have been thinking about it at the time, but Pope Benedict, in the course of his recent U.S. visit may have dealt a knockout blow to the liberal American Catholicism that has challenged Rome since the early 1960s. He did so by speaking frankly and forcefully of his "deep shame" during his meeting with victims of the Church's sex-abuse scandal. By demonstrating that he "gets" this most visceral of issues, the pontiff may have successfully mollified a good many alienated believers — and in the process, neutralized the last great rallying point for what was once a feisty and optimistic style of progressivism.

The liberal rebellion in American Catholicism has dogged Benedict and his predecessors since the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65. "Vatican II," which overhauled much of

Catholic teaching and ritual, had a revolutionary impact on the Church as a whole. It enabled people to hear the Mass in their own languages; embraced the principle of religious freedom; rejected anti-Semitism; and permitted Catholic scholars to grapple with modernity.

But Vatican II meant even more to a generation of devout but restless young people in the U.S. Rather than a course correction, Terrence Tilley, now head of the Fordham University's theology department, wrote recently, his generation perceived "an interruption of history, a divine typhoon that left only the keel and structure of the church unchanged." They discerned in the Council a call to greater church democracy, and an assertion of individual conscience that could stand up to the authority of even the Pope. So, they battled the Vatican's birth-control ban, its rejection of female priests and insistence on celibacy, and its authoritarianism.

Rome pushed back, and the ensuing struggle defined a movement, whose icons included peace activist Fr. Daniel Berrigan, feminist Sister Joan Chittister, and sociologist/author Fr. Andrew Greeley. Its perspectives were covered in *The National Catholic Reporter*, *Commonweal* and *America*. Martin Sheen held down Hollywood, and the movement even boasted its own cheesy singing act: the St. Louis Jesuits. The reformers' premier membership organization was Call to Action, but their influence was felt at the highest reaches of the American Church, as sympathetic American bishops passed left-leaning statements on nuclear weapons and economic justice. Remarks Tilley, "For a couple of generations, progressivism was an [important] way to be Catholic."

Then he adds, "But I think the end of an era is here." ...

[It's never too late to embrace ethical consistency.](#)

Political Intelligence: GOP jettisons abortion coverage from own insurance

Posted by Foon Rhee, deputy national political editor November 13, 2009

The GOP is doing its darndest to quickly move on from an embarrassing revelation -- that even as congressional Republicans insist that the health care overhaul does not cover abortions, the national party's own health plan covers elective procedures. Late Thursday night, the Republican National Committee acknowledged that its health plan, as far back as 1991, included some coverage for elective abortion. Chairman Michael Steele instructed the RNC's director of administration to opt out of any coverage for elective abortion services in its health insurance policy, the party said.

"Money from our loyal donors should not be used for this purpose. I don't know why this policy existed in the past, but it will not exist under my administration. Consider this issue settled," Steele said in a statement.

The situation was first reported by Thursday by Politico, which cited two sales agents for Cigna who said that the RNC's policy covered elective abortion and that the RNC didn't opt out of abortion coverage when given the opportunity.

Abortion has emerged as a key issue in the health care debate after the bill approved by the House last weekend included a provision that would ban a new government-run public insurance plan from offering coverage and that would also bar private insurers that accept federal subsidies from doing so.

Supporters, including Republicans, say the provision preserves the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits the use of federal money for abortions, except in cases of rape, incest, or danger to the life of the mother. But opponents say the provision goes far beyond that and would result in many women either being denied coverage or having to pay more. From Boston.com a service of the Boston Globe

The following Letter to the Editor of *The New York Times*, appeared on November 14.

Abortion and the Health Care Debate

Re "A Victory in Health Care Vote for Opponents of Abortion" (front page, Nov. 9):
In his speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association on Sept. 12, 1960, John F. Kennedy said, "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act."

