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Priests of God: Pastors or Community Organizers?

By Mary Ann Kreitzer

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The constant challenge of fallen human nature is deciding over and over again whom we will follow: God or the world. Once the wife of a couple engaged in a marriage ministry shared with me a conversation she had with the priest who recruited them. “You have more to offer your Church,” he said, “than a baby every year,” which is Planned Parenthood’s mentality in a nutshell. A few years later, another young woman in a couples’ ministry to the engaged criticized the decision of friends to accept all the children God would send them. She thought they should use NFP (natural family planning) to space their children. Although I was teaching NFP at the time, I disagreed saying I admired their faith. “It takes three to be married,” I said. “What’s wrong with letting the smartest of the three do some of the planning?”

The third conversation was most troubling. On the way to a day of reflection for the parish council, I travelled with my pastor. He commented that priests need a day off now and then from saying Mass. Stunned, I replied, “I love daily Mass; I can’t imagine a priest not wanting to say Mass every day.” He responded sardonically, “Well, I can.” Later he left the priesthood to “marry” a woman with whom I carpooled to the local parochial school.

Which brings me to the central question for the Christian: “Whom will I serve: God or the World?” When laity serve the world the results are bad, but when priests, chosen and anointed by God, serve the world, the results are disastrous. This article will examine the approach of the saintly Cure of Ars outlined in Pope Benedict’s letter to clergy for the year for priests which began on June 19, Feast of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, a day traditionally devoted to praying for the sanctification of priests. In contrast I will present several pastors in the Arlington Diocese following the example of Saul Alinsky, the world’s “patron saint” of community organizers.

The pope wrote that the year of prayer should “deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a more forceful and incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world.” The “pastoral plan” of St. Jean was “the complete identification of the man with his ministry he regularly visited the sick and families, organized popular missions and patronal feasts, collected and managed funds for his charitable and missionary works, embellished and furnished his parish church, cared for the orphans and teachers of the “*Providence*” (an institute he founded; provided for the education of children; founded confraternities and enlisted lay persons to work at his side.” The saint lived the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. His “tools” were prayer, fasting, and complete submission to the will of God.

Compare this to the work of two local pastors, among others, who have adopted the approach of Saul Alinsky, Fr. Gerry Creedon, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo in Arlington and Fr. Tuck Grinnell, pastor of St. Anthony’s in Falls Church. Both are community organizers for the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) local affiliate, VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement). VOICE claims to be non-partisan but if one examines their agenda it involves lobbying for liberalism, *i.e.*, increasing government’s role in education, housing, health care, etc., and threatening politicians who fail to support their agenda. Like ACORN, Gamaliel, PICO, and other radical community organizing entities, IAF’s goals favor liberal politics and politicians. They also siphon off parish collection money to fund IAF’s national office and salaries. Tens of thousands of dollars collected from Arlington parishioners filled IAF’s coffers last year (see www.lesfemmes-thetruth.org/v141/twilight.htm) and will continue to do so every year these parishes belong to the network. IAF asks for 1 % of the yearly collection as “dues.” Most parishioners don’t have a clue.

Let's look for a minute at national IAF. The group's website is totally up-front about its goal - POWER. "The leaders and organizers of [IAF] build organizations whose primary purpose is power - the ability to act - and whose chief product is social change." What kind of social change, the wise Catholic asks? We have a living example in IAF's most famous organizer, Barack Obama. His goal is to expand the tentacles of government into every facet of American life. IAF claims to be "non-ideological" and "strictly non-partisan," but liberal politics is what the group is all about. IAF uses tactics of intimidation and bullying to accomplish its goals. Meetings are pre-planned and manipulated down to telling people when to cheer for a politician and when to be silent. A flyer for VOICE's July 20th meeting with Governor Kaine announced an earlier date for the "Final Run-Through for the Action."

To understand how IAF works visit SperoForum.com and google Stephanie Block. She has written numerous articles exposing IAF. Not only is their agenda in conflict with Catholic teaching, but their methods as well. Their primary goal is to radicalize as many people as possible and use them to move the country toward socialism. Block's insightful articles at Spero Forum and elsewhere on the web document IAF's links to the Catholic dissent group, Call to Action, as well as the RENEW program, and to principles of liberation theology. IAF works in parallel with other community organizing groups to change the religious paradigm from advancing the kingdom of God to advancing the kingdom of this world. All the groups are wedded to Alinsky's doctrine that the end justifies the means and any tactic is good if it achieves the goal. Calumny, slander, bullying, lying, are all justified by victory.

