

In comments originally prepared for the June meeting of American Bishops, retired Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco speaks about the “Public Duty of Bishops,” in the August 31 edition of *America* magazine. His comments are printed here in their entirety. Please support *America* magazine by subscribing online: <http://www.americamagazine.org>

Lessons from the storm in South Bend

The right to life is a paramount and pre-eminent moral issue of our time. The Catholic bishops have borne a consistent and prophetic witness to the truth that all other rights are anchored in the right to life. When *Roe v. Wade* was handed down in 1973, this conference was nearly alone among institutional voices pointing out the defects and dangers of this decision and calling for its reversal.

Our witness to the sanctity of human life cannot diminish and our effort cannot cease. We must continue to enlist new vehicles of communication to highlight the grave moral evil inherent in abortion. We have to design effective and imaginative strategies to help people see that the choice for life is the most compassionate choice. And we have to speak with courtesy and clarity about why the protection of the unborn is a requirement of human rights and not their diminishment.

There is no disagreement within this conference about the moral evil of abortion, its assault upon the dignity of the human person, or the moral imperative of enacting laws that prohibit abortion in American society.

But there is deep and troubled disagreement among us on the issue of how we as bishops should witness concerning this most searing and volatile issue in American public life. And this disagreement has now become a serious and increasing impediment to our ability to teach effectively in our own community and in the wider American society.

The bishops' voice has been most credible in the cause of life when we have addressed this issue as witnesses and teachers of a great moral tradition, and not as actors in the political arena. Coming out of the Catholic moral tradition, this conference has defended human life in the context of the pursuit of justice, covering the whole continuum of life from its beginning in the mother's womb to its natural end. The Second Vatican Council rightly described abortion and infanticide as “unspeakable crimes.” But the council did not stop there. In a coherent moral logic, the council exhorted bishops to be faithful to their duty of teaching and witnessing concerning “the most serious questions concerning the ownership, increase, and just distribution of material goods, peace and war, and brotherly relations among all countries” (“Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church,” No. 12). The more recent “Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life” proposes an equally broad spectrum of concerns. This consistent focus over nearly 50 years, as well as the teaching of the popes, including Pope Benedict XVI, underline that neither the bishop nor the Catholic Church can confine itself to one single issue of concern in human society. If we proclaim that the right to life is necessary for the exercise of all other rights, then we must also address and defend those other rights as well.

Consequently, the Catholic Church brings to the defense of life and the pursuit of justice in this world the vision of faith and a living hope that transcends the limitations of what

can be accomplished in this world. This comprehensive and transcendent vision must provide the benchmark in weighing proposed pathways through the thicket of public policy choices that confront us. This traditional benchmark provides a challenge to us bishops today in evaluating our future approach to those who disagree with us on issues of fundamental importance.

The dilemma that confronts us today is whether the church's vision is best realized on the issue of abortion by focusing our witness on the clear moral teaching about abortion and public law, or whether it is preferable or obligatory to add to that teaching role the additional role of directly sanctioning public officials through sustained, personally focused criticism, the denial of honors or even excommunication.

This dilemma has troubled us for many years now, but it has been crystallized in the controversy over the decision of the University of Notre Dame to award an honorary degree in May of this year to the president of the United States. This is the first time in the history of this conference that a large number of bishops of the United States have publicly condemned honoring a sitting president, and this condemnation has further ramifications due to the fact that this president is the first African-American to hold that high office.

False Messages

The case for sanctioning President Obama by declaring him ineligible to receive a Catholic university degree is rooted in a powerful truth: The president has supported virtually every proposed legal right to abortion in his public career, and abortion constitutes the pre-eminent moral issue in American government today.

Notwithstanding this fact, the case against a strategy of such sanctions and personal condemnations is rooted in a more fundamental truth: Such a strategy of condemnation undermines the church's transcendent role in the American political order. For the Obama controversy, in concert with a series of candidate-related condemnations during the 2008 election, has communicated several false and unintended messages to much of American society. There are four such messages that call for our serious consideration today.

1. The message that the Catholic bishops of the United States function as partisan political actors in American life. The great tragedy of American politics from a Catholic perspective is that party structures in the United States bisect the social teachings of the church, thus making it impossible for most citizens to identify and vote for a candidate who adequately embraces the spectrum of Catholic teaching on the common good. For instance, Republican candidates are, in general, more supportive of the church's position on abortion and euthanasia, while Democratic candidates are generally stronger advocates for the Catholic vision on issues of poverty and world peace.

