

Remember to refer back to the September 2008(3) edition for the lead article that suggests some issues to consider before you vote on Election Day.

Last week, Christopher Buckley -- son of the conservative William F. Buckley Jr. -- endorsed Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama. Mr. Buckley revealed Tuesday that, as a result of his endorsement, he has resigned his position at a right wing magazine.

"We seem to be living in a time of arteriosclerotic orthodoxy. It's hardened so that if you deviate, you're a deviant," Mr. Buckley said. "A lot of the fun has gone out of it. I mean, gee whiz."

He's talking about America. It would have been easy to be confused by the vague antecedent.

When, in the past, voices have been raised in favor of universal health care, of revamped infrastructure, of enhanced education or of raising the minimum wage, a chorus of alarmists have chanted, "Where will the money come from?" But give us a trillion-dollar war or a trillion-dollar bailout of a failed system and, presto, the money is there for the taking.

John F. Kavanaugh
From America Magazine
October 20, 2008

In an article by David Willey, BBC News, Rome, a 106-year-old voter announces that she will vote for Obama

Sister Cecilia Gaudette, who last voted for President Eisenhower in 1952, has registered to vote and says she will vote for Democrat Barack Obama.

Although hard of hearing, she keeps herself informed by reading newspapers and watching TV at the convent.

"I'm encouraged by Senator Obama," she says. "I've never met him, but he seems to be a good man with a good private life. That's the first thing. Then he must be able to govern," she adds.

Sitting in her modest office in the convent where she has lived for the past 50 years, the diminutive nun appears uninterested in the row inside the American Catholic church over Senator Obama's support for pro-choice policies on abortion.

Asked about her hopes for the US under an Obama presidency, she says: "Peace abroad. I don't worry about the Iraq war because I can't do anything about it. Lord knows how it will end."

"It is very complicated," she said. "Those Eastern people are not like we are."

But despite taking part in the 4 November election, Sister Cecilia does not intend to return to the US.

"I have no plans for the future. I am too old to go back to the US. Life has changed too much."

But she still watches "very important events" on TV. The election comes under this category.

'U.S. bishops damaging rich Catholic faith tradition'

By Lisa Sowle Cahill

Published: October 16, 2008

Commentary

... Abortion is a moral tragedy for Catholics and many Americans. But when the Catholic church is perceived to be cheerleaders for one political party a rich faith tradition is badly damaged and loses its prophetic voice. Bishops should correct Catholic politicians who misrepresent Catholic teaching on life and justice issues in public interviews.

Religious leaders offer an important contribution when they address the values at stake in our political decisions and play a critical role in challenging the narrow ideologies of both parties. People of faith should never be asked to check their religious beliefs at the voting booth. But when clergy mistake their role as pastors and spiritual teachers by making tacit endorsements, a tenuous line has been crossed.

The Catholic church has a long tradition of speaking about the perils of preemptive war, the obligation to pay workers living wages and the dangers of unfettered free-market capitalism. Franklin D. Roosevelt drew heavily from Catholic social thought in shaping his New Deal agenda, which advanced minimum wages, labor standards and economic policies that challenged monopolistic concentrations of wealth.

U.S. bishops issued influential statements in the 1980s challenging Cold War nuclear proliferation. In our own era, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops warns against unjust war, promotes the dignity of all immigrants, recognizes health care as a human right and calls for an end to capital punishment. Along with abortion, the U.S. bishops' election year statement also says racism is an intrinsic evil and identifies torture and the targeting of noncombatants as acts that can never be justified.

The bishops follow the late Pope John Paul II in promoting 'the art of the possible' and recognize a variety of approaches to build a culture of life. In fact, research shows that abortion rates fall dramatically when pregnant women have economic and social supports that offer real choices.

At a time of profound economic crisis, understanding the connection between poverty and abortion takes on even greater urgency. Both Democrats and Republicans can support common ground efforts to prevent unintended pregnancies and help make it easier for women and families to choose life. Pro-life and pro-choice members of Congress have supported the 'Pregnant Women Support Act' and other legislative efforts to do just this by expanding health-care services for low-income women, beefing

up adoption programs and addressing the root causes of why women have abortions.

Catholics are the quintessential swing voters and have picked the winner of the popular vote in the last nine presidential elections. In a few weeks, Catholic voters in several battleground states may once again be the decisive factor in this election. Catholic clergy should reaffirm their essential role as moral leaders, and leave partisanship behind.

