

With what is possibly the most important election of my lifetime less than a month away, the following articles assume a high level of importance. But, before you read anything else, please check out the explanation of the American financial crisis offered by the Center of Concern at:

<http://www.coc.org/system/files/WallStreetBkg08.pdf>

Also remember to check back on the September 2008 (3) article for a consideration of issues of importance before you vote.

Then go on to read the following.

October 5, 2008

The New York Times Company

A Fight Among Catholics Over Which Party Best Reflects Church Teachings

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

As the Roman Catholic Church observes its annual “respect life” Sunday in this heated presidential election season, the unusually pitched competition for Catholic voters is setting off a round of skirmishes over how to apply the church’s teachings not only on abortion but also on the war in Iraq, immigration and racism.

In a departure from previous elections, Democrats and liberal Catholic groups are waging a fight within the church, arguing that the Democratic Party better reflects the full spectrum of church teachings.

It is a contest for credibility among observant Catholics, with each faction describing itself as a defender of “life.” The two sides disagree over how to address the “intrinsic evil” of abortion.

The escalating efforts by more-liberal Catholics are provoking a vigorous backlash from some bishops and the right.

... In response, a coalition of liberal lay Catholics is pushing back, criticizing the bishop’s message for neglecting other aspects of “life” talked about in Catholic social teachings, like concern for the poor.

To underscore the point, a nun is collecting the signatures of prominent Catholic leaders there for a newspaper advertisement reminding those who may be wary of voting for Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, the Democratic nominee for president, that the church also considers racism a sin that threatens the dignity of life.

“Here in Scranton, racist attitudes often prevent us from seeing all of our fellow citizens and candidates for public office as God’s children,” says the petition, circulated by Sister Margaret P. Gannon, a professor at Marywood University.

Scranton, the focus of a disproportionate amount of attention because it was the childhood home of Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr. of Delaware, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, has become a flashpoint in the battle playing out nationwide in

weekly homilies, pastoral letters and diocesan newspapers. Scranton is also one of several heavily Catholic, working-class cities in swing states — like Cincinnati; Cleveland; Detroit; Erie, Pa.; Pittsburgh; and St. Louis — where a new network of liberal groups like Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and Catholics United are trying to promote the church's social justice teachings.

Catholics make up about a quarter of the electorate nationwide and about a third in many of the most heavily contested states in the Northeast and Midwest, an increasingly central focus of both presidential campaigns.

The campaign of Senator John McCain of Arizona has dispatched high-profile surrogates like Senator Sam Brownback, Republican of Kansas, to remind Catholic audiences of the Republican candidate's opposition to abortion.

... Conservatives argue that ending legal protections for abortion outweighs almost all other issues, while liberals contend that social programs can more effectively reduce the abortion rate than trying to overturn Supreme Court precedents. They cite a 2007 statement from the United States bishops explicitly condoning a vote for a candidate who supports abortion rights if the vote was cast for other "grave" reasons.

... In the final push to Election Day, the intrachurch election debate is increasingly spilling into public view.

Last week, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that the head of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. in Missouri had stormed out of a Mass because his priest had invoked Hitler's name in condemning Democratic support for abortion rights. The Cincinnati Enquirer published a column commending several archbishops for instructing Catholics not to vote for supporters of abortion rights but lamenting that the archbishop there had not done the same.

In the aftermath of the 2004 election, many liberal Catholics complained that parishes had distributed millions of copies of a voter guide created by a group called Catholic Answers that highlighted five "nonnegotiable" issues: abortion, stem-cell research, human cloning, euthanasia and same-sex marriage.

In response, liberal groups like Catholics United and Catholics in Alliance quickly began preparing alternative guides emphasizing a broader spectrum of the church's social justice teachings.

Then the Bishops Conference, perhaps to forestall a blizzard of competing pamphlets, all but banned third-party voter guides from parishes, requiring the explicit endorsement of the presiding bishop.

But some, including the bishop of La Crosse in Wisconsin, a swing state, have nevertheless chosen to authorize distribution of the "nonnegotiable" guides this year. The liberal groups are trying to distribute their material through direct mail and at meetings of lay Catholic groups.

Alexia Kelley, executive director of Catholics in Alliance, said her organization was spending more than \$250,000 on radio, print and billboard advertisements in Scranton

and other heavily Catholic areas. The advertisements emphasize what Ms. Kelley described as the broader spectrum of Catholic concerns about the “common good,” including health care, jobs and home foreclosures.