For most of our history, the American bishops have assiduously sought to avoid being identified with either political party and have made a conscious effort to be seen as transcending party considerations in the formulation of their teachings. The condemnation of President Obama and the wider policy shift that represents signal to many thoughtful persons that the bishops have now come down firmly on the Republican side in American politics. The bishops are believed to communicate that for all the promise the Obama administration has on issues of health care, immigration reform, global poverty and war and peace, the leadership of the church in the United States has

strategically tilted in favor of an ongoing alliance with the Republican Party. A sign of this stance is seen to be the adoption of a policy of confrontation rather than a policy of engagement with the Obama administration.

Such a message is alienating to many in the Catholic community, especially those among the poor and the marginalized who feel that they do not have supportive representation within the Republican Party. The perception of partisanship on the part of the church is disturbing to many Catholics given the charge of *Gaudium et Spes* that the church must transcend every political structure and cannot sacrifice that transcendence, and the perception of transcendence, no matter how important the cause.

2. The message that the bishops are ratifying the “culture war mentality,” which corrodes debate both in American politics and in the internal life of the church. Both poles of the American political spectrum see our society as enmeshed in a culture war over the issues of abortion, marriage, immigration rights and the death penalty. In such a war, they argue, the demonization of alternative viewpoints and of opposing leaders is not merely acceptable, but required. More intense tactics and language are automatically seen as more effective, as necessary and more in keeping with the importance of the issues being debated. The “culture war mentality” has also seeped into the life of the church, distorting the debate on vital issues and leading to campaigns against bishops for their efforts to proclaim the Gospel with charity rather than with antagonism.

The movement toward sanctions against public officials will be seen as ratifying this trajectory in our political, cultural and ecclesial life. Whatever our intention may be, the acceptance and employment of a strategy that deliberately moves beyond teaching and pointing up the moral dimensions of public issues to labeling those with whom we disagree, will inevitably embolden those who de-Christianize our public debate both within and outside the church.

3. The message that the bishops are effectively indifferent to all grave evils other than abortion. Perhaps the most difficult task we face, as teachers on the moral dimensions of public policy in the United States today, is emphasizing the pre-eminence of abortion as a moral issue while defending a holistic view of the rights intrinsic to the defense of the dignity of the human person. This task of balancing arises not only in the formulation of our policy statements, but also in the steps we as bishops take to achieve justice in the political order. The pathway of sanctions and personal condemnation will open every bishop to the charge that if we do not use the tactic of sanctions and condemnations on issues such as war and peace or global poverty, we are tacitly relegating those issues to a level of unimportance. And it would indeed be difficult to explain how it is appropriate for a Catholic university to honor those who authorize torture or initiate an unjust war or cut assistance to the world’s poor. To assert on the one hand that the tactics of sanction and personal condemnation are legitimate tools for episcopal action in the public order, while on the other hand refusing to employ those tactics for any issue other than abortion will only deepen the suspicions of those in American society who believe that we bishops of the church in the United States are myopic in our approach to Catholic social teaching.

4. The message that the bishops are insensitive to the heritage and the continuing existence of racism in America. The election of Senator Barack Obama as President of the United States in November 2008 was a unique and signal moment in the history of racial solidarity in the United States. *L’Osservatore Romano* compared it to the fall of the

Berlin Wall. All over the world the election was hailed as ushering in a new chapter in the rejection of racial stereotypes and the enhancement of international relations.

Yet here in the United States, there has been the perception that we bishops did not grasp the immense significance of the moment. African-American priests, religious and lay persons have related that they felt they had to mute their jubilation at the election of an African-American president, and that we bishops did not share their jubilation. Some have expressed deep hurt over this, precisely because they respect the bishops and they love the church.

Added to this, the spirited condemnation of the president's visit and degree at Notre Dame last May have reinforced for many African-American Catholics those feelings of hurt and alienation. It is not that African-American Catholics do not understand that the church must oppose abortion, or that they themselves personally believe that the bishops are acting out of racist motivations. It is rather that when the church embraces a new level of confrontation when an African-American is involved, this readily raises widespread questions about our racial sensitivity. And these questions will only continue to be raised more forcefully if we continue to walk down the path of confrontation with this administration.