Lisa Sowle Cahill is a professor of theology at Boston College and a past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

October 9, 2008

OP-ED COLUMNIST - NEW YORK TIMES

Can This Be Pro-Life?

NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

The Bush administration this month is quietly cutting off birth control supplies to some of the world's poorest women in Africa. Thus the paradox of a "pro-life" administration adopting a policy whose result will be tens of thousands of additional abortions each year — along with more women dying in childbirth.

The saga also spotlights a clear difference between Barack Obama and John McCain. Senator Obama supports U.N.-led efforts to promote family planning; Senator McCain stands with President Bush in opposing certain crucial efforts to help women reduce unwanted pregnancies in Africa and Asia.

There is something about reproductive health — maybe the sex part — that makes some Americans froth and go crazy. We see it in the opposition to condoms to curb AIDS in Africa and in the insistence on abstinence-only sex education in American classrooms (one reason American teenage pregnancy rates are more than double those in Canada). And we see it in the decision of some towns — like Wasilla, Alaska, when Sarah Palin was mayor there — to bill rape victims for the kits used to gather evidence of sex crimes. In most places, police departments pay for rape kits, which cost hundreds of dollars, but while Ms. Palin was mayor of Wasilla, the town decided to save money by billing rape victims.

The latest bout of reproductive-health madness came in the last couple of weeks when the U.S. Agency for International Development ordered six African countries to ensure that no U.S.-financed condoms, birth control pills, I.U.D.'s or other contraceptives are furnished to Marie Stopes International, a British-based aid group that operates clinics in poor countries.

The Bush administration says it took this action because Marie Stopes International works with the U.N. Population Fund in China. President Bush has cut all financing for the population fund on the — false — basis that it supports China's family-planning program.

It's true that China's one-child policy sometimes includes forced abortion, and when traveling in rural China, I still come across peasants whose homes have been knocked down as punishment for an unauthorized child. But the U.N. fund has been the most

powerful force in moderating China's policy, and a State Department team itself found no evidence of any U.N. involvement in the coercion.

Mr. Bush's defunding of the U.N. Population Fund — backed by Senator McCain — has persisted since 2002. What is new is the extension of that policy to a leading private family-planning organization like Marie Stopes International. "The irony and hypocrisy of it is that this is a bone to the self-described 'pro-life' movement, but it will result in deaths to women who just want to space their births," said Dana Hovig, the chief executive of Marie Stopes International. The organization estimates that the result will be at least 157,000 additional unwanted pregnancies per year, leading to 62,000 additional abortions and 660 women dying in childbirth.

That may overstate the impact. Kent Hill, an official of the U.S. aid agency, insists that there will be no increase in pregnancies because the American contraceptives will simply be routed to other aid groups in Africa.

That will work to some degree in big cities. But it's a fantasy in rural Africa. Over the years, I've dropped in on a half-dozen Marie Stopes clinics, and in rural areas there's typically nothing else for many miles around. Women in the villages simply have no other source of family planning.

"This nearsighted maneuver will have direct and dire consequences," a group of prominent public health experts in America declared in an open letter, adding that the action "will translate almost immediately into increased maternal death and disability." Proponents of the cut-off are not misogynists. They are honestly outraged by forced abortions in China. But why take it out on the most impoverished and voiceless people on earth? Mr. McCain seems to have supported Mr. Bush, mostly out of instinct, and when a reporter asked him this spring whether American aid should finance contraceptives to fight AIDS in Africa, he initially said, "I haven't thought about it," and later added, "You've stumped me."

Retrograde decisions on reproductive health are reached in conference rooms in Washington, but I've seen how they play out in African villages. A young woman lies in a hut, bleeding to death or swollen by infection, as untrained midwives offer her water or herbs. Her husband and children wait anxiously outside the hut, their faces frozen and perspiring as her groans weaken.

When she dies, her body is bundled in an old blanket and buried in a shallow hole, with brush piled on top to keep wild animals away. Her children sob and shriek and in the ensuing months they often endure neglect and are far more likely to die of hunger or disease.

In some parts of Africa, a woman now has a 1-in-10 risk of dying in childbirth. The idea that U.S. policy may increase that toll is infuriating.

Fr. Richard McBrien says one-issue bishops actually violate their own teaching

Bishops who make a case for one-issue politics or openly oppose a political candidate are in violation of the guidelines set out repeatedly in their own documents on political responsibility, said noted theologian Fr. Richard McBrien in a recent talk here.