Douglas W. Kmiec, a Catholic legal scholar who was a legal counsel in the administrations of President Ronald Reagan and the first President George Bush, has been telling Catholic audiences in Pennsylvania and other swing states that Mr. Obama’s platform better fits Catholic social teaching, including reducing the abortion rate.

Mr. Kmiec, who recently published a book on the subject — “Can a Catholic Support Him? Asking the Big Question about Barack Obama” — was speaking in Scranton last week when Bishop Martino issued his letter rebutting those arguments.

Asked how his former Republican colleagues were responding to his Obama evangelism, Mr. Kmiec acknowledged some resistance. “Some remind me that George Washington gave orders for Benedict Arnold to be shot on sight,” he said.

October 4, 2008

The New York Times Company

OP-ED COLUMNIST

Palin’s Alternate Universe

By BOB HERBERT

Sarah Palin is the perfect exclamation point to the Bush years.

We’ve lived through nearly two terms of an administration that believed it could create its own reality:

“Deficits don’t matter.” “Brownie, you’re doing a heckuva job.” “Those weapons of mass destruction must be somewhere.”

Now comes Ms. Palin, a smiling, bubbly vice-presidential candidate who travels in an alternate language universe. For Ms. Palin, such things as context, syntax and the proximity of answers to questions have no meaning.

In her closing remarks at the vice-presidential debate Thursday night, Ms. Palin referred earnestly, if loosely, to a quote from Ronald Reagan. He had warned that if Americans weren’t vigilant in protecting their freedom, they would find themselves spending their “sunset years telling our children and our children’s children what it was like in America when men were free.”

What Ms. Palin didn’t say was that the menace to freedom that Reagan was talking about was Medicare. As the historian Robert Dallek has pointed out, Reagan “saw

Medicare as the advance wave of socialism, which would 'invade every area of freedom in this country.' ”

Does Ms. Palin agree with that Looney Tunes notion? Or was this just another case of the aw-shucks, darn-right, I'm-just-a-hockey-mom governor of Alaska mouthing something completely devoid of meaning?

Here's Ms. Palin during the debate: “Say it ain't so, Joe! There you go pointing backwards again ... Now, doggone it, let's look ahead and tell Americans what we have to plan to do for them in the future. You mentioned education, and I'm glad you did. I know education you are passionate about with your wife being a teacher for 30 years, and God bless her. Her reward is in heaven, right?”

If Governor Palin didn't like a question, or didn't know the answer, she responded as though some other question had been asked. She made no bones about this, saying early in the debate: “I may not answer the questions the way that either the moderator or you want to hear.”

The problem with Ms. Palin's candidacy is that John McCain might actually win this election, and then if something terrible happened, the country could be left with little more than an exclamation point as president.

After Ms. Palin had woven one of her particularly impenetrable linguistic webs, Joe Biden turned to the debate's moderator, Gwen Ifill, and said: “Gwen, I don't know where to start.”

Of course he didn't know where to start because Ms. Palin's words don't mean anything. She's all punctuation.

This is such a serious moment in American history that it's hard to believe that someone with Ms. Palin's limited skills could possibly be playing a leadership role. On the day before the debate, the commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, Gen. David McKiernan, made an urgent appeal for more troops, saying the additional “boots on the ground,” as well as more helicopters and other vital equipment, were “needed as quickly as possible.”

The morning after the debate, the Labor Department announced that the employment situation in the U.S. had deteriorated even more than experts had expected. The nation lost nearly 160,000 jobs in September, more than double the monthly losses in July and August.

Conditions are probably worse than even those numbers indicate because the government's statistics do not yet reflect the response of employers to the credit crisis that has taken such a hold in the last few weeks.

Where is the evidence that Governor Palin even understands these complex and enormously challenging problems? During the debate she twice referred to General McKiernan as “McClellan.” Neither Ms. Ifill nor Senator Biden corrected her.

But after Senator Biden suggested that John McCain's answer to the nation's energy problems was to "drill, drill, drill," Ms. Palin promptly pointed out, as if scoring a point, that "the chant is 'Drill, baby, drill!'"

How's that for perspective? The credit markets are frozen. Our top general in Afghanistan is dialing 911. Americans are losing jobs by the scores of thousands. And Sarah Palin is making sure we know that the chant is "drill, baby, drill!" not "drill, drill, drill."