A Policy of Cordiality

As we confront the admittedly difficult task of balancing the need to uphold the sanctity of human life while avoiding the enormously destructive consequences of the strategy of sanction and condemnation, we bishops could profitably look to the example of the Holy See, which wrestles with these same complex issues of integrity of witness, fidelity to truth, civility in discourse, and political, national and racial sensitivities every day.

The approach of the Holy See might justly be characterized as a policy of cordiality. It proceeds from the conviction that the integrity of Catholic teaching can never be sacrificed. It reflects a deep desire to enshrine comity at the center of public discourse and relations with public officials. It is willing to speak the truth directly to earthly power.

Yet the Holy See shows great reluctance to publicly personalize disagreements with public officials on elements of church teaching. And the approach of the Holy See consistently favors engagement over confrontation. As Pope John Paul II put it, "The goal of the Church is to make of the adversary a brother."

These principles of cordiality will not make our task as bishops in the public square an easy one. But they do provide the best anchor for insuring that our actions and statements remain faithful to the comprehensive and transcendent mission of the church, our ultimate mandate. Much of this is summed up in the council's decree on bishops, *Christus Dominus* (No. 13):

The Church has to be on speaking terms with the human society in which it lives. It is therefore the duty of bishops especially to make an approach to people, seeking and promoting dialog with them. If truth is constantly to be accompanied by charity and understanding by love, in such salutary discussions they should present their positions in clear language, unaggressively and diplomatically. Likewise they should show prudence combined with confidence, for this is what brings about union of minds by encouraging friendship.

Cardinal Bertone, Vatican Secretary of State, addresses the issue of resigned clerics.

Says Priest-Saints Are Supporting Pope's Plans for Renewal

VATICAN CITY, AUG. 31, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Year for Priests is also for those men who have left priestly ministry, according to Benedict XVI's secretary of state.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone made this observation Friday in *L'Osservatore Romano*, in an interview that also explains how the Year for Priests became a reality.

"I remember that after the synod of bishops on the Word of God, at the Pope's table there was talk of a proposal that had already come up in the past, of convoking a year of prayer, which was very linked to the reflection on the Word of God," the cardinal recounted.

Nevertheless, he said, "the 150th anniversary of the death of the Curé d'Ars and the situation of the problems that have affected so many priests brought Benedict XVI to declare a Year for Priests."

With this initiative, Cardinal Bertone affirmed, the Holy Father wants to show "special attention to priests and to priestly vocations" and to promote "a movement within the whole people of God, of a growing affection and closeness to ordained ministers."

"The Year for Priests is bringing about great enthusiasm in all of the local Churches and an extraordinary movement of prayer, of fraternity with and among priests, and of vocational ministry," the cardinal added.

He continued, "Moreover, the sometimes weak fabric of dialogue between bishops and priests is being strengthened, and special attention is being given to those priests who have been put to the side in pastoral ministry."

The year is also a "renewal of contact, fraternal help, and if it is possible, a reuniting with those priests who for various reasons have left behind their priestly ministry," Cardinal Bertone stated.

Finally, he affirmed, "The holy priests who have been part of the history of the Church will not cease to protect and support this road to renewal that Benedict XVI has proposed."

The following letter was sent to His Eminence Claudio Cardinal Hummes, O.S.F., by John Horan.

Dear Cardinal Hummes:

Congratulations on the new responsibility you have just taken on. This past April, Pope

Benedict XVI granted you the power to dismiss from the priesthood and release from the obligation of celibacy, priests who are living with women, who have abandoned their ministry for more than five years or who have engaged in seriously scandalous behavior. I am one of those you will be dismissing – not for the scandal part but for the woman part.

It is a big job you have taken on. World wide, there are many thousands of us and, to add to the challenge, most bishops have no idea who or where we are. We have been on the “pay no mind” list for such a long time that tracking us down will be quite a headache.

I have seen your picture on Wikipedia. You seem like a kind man and your vitae demonstrates that you have Doctor of the Church quality brains. You clearly have some iron in your soul as demonstrated by your advocacy for homeless, indigenous people and your stance against the dictatorship in Brazil. But you have been away from parish work for a long time and prolonged exposure to the curia can cause cataracts. I am appealing to your kindness, brains and iron.

First off, understand that this project is a matter of paperwork, a re-organizing of files in cabinets, a clearing of the priesthood balance sheet. It has nothing to do with protecting the good of the church, avoiding scandal or getting things right in the eyes of God. God knows the Catholic Church has a good deal of work in those areas, but releasing thousands of us from the obligation of celibacy should be about around 10,000th on the Vatican to do list.