McBrien of Notre Dame University, author of a number of major works on Catholicism, including the recently published *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism*, was speaking to an overflow, mostly Catholic audience of several hundred at a Unitarian Church in Kansas City, Mo. His talk was hosted by a group of lay Catholics who run a speaking forum called "Topics to Go."

In his talk, McBrien listed five Catholic principles, taken from Catholic teachings, that he said can be applied to the current political process.

1. Although bishops and other Catholic officials have the constitutional right to participate in public policy debates and in the political process generally, they impose certain limits upon themselves as a matter of prudence.
2. Catholic voters and their bishops should examine the positions of the candidates on the full range of issues as well as their integrity, philosophy and performance.
3. Catholic voters and their bishops must not forget the distinction between moral principles and their application in the political order. It is possible to agree on an important moral principle and yet disagree, in good conscience, on the way that principle is applied in the political order.
4. Because there is a distinction between the moral law and the civil law, Catholics and others—Christians and non-Christians alike—cannot expect that every element of the moral law, as they understand it, can or should be translated into civil law.
5. Given the principle of sacramentality, in the final analysis the most effective way for the church and its members—or for anyone—to influence public policy is by force of their own example.

McBrien cited a statement by the Administrative Board of the United States Catholic Conference issued in March 1984 titled, 'Political Responsibility: Choices for the '80s.' In that statement the bishops wrote that they "specifically do not seek the formation of a religious voting bloc; nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing candidates."

He said that following a 1984 attack by Cardinal John O'Connor on then Democratic vice-presidential candidate Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro from the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral, the bishops added the words "or opposing" after the word "endorsing." This has been the policy of the U.S. bishops since, having been re-affirmed in statements of 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007.

He cited last November's election policy statement, which reads: "The consistent ethic of life provides a moral framework for principled Catholic engagement in political life and, rightly understood, neither treats all issues as morally equivalent nor reduces Catholic teaching to one or two issues. ... Catholic voters should use the framework of Catholic

teaching to examine candidates' positions on issues affecting human life and dignity as well as issues of justice and peace ...”

McBrien noted that the U.S. bishops' policy was most recently reiterated in a letter to The New York Times that appeared Sept. 24, written by Bishops William Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., and Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, N.Y.

The letter made the point that the bishops do not teach that abortion is the only issue, but that it is an issue of high moral importance, which nevertheless must be seen within the context of 'the whole teaching of the church on justice and peace, serving the poor and advancing the common good ...”

In a question and answer period, on a different subject, he asked the audience to imagine a scenario in which President Bush “were in office for life and that he had the authority to make appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court and throughout the federal court system at will, without even a U.S. Senate to hold hearings and vote on the nominees.”

“That's exactly what Pope John Paul II -- or any other pope for that matter -- was able to do in his long term of office, and that is why the Catholic church finds itself today -- and especially during the height of the sexual-abuse crisis in the priesthood -- with such a dearth of pastoral leadership.”

McBrien said John Paul's greatest failing, as pope, were the bishops he named. “Men were appointed bishops or promoted within the hierarchy on the basis of loyalty to the Holy See rather than on the basis of pastoral aptitude, theological sophistication and leadership skills.”

FROM: Robert Blair Kaiser

RE: Don't Let the Bishops Swing the Election – Again!

I really resent the few U.S. bishops who are now engaged in a campaign to swing the election for John McCain -- as they did for George W. Bush in 2004.

Four years ago, Archbishops Charles Chaput of Denver and Raymond Burke, then of La Crosse, Wisconsin (Burke has just left St. Louis to take a post in the Vatican) succeeded in bringing Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) into the media mix. They requested, then disseminated, a letter from the prefect of the Vatican's Holy Office which, Vatican nuances aside, told Catholics not to vote for the dubiously Catholic Senator John Kerry, because he was 'pro-abortion.'

(Kerry wasn't pro-abortion; he was pro-choice. There is a difference, as I will explain in a moment.)

As a result, Catholics in Ohio (for example) who voted overwhelmingly for another Catholic, JFK in 1960, voted almost as overwhelmingly against another Catholic, JFK in 2004. Ohio's electoral votes alone were enough to put Bush over the top. In effect, Cardinal Ratzinger, a man who would soon be pope, swung an American election for a Republican who said he was 'pro-life.'

Cardinal Ratzinger might have cited ample Catholic social teaching to point out that good Catholics in a pluralistic society need not and should not attempt to make secular civil law a carbon copy of Catholic moral law. Good Catholics can oppose abortion (as I do) and resist those who want to make it a crime (as I do) because we fear the likely consequences. In Phoenix, where I live now, I would not like to see Sheriff Joe Arpaio's men camping out in our county's hospital hallways looking for doctors to arrest and charge with murder.