John McCain has spent most of his adult life speaking of his love for his country. Maybe he sees something in Sarah Palin that most Americans do not. Maybe he is aware of qualities that lead him to believe she'd be as steady as Franklin Roosevelt in guiding the U.S. through a prolonged economic downturn. Maybe she'd be as wise and prudent in a national emergency as John Kennedy was during the Cuban missile crisis.

Maybe Senator McCain has reason to believe that it would not be the most colossal of errors to put Ms. Palin a heartbeat away from the presidency.

He's got just four weeks to share that insight with the rest of us.

A profile in courage.

Suburban Catholic church tests the tolerance of Rome

From: The Australian: Online Newspaper of the Year

Andrew Fraser | *October 04, 2008*

IT sounds like something out of a thriller novel, not the doings of a suburban Catholic parish in Brisbane.

There are letters to the Pope setting off a train of events that could lead to excommunication, parishioners who tell those who have worshipped alongside them that they will fry in hell for their actions, and talk of spies, Opus Dei, and storming the church to break the locks if the Vatican changes them.

All of this has resulted from a letter from Brisbane Archbishop John Bathersby to St Mary's parish priest Peter Kennedy. Bathersby's letter says that St Mary's is "out of communion" with the Roman Catholic Church, the grounds being the liturgical practices, or form of service.

The letter lists several areas where St Mary's needs to conform.

It then says "in reality, St Mary's South Brisbane has taken a Roman Catholic parish and established its own brand of religion. Ultimately it does good ... but its own style of worship and sacramental practices can hardly be described as Roman Catholic." The

letter says it is "now up to St Mary's itself to make whatever decisions about its future existence".

The unspoken threat is to remove the parish from the Catholic church. But both the advocates and opponents of St Mary's think there is a bigger battle here that goes well past the liturgy, or form of service, and is one for the soul of the Catholic church.

Put simply, it is the extent of control from Rome. St Mary's advocates say they are creating the sort of involved parish with close community links the broader church says it wants, but opponents say those attending St Mary's are denied a full Catholic experience.

St Mary's is the first to admit it is not a conventional church. The church gives communion to not only divorced people but also openly gay couples and individuals. The congregation regularly joins in the service. Outside of the church itself, St Mary's is active in social justice movements such as helping the homeless, of whom there are rather a lot close by. St Mary's has a healthy congregation of about 700, but what sets it apart from many other churches is that it is comparatively young, with an average age of about 40.

At a public meeting of St Mary's congregation about how to respond to Bathersby, speaker after speaker said they identified with being Catholic and wanted to stay in the church. But their opponents say that they are not Catholics, and St Mary's is not a Catholic church.

Tensions are high. Neither Kennedy nor the man who wrote the letter to the Vatican about St Mary's, Richard Stokes, would go on the record for this article. But Stokes, for the record, denied the rumour among some of the congregation that he was a member of Opus Dei.

At St Mary's, the congregation talks of "spies", people who come in to services there and then complain about it. The paranoia is at least partially justified. A visitor to the church at last Sunday morning's mass filmed a baptism, which was placed on YouTube, as evidence that the church was not following correct practices.

St Mary's advocates admit the form of their service is a unique one, which has evolved over years in response to the local community. Church spokeswoman Karyn Walsh said that this was in the spirit of Vatican II, where the church consciously adopted a policy of reaching out to the community and having a "bottom-up" approach, where the broad outline of a service was adapted by a congregation to their own circumstances.

"This is fundamentalist Catholics wanting to control the rest of the church," she said. "Our liturgy clearly reflects the modern world. We live in a world where people marry and divorce, some people are gay, and there's a whole range of relationships. The Government recognises this. How come the church can't?"

On the other side, Kathleen Gordon said that at a meeting of St Mary's congregation this week, "I wanted to get up and say, 'I weep for you all'."

"I don't see how they are possibly in communion with the Catholic church. They have no respect at all for Catholic institutions and no respect for the archbishop, or Rome. If they were prepared to compromise, then we can make judgments. But there doesn't seem to be any sign at all of that," she said.

St Mary's has set up a working party to work their way through the demands of the church, but all say there is a limit to how far they will go in their compromises.

Bathersby, who will eventually decide the fate of St Mary's, is currently out of the country and could not be interviewed. No doubt he's praying for guidance.

Once again, the issue does not seem to be the obvious good that is being accomplished. Rather it is the issue of control (authority).