Secondly, some historical context needs to be established. You may not realize it, but the Vatican has zig-zagged for years about laicizations. Under Paul VI when large numbers were leaving, there was a fairly straightforward, but slow process. John Paul II pursued a much harder line, apparently in the belief that he could stem the tide by making laicizations virtually impossible. It didn't work. The unintended consequence was to diminish the credibility of the process. In his later years, he switched to a strategy wherein a petitioner had to lie, and state that he never really had a vocation at all. Most of us could say that we had a genuine vocation to priesthood, but not to celibacy. Now, Pope Benedict has done a complete about face. Forgive us if we are a little confused but the Vatican has changed its strategies like most of us change socks.

I left the Vatican priesthood during the late 1980's when the church was NOT granting formal dispensations from the obligation of celibacy. During my “exit interview” with Cardinal Bernardin he said that I could apply for a dispensation, but it would not be granted until I was much, much older. I remarked that the Vatican was playing hardball. He agreed, but his eyes told me that he had no stomach for such silly tactics. (By the way, what SHOULD be on the Vatican “To Do” list is to put Joe Bernardin on the canonization track.)

So, let's be clear. In the 1980's the Vatican would not grant that which was asked for and now, 20 years later, will take that which has not been offered. In light of this context, please be careful about tossing out phrases like “abandon our ministry.” This revisionist bit of history is a lie, pure and simple.

I am no ecclesiastical prognosticator, but I have to believe that you are on anyone's short list for Pope. The Congregation for Clergy is a big job and this chance to clean up

the sacerdotal balance sheet is litmus test of the first degree. But you should know that it is only important in Vatican circles and in diocesan offices. Everywhere else, Catholics find it funny and upon deeper reflection, really quite infuriating.

I'll give you an example. My wife and I have been in a civil marriage for the last 19 years. We couldn't get married in the Catholic Church because I didn't have a dispensation the Vatican wouldn't give. Our marriage has been full of consensual sex. When my wife found out that our sex, in the eyes of the Vatican, was causing serious scandal, she laughed right out loud. "Our lawn is a scandal", she said. "Our consensual sex is a sacrament."

I fear most women married to ex-priests will not, like my wife, find this particularly funny. They will instead fume and wonder out loud why the Holy See has such a hard time seeing real scandal and such an easy time manufacturing fake scandals.

This notion that our church will become "leaner and purer" are concepts best applied to cuts of meat and not the Church of Jesus. Cardinal Hummes – if your kindness, brains and iron could only understand how absurd this all is to all of us, if only you could muster up a real giggle about these forced dispensations, you would surely make a terrific Pope.

So, to make things easier for you, here is my address; 1528 West Glenlake, Chicago IL 60660. I would be happy to be dispensed from the Vatican's notion of priesthood and released from the obligation of celibacy. I wonder, will you send us some sort of note? My wife and I would like to know when the deal is sealed. I wonder if you will let our home parish know? My home parish is St. Gertrude on the north side of Chicago. I think you would be surprised by their reaction. Talk about a scandal! I would love if there was a way you could send someone from the Archdiocesan staff to deliver the dispensation at my place of work. I have started two schools on Chicago's West Side. Our students are wonderful and the place is full of beatitudes. You would be proud of the work we "non-dispensed" ex-priests do. I am sure you would never use the phrase "abandon our ministry" again.

Good luck! You have an uphill battle ahead of you. I think Melchizedek is right, but I will encourage other ex Vatican priests to ask for their dispensations and to send you a note expressing their views, all the same. It will make for some exciting reading.

Best Wishes,

John Horan

Ordained; May 13, 1981

Left the Vatican Priesthood; June 10, 1988

Was civilly married and began consensual sex; October 27, 1990

For those of you who would like to add their comments to John's, Cardinal Hummes can be reached at:

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The editors of America magazine consider the obstacles to health care reform.

Obstacles to Reform

AUGUST 31, 2009

The biggest obstacles to health care reform have little to do with legislation currently being considered by Congress. Obstacles like rising unemployment, a growing number of home foreclosures and the continuing economic instability are currently being magnified by an underlying public fear about the future. That fear is manifest in the ferocious disruptions of town-hall meetings with members of Congress, urged on by opponents of reform. Long exploited to stoke the “war on terror” and to combat “big government,” fear of the future seemed to many to have been conquered with the last presidential election. But now, given the ill effects at home of the global recession, fear is making a comeback.