As Justice John Scalia has admitted, if *Roe v. Wade* were overruled tomorrow, there would be no significant change in the U.S. abortion rate. Even President Bush realized this. After the 2004 election, he told *The New York Times*, 'I fully understand our society is divided on this issue and that there will be abortions. It seems like to me that my job is to convince people to make right choices in life.' He wisely made no efforts to criminalize abortion.

... I'd like to pass on the opinion of a highly regarded Australian Jesuit, Frank Brennan, a law professor with the kind of national standing that John Courtney Murray SJ once enjoyed in the U.S.

Father Brennan wrote in his book, 'Acting On Conscience' (Univ. of Queensland Press, 2007) that the debate in the U.S. election campaign of 2004 was 'largely symbolic.' He said, 'The relation between religion and politics is badly out of kilter when bishops announce publicly that they would deny communion to John Kerry, and even suggest that those who vote for him should examine their conscience. All voters should examine their consciences all the time.' But shaming Catholic voters to vote against Kerry on moral grounds – that, he said, looked very much like a partisan political act.

Right now, we think we've caught the same U.S. bishops engaged in the same kind of partisanship. Or do they think we do not notice them stepping up their so-called pro life campaign every four years at election time? This time, I hope Catholic voters will see through the bishops' simplistic theologizing.

Father Brennan found Archbishop Burke writing this nonsense during the 2004 election campaign: 'Of course,' said Burke, 'the end in view for the Catholic must always be the total conformity of the civil law with the moral law.' Brennan called this 'a theocratic hope,' and he said the U.S. bishops should abandon it.

... Fr. Brennan said the U.S. bishops 'need to abandon the simplistic hierarchy of political wrongs, giving a preference to politicians who favour the criminalization of acts judged to be intrinsically evil while [ignoring] the direct action of those same politicians who themselves commit criminal acts, such as...committing the nation to war without just cause.'

chicagotribune.com
GOP Catholic backs Obama
Mary Schmich
October 8, 2008

Doug Kmiec went to mass, as usual, at Our Lady of Malibu on Tuesday morning. Then he drove up the hill to his office to talk to me by phone about how a Republican Catholic opposed to abortion could endorse Barack Obama.

You may recognize Kmiec's name. He teaches at Pepperdine University in California now, but he's a Chicago guy. St. Pascal grade school, St. Patrick's High School, Northwestern. From 1980 until 1999, he taught at Notre Dame Law School. In those years, while raising five kids with his high school sweetheart, he worked as legal counsel to Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. This election season, he was co-chair of Mitt Romney's failed campaign.

So why does a guy like that veer to the left and throw a political grenade into his church?

"One of the things I kept discovering," Kmiec said, "was that Obama was sounding more Catholic than most Catholics I know."

Obama talked about family wages. About the difficulty of health care. About the cost, in lives and dollars, of the Iraq War.

"Right down the line," Kmiec said, "if I look at the social gospel side of my faith, Barack Obama was hitting a 10-strike almost every time he addressed one of those subjects."

Kmiec read Obama's books, listened to his speeches. He thought. He prayed. On Easter Sunday, he publicly endorsed Obama. He didn't expect to make a splash, but among Catholics, his endorsement was an explosion.

The calls, the e-mails, the hand-written letters rushed in. How could he support a candidate who supported Roe vs. Wade?

He was invited to give a speech at a dinner of a Catholic business organization. During the homily at the mass before the dinner, the priest warned against endorsing Barack Obama. When Kmiec walked to the altar for communion, the priest put his hand over the ciborium that held the hosts and said, "Not you."

Kmiec understands the concerns of Catholics opposed to abortion. He spent 30 years trying to reverse the Supreme Court ruling that legalizes it nationwide. Thirty futile years that convinced him there must be a better way.

"Is there an alternative way to be pro-life?" he wondered.

"I think," he said, "Sen. Obama comes reasonably close to that alternative path. He is careful to say he's pro-choice, not pro-abortion. There's a significant difference that my church, in particular, should pay more attention to."

Kmiec was drawn to Obama's emphasis on using public resources to alleviate social conditions that correlate with abortion. Poverty, for example.

