

I am grateful to Kathleen for passing this letter along.

Reflections Approaching September 11, 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For the past eight years throughout our nation, the anniversary of the horrific September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has been marked by remembrance of the victims and prayers for peace and reconciliation in our world. Each year, the Memorial Mass at our Church of St. Francis of Assisi in New York City has called to mind the self-sacrificing dedication of our brother, Fr. Mychal Judge, OFM, and the thousands of others who perished on that day, and also has offered an opportunity to pray for healing among the peoples of the world so that such tragedies might not reoccur.

This year, however, the mood in our nation is different. Members of a small independent church in Gainesville, Fla., declaring that "Islam is of the Devil," have announced plans to mark the September 11th anniversary by publically burning copies of the Qur'an. A project to build an Islamic Center in New York several blocks from "Ground Zero" has unleashed vitriolic abuse against Islam as a religion; strong local opposition has surfaced in a number of places against Muslims providing places of worship for themselves in their communities. Perhaps heightened by our current economic insecurity, there is a mounting cry against the perceived "other" in our midst and that "true" - i.e., Christian - Americans must somehow "take back" the country.

As leaders of the Franciscans of Holy Name Province, we wish to lift our voices against this tide of anti-Muslim rhetoric in our nation. We cannot help but recall that in the nineteenth century, there was a similar outcry against Roman Catholics as an foreign, inassimilable mass within the nation, that our Catholic practices and values were contrary to the American way of life. Time, of course, proved those sentiments wrong. We must give our Muslim brothers and sisters the same opportunity. We must accept them as fellow-worshippers of our common God.

Our position as Catholics is grounded in the clear teaching of our Church. The Second Vatican Council's dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, after speaking of the People of God who have explicitly professed faith in Christ, and then the Jewish people, goes on to state: "God's plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Muslims: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge all human beings on the last day" (LG, 16). The Church thus clearly teaches that Muslims are not "pagans" or "idolaters" but children of the same loving God as Christians and Jews.

On a practical level, the Decree on Religious Liberty of the same Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, states that: "religious groups . . . must be allowed to honor the Supreme God in public worship. . . and promote institutions in which members may work together to organize their own lives. . . . Religious communities also have the right not to be hindered by legislation or administrative action by the civil authority. . . in

erecting buildings for religious purposes, and in the acquisition and use of the property they need." (DH 4) This has clear implications for how Catholic Americans should accept Muslims in our society. We cannot allow the actions of a fanatical minority to define an entire religion.

In a particular way, we Franciscans cannot help but recall that we are followers of a man who crossed frontiers, even battle lines, to offer a message of peace to the perceived enemies of Christianity. As Paul Moses has strikingly portrayed in his recent study, *The Saint and the Sultan*, at a time when some preachers were urging Christians "to kill a Muslim for Christ," Francis boldly defied the prejudices of his era to demonstrate to the Sultan of Egypt that Christianity had another face than that of the Crusaders who faced him in battle. Francis was not able to win the Sultan over to the Gospel of Christ, but returned to Europe impressed by the faith he had experienced among the followers of Islam, convinced that he had met other worshippers of God like himself. Our General Chapter in Assisi last year urged Franciscans throughout the world to take up this heritage and to work in a special way at dialogue among Christians and Muslims and be architects of peace and reconciliation in society.

Three pieces of steel from the tangled mass of debris of the World Trade Center were entrusted to the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in New York and now form a memorial to the victims of September 11th, including our own brother, Fr Mychal. The compressed pieces of steel vividly summon the grief and unspeakable sadness of that tragic morning. Still, a single golden rose rises gently from the mass of contorted steel, transcending the senseless brutality with an enduring promise of hope.

Let this September 11th be an opportunity for all of us to summon the better angels of our nature, to rise above the anger and bitterness that seem to be an increasing feature of our country, to show respect to all people who seek the face of God, and to be agents of true and lasting peace and reconciliation in our own land and among all nations.