President Obama’s economic stimulus has kept the financial tsunami from hitting with full force, and some economists claim that the Great Recession has bottomed out. Even so, many people are still suffering from its effects. And suffering is what voters see when they look at the data on foreclosures and unemployment, expected to reach 10 percent nationally in 2010 and already higher than that in some places. Voters still worry about the sagging value of their life savings and their home equity. Many look to President Obama to lead the nation out of the recession, but find it too early to assess his effectiveness. If all the efforts made by Mr. Obama and his team since January have not yet stabilized our economy, many wonder, will his ideas work for health care? The public needs convincing signs of economic recovery. As it waits for an upturn, the public appears to have suspended its hopes for the government’s broader agenda, including health care.

What happened? As recently as mid-June, according to a New York Times/CBS national poll, respondents indicated overwhelming support for substantial health care reform; they also favored a tax increase to extend health coverage to all Americans. Nearly three-quarters, including half of those who identified themselves as Republicans, favored a government-run insurance plan to compete with private insurers. Since then, however, more jobs have been lost, long-term unemployment has grown, and foreclosures have risen despite incentives given to banks to modify loans; many states are in fiscal distress and are considering tax increases. While waiting for the economic stimulus to work, voters have become more susceptible to the spread of misinformation by some opponents of reform, like Glenn Beck, Bill O’Reilly and Sarah Palin, who have taken advantage of the vacuum of hard information on health care to stir doubts about the president’s leadership.

Both major parties, focused on the coming 2010 Congressional election, know that the failure or success of health care reform, as well as progress on the economy, could determine the outcome of that election. As a result, partisanship is overtaking Congress even as it works on the reform bills. Ideological opponents have resorted to groundless fear-mongering, like the “death panel” rumor, to destroy any chance of success with health care reform, despite the benefits it could bring the country as a whole.

Passage of a strong health care reform bill could allay one of the deepest legitimate fears Americans have: that of going bankrupt because of illness. Currently, insurance companies can refuse coverage, drop coverage or raise premiums beyond reach for

those with a pre-existing condition. The proposed House reform bill would outlaw such practices. Just as auto insurance is currently required of vehicle owners, the bill would require health insurance of individuals and employers; it would offer subsidies for those with low incomes and small businesses. It would also cut waste and curb costs. If the majority party were to pass such legislation without the help of Republicans, it might secure Democratic leadership for years. Such reform would also exemplify the change a majority thought they had embraced when they voted for Mr. Obama: a fairer, more compassionate America.

Health care reform would not solve the job or housing crisis, or send stocks soaring. But it would add the United States to the roster of developed nations with universal health care, where no family need be bankrupt or homeless because of illness or injury. Both parties understand that passage of an effective reform bill would have major political significance. That is what drives the misinformation campaigns and the scare tactics now reaching a fevered pitch.

Finally, Mr. Obama is correct to point out the relationship between health care reform and economic recovery. For the soaring costs of health care insurance and delivery, if unchecked, are unsustainable; they will leave us mired in debt. That is one more reason why these obstacles—joblessness, foreclosures, economic instability, fear of the future and partisanship—must be overcome, and why a strong health reform bill must be passed.

And, if some educators are so concerned about what President Obama will say to their students during his nationally televised address to students on Tuesday, perhaps they could tape it first, review it, and show it the following day or whenever the academic schedule allows. If their objections are not merely motivated by racism or politics, this might be a sensible solution.

I believe the following commentary is from the *Boston Globe* Web site. I will correct this attribution if I am notified by the person who sent it to me.

Wisconsin bishop defends Kennedy funeral

by Michael Paulson September 4, 2009

Another Catholic leader is coming to the defense of the funeral for Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.

Bishop Robert C. Morlino, the Catholic bishop of Madison, Wisconsin, has penned a column for his diocesan newspaper reflecting on the funeral rites. The quotation that jumped out at me was this one: "The death of Senator Kennedy has called forth at least an apparent rejection of mercy on the part of not a few Catholics." Morlino expresses "contentment" with the church's handling of the liturgy, writing:

The proclamation of God's Mercy was powerful, the prayer for forgiveness of his past sins was clearly offered, and all of this in a subdued way because of his long-standing and public holding of pro-abortion and other stances which have been a scandal in the literal sense.