To help others understand his thinking, he recently published a book, *Can a Catholic Support Him? Asking the Big Question about Barack Obama*. [In it, he said,] ... "The heart of the country really is the working family. Catholics are, by theology and cultural disposition, very much in touch with the needs of that family. So in any given election

how that family goes—not the family of great wealth or the family of great poverty, but the family in the middle—that's kind of the national temperature."

... Kmiec has taken his argument on the road, campaigning in key states for Obama, talking mostly about faith.

And any day he's home, he goes to mass at Our Lady of Malibu, where he receives communion.

Finding a middle ground

By Douglas W. Kmiec

Thomas More is the patron saint of politics. Unfortunately, his public service ended in 1535 as his head fell from the chopping block for refusing to follow the dictates of King Henry VIII rather than those of his Roman Catholic faith. The Vatican reflects that More "taught by his life and his death that 'man cannot be separated from God, nor politics from morality.' " Of course, in bringing his faith to bear on public life, More did not parade about wearing a sign saying "execute me." No, this "man for all seasons" devoted his life to finding common ground between faith and policy, not to provoking conflict between them.

There is only one Catholic on a national presidential ticket in 2008: Joe Biden. Luckily, his lot is a bit easier than St. Thomas More's. As Biden made clear in the recent vice presidential debate, he is a blue-collar, working man's Catholic. In common with the Church, he shares a deep appreciation for family, respect for the dignity of work and a commitment to a living wage, working toward a more just social order that honors economic freedom while acknowledging the need for regulatory fairness, establishing health care as a human right, affirming human equality, protecting the environment and pursuing peace by engaging in responsible diplomacy.

Barack Obama has many of his running mate's Catholic sensibilities. His public life began in service to the least of his brothers and sisters. He worked to help laid-off workers in south Chicago find jobs and housing in a project funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the U.S. bishops' anti-poverty program. Obama and Biden are running in an era vastly different from the one faced by John F. Kennedy. Before JFK proclaimed at his inauguration that "here on earth, God's work must truly be our own," he reassured Protestants and other believers that "the separation of church and state is absolute; where no Catholic prelate would tell [a Catholic] president how to act."

That statement has been described in ways ranging from political necessity to outright apostasy. Kennedy was compelled to give that reassurance because until 1965 the church maintained that the best social order was one in which Catholicism was the established church under law. The modern Catholic recognition of religious freedom worked wonders to reduce interfaith conflict.

Today the rough spots for church officials occur when laws diverge from Catholic teaching. Abortion is an obvious example, but it is not the only one. Consider capital punishment or states' requiring Catholic employers to cover contraception. The Church expects its faithful in offices affecting the making of policy, legislative or executive, not to enact or "unabashedly pledge themselves to the perpetuation of abortion." Yet this obligation need not place Catholic teaching in conflict with public duty, since America is founded on the acknowledgement of a Creator as "self-evident truth" and the universal

values of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." While difficulties can emerge in the details, and some issues are without compromise, clash can be mitigated. For example, respecting the many religions in America, it is not the teaching of the Church to mandate Catholic officeholders to abolish either divorce or the death penalty. Likewise, the Church prudently withdrew from advocating a legal ban on artificial contraception. The Church stands foursquare against all those things and uses its teaching authority in its parishes to affirm the sanctity of life-long marriage, the lack of justification for capital punishment and a married couple's sacramental obligation to be open to new life. But when invited to lean on the law to fulfill the duties of faith, the Church recognizes St. Thomas Aquinas' famous caution that the human law ought not to attempt to "prohibit every vice, nor enact every virtue." After all, imperfect man cannot be perfected by law.

In Catholic teaching, abortion can never be justified. Yet the Church has never said there is only one way to promote respect for human life. It recognizes that a total ban may not be presently possible. Therefore the Church enjoins adherents in law-making offices to reduce the tragedy of abortion by working for "effective family and social policies in support of families, especially ... those with particular financial ... needs." Biden and Obama not only support such measures but would expand them with pre- and post-natal care, paid maternity leave as well as universal health care and tax relief for working families. Indeed, recent data show that enacting such policies can reduce abortions. There is a difference of opinion among bishops whether (and when) it is appropriate to deny a public official communion. It is a matter of individual prudence for each bishop; the present pontiff advises focusing on those "consistently campaigning and voting for permissive abortion and euthanasia laws." Is there anyone in 2008 who fits that category? In any event, bishops are careful to state that the "Church's leaders are to avoid endorsing or opposing candidates or telling people how to vote."