Fraternally,

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Provincial Minister

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Provincial Vicar

Do we have the right to expect consistency in the application of love within our Church? John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., is a professor of philosophy at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Mo. This article appeared in *America* magazine.

How Will They Know?

In his encyclical "Deus Caritas Est," Pope Benedict XVI joins "the ministry of charity" in proclaiming the word of God and celebrating the sacraments as the expression of

the church's "deepest nature." What is more, charity, which Benedict equates with love, is called the "indispensable expression" of the church's very being. These are inspiring words addressed to everyone in the Catholic Church. But there is a problem: the words are often not matched by reality. To be sure, there are armies of known and nameless Catholics who powerfully witness to love. There are many devoted clerics and vibrant parishes and spiritual movements. Most of us, we can hope, have even had our own high moments, expressive of charity.

The encyclical's inspiring words are often not matched by the reality. But we should be honest with ourselves, especially when considering the church as institution and how it is perceived in the world. Are we known by our love? Since the encyclical is addressed to everyone in the church, we might want to consider whether the answer to that question has something to do with us. Indeed, there have been members of the hierarchy who, like Archbishop Mark Coleridge in Australia, have worried about a "clericalism understood as a hierarchy of power, not service." But there is at least a perception among many Catholics (including the 10 percent who have left the church in the last decade) that power is a greater concern to members of the hierarchy than service to "proclaiming the word of God," the sacraments and "the ministry of charity."

I would be surprised if I were the only priest to have been asked painful questions like the following: Is having a male, celibate priesthood more important than the liturgy itself or than other sacraments administered only by a priest? Why is it supposedly forbidden to even raise this question?

If proclaiming the word, living the sacraments and charity mark the church's deepest nature, why does it at least appear that our highest priorities are rules and self-protection? In the public eye, the church is perceived as mounting its most urgent opposition in matters of sexuality and ecclesiastical law rather than of justice, charity and service.

Such a confusion of priorities is exemplified in incidents like the full-page indictment and excommunication of a sister who supports women's ordination while some highly placed clerics, profoundly compromised by their actions of injustice and disordered attachment, seem to be quietly passed over. The confusion is intensified when newspapers throughout the world give front-page coverage to a Vatican document that, by its presentation, appears to assert a strange moral equivalence between attempting to ordain a woman and the abuse of children or the disabled, or the distribution of child pornography. They are all considered "grave crimes." I do not think such questions betray hostility to the hierarchy or the church, although I know many people who have left the church because of them. But there are also many who abide in painful conflict, like the appellate court judge in Illinois who wrote in The Chicago Tribune that maybe she should be excommunicated because she has questions similar to those reported above. As a committed Catholic and mother who loves the church, she cannot abandon it, because "walking away would break my heart."

Perhaps the whole church can learn from her. For members of the hierarchy, one hopes that they do not ignore her plight or belittle her complaint. May they always

embody what Archbishop Coleridge calls the way of service, rather than power. And we can hope, for the church and the world, that our bishops' model for love is the one who said, "as I have loved you."

As for the rest of us, the Illinois judge exemplifies the fact that none of us can say, "I am the church" or "They are the church." We are all the church; and our union of hearts and minds is not found in our state of life, but in the saving Lord the church has given us through all its years of splendor and, yes, its crying need of reform. As his followers, we will be known, then, like the great ones who have gone before us, not for our self-righteousness or anger, our resentment or judgment of others, our human-made laws or pet causes, but for our love.

This article appear in Mother Jones magazine at <http://motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2010/09/paul-pierson-jacob-s-hacker>

Here's What's the Matter With Kansas

By Kevin Drum

Why has income inequality grown so explosively over the past 30 years? Why do so many working and middle class voters cast their ballots for a party that's so obviously a captive of corporations and the rich? Why is there no longer any real sustained effort to improve the lot of the middle class?

There's no shortage of answers. There's the "What's the Matter With Kansas" theory. There's the demise of labor unions. There's the well-worn story of the rise of conservative think tanks. There's the impact of globalization on unskilled and semi-skilled labor. There's the growing returns to education in a world that grows more complex every year.