The only aspects of the Funeral Rites which were not low key were those on the guest-list, where family preferences are generally granted.

Morlino makes clear his unhappiness with Kennedy's support for abortion rights, but also praises his actions in other areas. Here is an excerpt from Morlino's lengthy column:

I'm afraid...that for not a few Catholics, the funeral rites for Senator Kennedy were a source of scandal — that is, quite literally, led them into sin. From not a few corners has come the question, "how on earth could Teddy Kennedy be buried from the Church?" There have also been expressions from some, that "whatever happens in Church, Senator Kennedy will now face justice, which will lead him inside the gates of Hell."

From the earliest days of the Church it was defined as sinful to enjoy the thought that someone might be in Hell. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit worked powerfully through history so that Hell could be avoided by the proper exercise of human freedom, and to take delight in the perceived foiling of God's plan is wrong.

Pope Benedict XVI has written very beautifully that on the Cross of Christ there was lived out a conflict between God's justice, in that someone who was Himself equal to God had to die in reparation for man's sinfulness, and God's mercy: from the very beginning, the Church believed and taught that Jesus died precisely so that sins might be forgiven. His body was broken and His blood was shed so that sins might be forgiven, so that there might be mercy.

The death of Senator Kennedy has called forth at least an apparent rejection of mercy on the part of not a few Catholics. On the cross of Christ, God's justice came into conflict with God's mercy. God's justice was fully satisfied, but mercy triumphed in the conflict, according to the teaching of Pope Benedict. Without denying any misdeeds on the part of Senator Kennedy, the Church, seeking to reflect the face of Christ, proclaimed God's mercy for the whole world to see in a subdued but unmistakable way. It was more than appropriate.

In the seminary I was taught to speak like a lion from the pulpit — certainly there are those in the diocese who believe that perhaps I do that all too well — but that in the confessional I should be a lamb, reflecting the face of the Lamb of God, who died so that there might be mercy. The funeral rites for Senator Kennedy challenge all of us to question ourselves as to whether we are less eager to grant mercy than God Himself is.

Morlino also comments on Kennedy's relationship with the Catholic church, discussing a meeting between Kennedy and theologians to discuss the abortion issue (I think he must be referring to a gathering in 1964 described by Anne Hendershott in the *Wall Street Journal* in January):

Senator Kennedy, a good number of years ago, convened a meeting of priests and very high-level theologians to address the issue of Catholic political leaders and their votes with regard to abortion. Obviously, the very convening of this meeting showed that he took his Catholicism seriously and did not consider himself to be an accomplished theologian. Sadly, that meeting simply became another occasion for the development by theologians of the "two-conscience" approach to the faith for Catholic political leaders — that is the approach which says, "privately I'm opposed to abortion, but in the public

arena there are other conflicting responsibilities which allow me to vote in favor of legal abortion."

No matter how many theologians get together, the two-conscience theory is irreparably flawed and wrong, and no one can make it otherwise. But if Senator Kennedy was given this advice and this approach, this "catechesis" — false though it is — by prominent theologians, it could at least be said that there was some ground for confusion and ambiguity in his own practice about these matters. The priests and theologians who counseled Senator Kennedy are not free of blame for causing the confusion and the ambiguity through false catechesis.

God forbid that I be taken as making excuses for Teddy Kennedy's behavior in certain areas, yet Senator Kennedy's having written a personal letter to our Holy Father during his last days, a letter that was hand-delivered by President Obama, is also an indication that he believed that the pope alone was the Vicar of Christ, and he wanted to make absolutely sure that our Holy Father received his letter. And too, since priests were regularly present to him during his final year and final days, it would be more reasonable than not to believe that he had made a good confession.

From ReligionDispatches.org comes the following article by Paul Gorrell.

Cafeteria Catholics Favor Conservative Teachings

September 4, 2009

The Roman Catholic bishops in New Jersey are using the power of their pulpits and the authority of the Church to insert themselves into the gay marriage debate. New Jersey recognizes civil unions for same-sex couples, but investigations into the equality of these legal arrangements has shown that they are not effective in ensuring that all state marriage rights apply to same-sex couples. Despite the intentions of the legislators in creating the civil union law passed in 2006, same-sex couples do not enjoy all of the same benefits of marriage and, thus, have second-class status. These findings have prompted a new legislative push for same-sex marriage within the state; debate over the measure will begin this fall.