I'm happy that they have clarified their opposition!

Pope reaffirms Church opposition to contraception

VATICAN CITY (AFP) — Pope Benedict XVI on Friday reaffirmed the Catholic Church's condemnation of artificial birth control, a position that has driven millions of people away from the faith.

Contraception 'means negating the intimate truth of conjugal love, with which the divine gift (of life) is communicated,' the leader of the world's 1.1 billion Roman Catholics wrote on the 40th anniversary of a papal encyclical on the controversial topic.

In reaffirming the position, the pope rejected an appeal for a retraction by some 60 Catholic groups in July who said the Church's stance had been 'catastrophic' for the world's poorest and weakest.

The letter by dissident Catholic bodies from countries including Britain, Brazil, Canada, France and the United States said the Church's opposition to birth control endangered women's lives and exposed millions of people to the risk of contracting AIDS.

It said the impact of the 1968 encyclical had been 'disastrous in the southern hemisphere, where the Catholic leadership exercises considerable influence on the politics of family planning.'

An encyclical is a letter usually treating some aspect of Catholic doctrine and issued by the pope every few years.

The landmark document, whose title in English is 'On the Regulation of Birth,' was published at a time when the development of the Pill was giving new sexual freedom to women across the world.

Millions of Catholics distanced themselves from Rome as a result, while the clergy were divided on how to deal with such a document, covered as it was by the doctrine of papal infallibility.

The 81-year-old pope's message Friday to a seminar on the encyclical also reaffirmed that the rhythm method is an acceptable form of contraception for couples in 'dire circumstances' who need to space their children.

The pontiff recognised that 'the world, as well as many of the faithful, have a lot of difficulty understanding the message of the Church,' which he said aimed to protect 'the beauty of conjugal love.'

'Technological answers often seem the easiest, even to great human questions,' he

wrote. But 'technology cannot substitute for a mature approach to freedom when love is involved.'

It was for the same reason, he said, that the Catholic Church advocates 'natural solutions to infertility.'

The Vatican opposes assisted procreation through donated sperm or eggs and the freezing of embryos.

In July, the Vatican said the idea that its stance on contraception contributed to the spread of AIDS was 'obviously unfounded.'

Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi said the July appeal was not about expressing a 'theological or moral position but paid propaganda in favour of the use of contraceptives.'

'The spread of AIDS is totally independent of the religious denomination of populations and of the influence of religious hierarchies,' Lombardi said, adding that policies aimed at preventing the spread of HIV through condom use had largely failed.

French Cardinal Roger Etchegaray wrote in his memoirs that opposition to the encyclical within the Church was a 'silent schism' that had weakened papal authority.

Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the water ...

Liturgical shakeup

Benedict XVI replaces all members of Office of Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff

Vatican City (CNA) -- Pope Benedict XVI has made a low profile but significant move in the direction of liturgical reform by completely changing his liturgical consultants.

A hardly noticed brief note from the Vatican Press Office on Sept. 24 announced the appointment of new consultants for the Office of Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff. It did not mention, however, the importance of the new appointees.

The new consultants include Monsignor Nicola Bux, professor at the Theological Faculty of Puglia (Southern Italy), and author of several books on liturgy, especially on the Eucharist. Bux recently finish a new book, *Pope Benedict's Reform*, printed by the Italian publishing house Piemme, scheduled to hit the shelves in December.

The list of new consultants also includes Fr. Mauro Gagliardi, an expert in dogmatic theology and professor at the Legionaries of Christ's Pontifical Athenaeum "Regina Apostolorum;" Opus Dei Spanish priest Juan José Silvestre Valor, professor at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce in Rome; Fr. Uwe Michael Lang, C.O., an official of the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and author of the book *Turning Towards the Lord* -- about the importance of facing *ad orientem* during Mass; and Fr. Paul C.F. Gunter, a Benedictine professor at the Pontifical Athenaeum Sant Anselmo in Rome and member of the editorial board of the forthcoming *Usus Antiquior*, a quarterly journal dedicated to the liturgy under the auspices of the Society of St. Catherine of Siena. The Society, which has an association with the English Province of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), promotes the

intellectual and liturgical renewal of the Church.

Also relevant to the appointments is the fact that all former consultants, appointed when Archbishop Piero Marini led the office of Liturgical Celebrations, have been dismissed since their appointments were not renewed.