But these are all limited and therefore unsatisfactory explanations, and no one has yet put them all together into a single organic whole that feels genuinely complete and compelling. Until now. The book that finally does it is called *Winner-Take-All Politics*, [1] by Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, and it puts together all of these pieces with a clarity of explanation that's breathtaking. I hesitate to summarize their argument for fear of ruining it, but here's the nickel version:

1. In the 60s, at the same time that labor unions begin to decline, liberal money and energy starts to flow strongly toward "postmaterialist" issues: civil rights, feminism, environmentalism, gay rights, etc. These are the famous "interest groups" that take over the Democratic Party during the subsequent decades.
2. At about the same time, business interests take stock of the country's anti-corporate mood and begin to pool their resources to push for generic pro-business policies in a way they never had before. Conservative think tanks start to press a business-friendly agenda and organizations like the Chamber of Commerce start to fundraise on an unprecedented scale. This level of persistent, organizational energy is something new.
3. Unions, already in decline, are the particular focus of business animus. As they decline, they leave a vacuum. There's no other nationwide organization dedicated to persistently fighting for middle class economic issues and no

- other nationwide organization that's able to routinely mobilize working class voters to support or oppose specific federal policies. (In both items #2 and #3, note the focus on *persistent organizational pressure*. This is key.)
4. With unions in decline and political campaigns becoming ever more expensive, Democrats eventually decide they need to become more business friendly as well. This is a vicious circle: the more unions decline, the more that Democrats turn to corporate funding to survive. There is, in the end, simply no one left who's fighting for middle class economic issues in a sustained and organized way. Conversely, there are lots of extremely well-funded and determined organizations fighting for the interests of corporations and the rich.

The result is exactly what you'd expect. With liberal money and energy focused mostly on non-economic concerns, the country moves steadily leftward on social issues. With conservative money and energy focused mostly on the interests of corporations and the rich—and with no one really fighting back—the country moves steadily rightward on economic issues. Thomas Frank's famous working-class Kansans who vote against their own economic interests are easily explained. It's not just that conservatives appeal to them on social grounds, it's that there's no one left to really make the economic case to them in the first place. And even if anyone did, they have little reason to believe that Democrats would actually follow through in concrete ways. So why not vote on abortion and gay rights instead?

I'm not doing Pierson and Hacker justice here. In fact, I'm not really even trying to. What I *am* doing is telling you to buy a copy of their book and read it. Seriously. Just get a copy and read at least Parts I and II. No book is perfect, and I feel a little silly gushing too much, but this is the most complete and sustained explanation I've ever read of why, over the past 30 years, America has gone the direction it has even while most other countries haven't. And although Hacker and Pierson's sympathies are obvious, this isn't a polemic. It's an explanation. For me, it was a 300-page "Aha!" moment.

More later. In the meantime, though, buy the book. I can almost guarantee you won't be disappointed.

The following are remarks made by Fr. Charles E. Curran, Elizabeth Scurlock University Professor of Human Values at Southern Methodist University, at the closing of a July 24-27 gathering of moral theologians in Trent, Italy. They appeared in the *National Catholic Reporter*.

'We cannot put our heads in the sand'

This has been an extraordinary meeting of 600 Catholic moral theologians from all over the world that has contributed much to the development of Catholic moral theology. Thanks to the meeting at Padua [Italy] four years ago and this meeting now, the process of dialogue and interchange has been growing.

Both the understanding of the Church Catholic and of moral theology recognizes the need and importance of such dialogue and interchange. By definition, the Church Catholic is a big church, having room for both saints and sinners, people of all races and colors and languages, and people living in all parts of the world. Less than a century ago, moral theology was primarily a European enterprise, and moral theologians in Europe were in somewhat regular contact with one another through their writings. The fact that the textbooks were all in Latin made this communication even easier. But today, moral theology is done on every continent. Since Catholic moral theologians belong to a worldwide church, it is absolutely essential for moral theologians to learn from one another and to be in dialogue.