Catholicism transcends party. In Catholic terms, neither ticket is perfect. But with right intent, either can be supported by a Catholic in good conscience — always being ready, as St. Peter counseled, to "give an explanation to anyone for the reason for your hope, with gentleness and reverence."

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Biology and Sexual Morality
Frank Lawlor

The American Catholic bishops recently issued instructions for the laity on two issues related to sexual morality. The bishops were not saying anything new. They were reaffirming what has been the Roman Catholic doctrine on sexual matters for at least hundreds of years. ...

As a biologist who dabbles in theological issues, I would like to propose here, hoping for some discussion, that the Galileo incident is a good analogue of the present sexual morality crisis that is tearing the Roman Catholic church apart. I suggest that the sexual morality taught in the Baltimore declaration and elsewhere is based on a discredited pre-scientific model of human reproduction. The model underlying this doctrine was so universal that theologians never adverted to it, it was taken for granted, in fact it did not

even have a name, unlike the Ptolemaic model of the universe. When it was implicitly recognized, it was subsumed under 'natural law' (law of nature - empirical?).

The scientific model of human reproduction under which we operate today is so universally recognized and so solidly based on evidence that very few people, including both biologists and theologians, can even tell you what the earlier model was. Amazingly, the old model held sway from the time of the ancient Greeks (with dissent from some philosophers such as Democritus) to the nineteenth century! What we know about reproductive biology today ultimately depends on the invention and application of the microscope in the nineteenth century. Therefore, before evidence to the contrary was uncovered, the former model of human reproduction was based on a few simple ideas. First, the male supplied a seed which he implanted in the female who acted as an incubator for this seed to mature. The male seed was pictured as a very small human being, folded up very compactly. This was at one point in the history of science called the homunculus. It was male. The female did not supply any essential material (unlike our present model). The female influenced the developing human, even frequently causing what was considered an 'imperfect male' to develop; this was the female. The implications of the model also led to the social, legal, ecclesiastical, etc. inferiority of women. The pregnant mother might have experiences that would influence the personality or physical characteristics of the offspring. This would explain how a child could look like the mother. It also lets the male free of all blame for physical or moral defects in the offspring. Something eaten or drunk might cause changes or abnormalities. It has been claimed that the Bible says somewhere that a spotted lamb would be the result of the mother lamb being exposed to spotted hay.

This was a good model in that it explained the empirical evidence available at the time in a coherent way. It turned out to be a very flawed model. It could not explain the microscopic evidence or the genetic patterns and so was bad biology. Bad biology leads to bad theology.

The implications of this older model do not enhance the mother's dignity. She was held responsible for failing to produce a male heir, for instance. She was also responsible for all physical or mental defects in the child. Today's model holds that the mother is an equal in supplying the material necessary for the very life of the child. Recent research even shows that the mother actually supplies more of the genetic material than the father (mitochondrial DNA).

What does all of this have to do with sexual morality? Well, if the homunculus is a small human, then masturbation, contraception and homosexual activity are all forms of murder. As recently as the 1970s the very revered elderly confessor of Pope John Paul II declared to a bemused public that contraception was murder. Old models die hard.

There are other implications of the old model for sexual morality: the place of the woman in a marriage and in society, the impossibility of a woman (a malformed male) being ordained a priest in the Roman church, the former almost universal legal non-status of women, the importance of the male in passing on social and political status. It is perhaps not a surprise that it has taken over a hundred years for women to break out of their tight boundaries after the old reproductive model was destroyed in the West. I wonder if the old model still prevails in Islamic cultures. I am sure that the centrality of the model puts its implications into play in many other contexts.

Since the old model of reproduction died a quiet death over a hundred years ago, almost no moral theologians today use murder as the basis for qualifying these sexual acts (masturbation, contraception and homosexual activity) as mortal sins. However, many of them retain the former 'mortal' designation. The new reasoning of these moral theologians is, it seems to me, a very abstract philosophical argument. It is now expressed in somewhat poetical language (JP II). Perhaps in terms of retaining any moral credibility it is impossible for the Roman Church to change these moral teachings.

The fact is that theologians never were given a chance to rethink doctrinal and moral principles in light of new world-views suggested by science. Popes Pius IX and Pius X issued fatwas against modernist theologians which have left us with some serious disconnects. Charles Curran in our day fell victim to the papal refusal to deal with these disconnects. The people in the pews and (to use Greeley's term) the lower clergy, have never been able to swallow the old ideas in new clothing. If they had, I suspect that the pews and the pulpits would be sprouting cobwebs like the interiors of the musty confessionals.