It is quite ironic that 49 years after Kennedy had to reassure some conservatives that as president he wouldn't be beholden to the Roman Catholic Church, it is now conservative Democrats themselves who appear to be openly beholden to the Catholic Church. J.F.K. went on to say: "I do not speak for my church on public matters, and the church does not speak for me. Whatever issue may come before me as president — on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling or any other subject — I will make my decision in accordance with these views, in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates. And no power or threat of punishment could cause me to decide otherwise."

It is a shame that some Democratic members of Congress aren't able to display the same political courage.

Mark Abramowitz
Pittsburgh, Nov. 9, 2009

WHEN IT comes to America's most famous Catholic family, no true compass guides the Roman Catholic Church.

After Ted Kennedy's death, that's clearer than ever.

Cardinal Sean O'Malley presided over the funeral of the world-famous US senator, who also happened to be an abortion rights advocate. When challenged by conservative Catholics, O'Malley defended his participation as a way to promote civility when discussing divisive issues. O'Malley also used the occasion to lobby President Obama, telling him that Catholic bishops would not support a health care reform plan that includes a provision for abortion or could open the way to abortions in the future.

At a graveside ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, Cardinal Theodore A. McCarrick read aloud the letters exchanged between the dying senator and Pope Benedict XVI. In his letter, Kennedy listed the ways in which his public policy views mirrored the social teachings of the church. "I have always tried to be a faithful Catholic," he wrote.

The pope's response was polite, if tepid. It reflected the ambivalence of a pontiff who knew the ways in which Kennedy's views did not mirror church teachings, but did not want to point them out to a dying, yet still powerful, man. But now there's no such reluctance when it comes to Kennedy's son.

With Patrick Kennedy, the cassocks are off.

After Representative Kennedy of Rhode Island questioned why the church is vowing to fight any health care bill that does not explicitly ban the use of public money for abortions, Bishop Thomas J. Tobin of Providence fired back. Tobin called Kennedy's support of abortion rights "a deliberate and obstinate act of will" that was "unacceptable to the church and scandalous to many of our members."

In a radio interview, Tobin went on to say, "If you freely choose to be a Catholic, it means you believe certain things, you do certain things. If you cannot do all of that in conscience, then you should perhaps feel free to go somewhere else."

It's an echo of what happened in 1975, when the bishop of Fall River denounced Ted Kennedy for supporting *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

The intersection of faith, politics, and power has always been a complicated part of the Kennedy legacy. To persuade voters to elect him as America's first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy had to declare political independence from Rome. Yet over the decades, personal ties remained strong between the church and the Kennedy family. Rose Kennedy, the family matriarch, was highly religious. In his memoir, "True Compass," published after his death, Ted Kennedy recounts how he received his first holy communion from Pope Pius XII in Rome.

The late Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston was a close family friend. He married Jack Kennedy and presided over his funeral, long before abortion became part of the national debate.

More recently, Kennedy family access to the church turned into an issue for Joseph P. Kennedy II, when the then-Massachusetts congressman sought to annul his marriage in 1993.

The Archdiocese of Boston granted the annulment, leading Kennedy's former wife, Sheila Rauch, to write a book "Shattered Faith: A woman's struggle to stop the Catholic Church from annulling her marriage." She wrote that the family's influence made it possible to treat a 12-year marriage as if it never existed. The annulment was eventually overturned.

When the Boston Archdiocese was rocked by the clergy abuse scandal, Ted Kennedy said his thoughts on whether Cardinal Bernard Law should resign were private. When

Law finally resigned, Kennedy said, “Cardinal Law made the right decision. Today is a new day.”

The fight between Patrick Kennedy and the Providence bishop signals the start of another new day.

Echoing his father’s letter to the pope in which Ted Kennedy acknowledged human imperfections, Patrick Kennedy wrote his own letter to Tobin, saying “I embrace my faith which acknowledges the existence of an imperfect humanity.”

Responded Tobin: “Sorry you can’t chalk it up to ‘imperfect humanity.’ ”
For the church, the time for comfort and civility is over. That’s using the compass of expedience.

The preceding appeared on the Boston Globe Web site and was written by Joan Vennoch.

Please send your comments and your articles to tony@tonyercolano.com