To fight potential legislation that would provide marriage rights to same-sex couples in New Jersey, the bishops have joined conservative Catholic organizations like the Knights of Columbus that are aligned with right-wing Republicans. The bishops have asked parishes to read letters stating their position, and have instructed parishes to gather anti-same-sex marriage signatures to be presented to the legislature.

That may seem like an unsurprising response from the bishops. But taking a broader look at their activism (or *in*activism) on another current issue is in order. By getting involved in this conservative cause while opposing or remaining silent on universal health care, the men ordained to leadership positions within the Church are behaving like the "cafeteria Catholics" they usually speak of with disapproval.

"Cafeteria Catholics" is a term often used by conservatives to describe members of the church who are not in alignment with Church teaching on every issue. Using this term, conservatives claim that liberals are too willing to pick and choose which teachings they

will follow. But conservatives overlook the reality that the Catholic Church has a very liberal social teaching that places the dignity of the person at its core. This influences the way the Church teaches about aid to the poor, economic justice within taxation systems, and universal health care. Since the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, the Church has formally taught that a social approach to health care was necessary to ensure equal access for all. The burden of providing health care to everyone belonged to the society at large. Catholic Social Ethics has further developed this notion since the Council and consistently articulated support for universal health care within society.

Catholic Bishops in the United States, however, have opposed universal health care out of fear that abortion will be included in whatever bill that Congress might pass. Instead of proudly stating the Catholic tradition on universal health care and then demanding that abortion be excluded from public option benefits, the Catholic bishops have started from a place of opposition and, in so doing, failed to uphold a core social teaching of the Church.

Catholic bishops in this country have shown that they are only willing to speak out politically in support of deeply conservative causes associated with the culture wars (i.e., abortion and same-sex relationships). They are not willing to stand up for the liberal principles that have shaped the Church's official teaching and the work of its theologians. In other words, the bishops are picking and choosing at the cafeteria of Church teaching and behaving like right-wing political ideologues.

The call to serve the sick is found in the New Testament teaching of Jesus. The Gospel is clear on the topic of health care when it states, "From each according to his or her ability, to each according to his or her needs." The principle of the Common Good means that merit is not a factor in health care. Followers of Jesus are called to defend the needy, not ignore them.

Meanwhile, the New Jersey Bishops can pretend that marriage has been a universal principle within the Catholic Church for the last 2,000 years; but that would be untrue. The sacrament of marriage was the last of the sacraments to be established, and the Church has long regarded marriage as a lesser vocation than ordination to the priesthood. Strangely enough, the first systematic theology to promote the dignity of marriage came from Martin Luther, who established his position in direct opposition to Catholic teaching at the start of the Protestant Reformation. Today, over 90 percent of Catholic couples receive annulments for their marriages after going through the perfunctory request process. The same bishops who claim to be defenders of marriage in the same-sex debate oversee the tribunals that allow these annulments.

It's important to realize that the official teaching on marriage in the Catholic Church has been written by men who have never been married. These men also teach that birth control can never be used by a married couple. Aside from the fact that much of the official teaching of the Church contradicts the understanding of healthy sexuality within the field of modern psychology, it is stunning that those whom the Church authorizes to speak on these topics have often defended, hidden, or participated in a system of sexual abuse that highlights their own deeply disordered relationship with human sexuality.

While the New Jersey bishops offer their theological musings on the importance of marriage and the need to defend it, we need to ask them to prove to us why

heterosexual marriage needs to be defended against same-sex marriage. First, sacramental and civil marriage have been distinguished by the church for centuries, and civil marriages that do not comply with sacramental marriages have never been seen as a risk to Catholic marriages. Second, if heterosexual marriage is threatened when same-sex marriages are allowed, why do Massachusetts and Connecticut have the lowest divorce rates in the United States? These are two of the states that allow gay marriage, and marriages there (both same-sex and otherwise) seem to be the most stable in the country.

The Catholic bishops in New Jersey and in the rest of this country have decided to align themselves with right-wing politics. The bishops in Washington DC recently launched a campaign similar to the one now being waged by their counterparts in New Jersey. This stance by the bishops goes against the tradition of American Catholicism and suggests that Catholics should decide their positions on social issues based on their political alliances and not their core principles. While conservative Catholic leaders have bemoaned “cafeteria” approaches to Catholicism, they are now prime examples of this behavior.

As a colleague and friend recently said, “The Church should not use its authority to *curtail* human rights.”

Amen!

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