Moral theology today recognizes the role of social location as affecting all of us. We are finite individuals and are always limited because we exist in one space and culture and one particular time. We have become more conscious of this reality in the last few decades. We white Catholic moral theologians in the United States have rightly been criticized for our abysmal failure to recognize the evil of racism in our country and our church, and the consequent white privilege that we enjoy. Catholic feminists have reminded us of the patriarchy that continues to exist in our church and our society. Liberation theologians have recalled for us God's preferential option for the poor and the need for this to be an important hermeneutic principle in Catholic social ethics. Thus the type of dialogue and interchange taking place in this meeting is important for Catholic moral theology. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to [Jesuit Fr.] James Keenan [of Boston College] and the other people who have worked tirelessly to organize this meeting.

As I listened to our discussions of past, present and future, there was one important issue that did not receive enough attention. I refer to the different approaches taken by the majority of Catholic moral theologians and of the hierarchical magisterium of the church. James Keenan in his acclaimed history of Catholic moral theology in the 20th century describes the methodology of Pope John Paul II's 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* as neo-manualist. Keenan goes on to say, "Few moral theologians found the encyclical a hospitable acceptance of their work during the 25 years since *Humanae Vitae*." Enda McDonagh has titled his latest book *Theology in Winter Light*. This is not only a theoretical issue; it has practical ramifications since it deals with such concrete issues as contraception, sterilization, divorce, homosexuality, abortion in its legal and moral aspects, and especially the role of women in the church. Even Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* recognized the problem and called it "a genuine crisis." But we in this meeting have not really addressed this crisis. We cannot put our heads in the sand. The present problems of priests' pedophilia and its cover-up by bishops have made many recognize the need for change in our church. The reality is that many people have left the church not because of disagreements with basic areas of faith and Catholic eucharistic celebration, but often because of the issues mentioned above, as well as the pedophilia crisis. Our church today is in serious trouble, but I have to admit in light of the earlier emphasis on social location I am speaking primarily from the perspective of the church in Europe and in North America. But still, the problem today in these churches is great and has to be recognized and addressed. This problem is especially acute for women in our church.

Bishop Kevin Dowling [of Rustenburg, South Africa] has recently candidly addressed the authoritarianism and overcentralization in the church today. Antonio Autiero [of the University of Münster, Germany], our host in Trent, has recognized the great number of Catholics leaving the church today because of its moral teachings. "One cannot deny that there is a movement away from the church, quite explicitly or sometimes even simply pragmatically, precisely on account of the church's insistence on moral themes public or private, marked by normative solutions that make little sense to the critical consciousness of contemporary men and women." The Pew Research Center in the United States concluded a few years ago that one out of three people who were raised in the Catholic church in the United States are no longer Catholic today. The second largest "religious denomination" in the United States today consists of fallen-away Catholics. One out of 10 people in the United States is such a fallen-away Catholic.

Catholic parents and grandparents are well aware of this reality. Let me add here a personal note. A few weeks ago I was on vacation for a week with friends -- a wife and husband, their four children, and eight grandchildren along with other friends. The grandparents are in their 70s and the adult children are around 40. Only one of the four adult children was married in the Catholic church, but today two of them and their spouses are staunch members of the Episcopal church. I assure you that relativism and secularism played no role in their decisions.

Our love for the church and our role as Catholic moral theologians call for all of us to address these issues no matter what our positions are. We who are advocates for change must recognize our own limited social location and the need to listen to all others. An honest, open dialogue is required on the part of everyone in the church based on a mutual love for the church, a respect for all those engaging in the discussion, and a recognition of the essential roles in the church of the Holy Spirit, the hierarchical magisterium, theologians, and the *sensus fidelium*. We are all called to put flesh and blood on the ancient axiom, "*In necessariis, unitas; in dubiis, libertas; in omnibus, caritas.*" ("In necessary matters, unity; in doubtful matters, freedom; in all things, charity.")

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