Recent town hall meetings where violence erupted witness to the morally bankrupt activities of community organizers. Six union thugs from SEIU (Service Employees International Union) led by long-time community organizer, Elston McCowan, were arrested outside Democratic Congressman Russ Carnahan's town hall meeting in St. Louis for allegedly beating up black conservative Kenneth Gladney. At that same meeting, union members were ushered through a side door ahead of regular citizens to fill up the front seats. This is the ugly reality of morally bankrupt Alinsky organizing.

IAF claims over 50 groups around the country actively lobbying for a diverse agenda that, in many cases, opposes Catholic doctrine. For example, GIBO (Greater Boston Interfaith Organization) in Massachusetts demands, among other things, universal family planning services in health care throughout the state. These programs would, at the very least, fund chemical birth control and the morning -- after pill both of which are abortifacients. Other agenda items include outcome based education and affirmative action loans. Assisting the poor may be the goal of the useful dupes working with IAF; the national goal is power to the organizer.

In 2008, the late Fr. John Neuhaus wrote in a *First Things* blog post, that the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), which grew out of a partnership between Alinsky and the late Msgr. Jack Egan of Chicago, was "using the Catholic Church as a milk cow to fund organizations that frequently were actively working against the Church's mission, especially in their support of pro-abortion activities and politicians." One of the most insidious groups milking the Catholic Church is IAF, which Block says receives about 16% of the national campaign's grants every year racking up millions since CCHD began. Informed Catholics boycott the national collection taken up in most dioceses in November.

As for VOICE, they are indeed political. Fr. Grinnell, speaking to the Washington Post last October, said, "From the elected officials' side, they're going to see the birth of an interfaith organization as a huge ally for them if they do the right thing or a huge obstacle if they do the wrong thing." Translate "right" and "wrong" as liberal vs. conservative and you'll immediately recognize the political threat. VOICE is simply ACORN by another name, working to elect big-government Democrat Party candidates, despite VOICE's non-profit status. Does anyone think that the Obama IRS will question or investigate their activities?

Both Fr. Creedon and Fr. Grinnell are well-known for liberal politics and coddling of dissent. Fr. Creedon's liberalism was front and center during the Kennedy funeral. He gave the invocation at the Memorial Service, celebrated at the disgraceful funeral Mass, and participated in the private graveside service. A CNN video on the St. Charles Borromeo website says Fr. Creedon "counseled Kennedy for more than thirty years." Interesting - exactly what was he counseling him on - his golf swing?

Should the Church, and particularly priests, engage in political activity and what does it do to the priest's understanding of himself as another Christ? St. Jean Vianney, the pope tells us, was "consumed . . . by apostolic zeal for the salvation of souls." Does the priest-community organizer share that holy vision? No. A case in point is illustrative. Fr. Grinnell held a "Day of Hope" in June to offer members of the community an opportunity to meet with representatives from . . . service organizations, a laudable goal. However, parishioners tell us that parents and godparents arriving for the baptism class that day were handed their certificate of completion and sent home because there was no room available for sacramental preparation. When you consider that the breakdown of the family is a principal cause of poverty, the pastor's apparent indifference to this important teaching moment in the life of the family speaks volumes.

St. Anthony's also has a parish nurse who works with the local Bailey's Crossroads Health Clinic which refers for abortion. The nurse distributes a state flyer on sex abuse (in Spanish since the parish has a large Hispanic population) that translates: "If you need immediate medical attention, the doctor can prescribe a medication to prevent you from becoming pregnant." This can only refer to the morning after pill, which prevents implantation, not conception. Promoting abortion and birth control is common in Alinskyite groups, and many, even when they don't directly work for abortion, network and promote the efforts of those who do.

Judging from videos and photos on the VOICE website, Fr. Creedon and Fr. Grinnell are important members. They attend and address the mass meetings, talk to the press, and are very much front men for the group. They obviously have committed long hours to their community organizing efforts. It is hard to see St. Jean Vianney's "deep personal identification with the Sacrifice of the Cross [which] led him - by a sole inward movement - from the altar to the confessional" in these priests' actions.

There is another pernicious aspect of IAF activities. They teach that man is the creator of a worldly utopia and can save himself if he can just snatch power from the haves and transfer it to the have nots. Is that what Jesus taught? Was he recruiting zealots to challenge Rome? No! He said, "My kingdom is not of this world" and "The poor you will always have with you."

That doesn't mean Christians shouldn't care about the poor. It means no matter how much people do, we will still live in a fallen world with problems. The solution is individual sanctification. When Dives recognizes his Christian responsibility, he will serve Lazarus at the gate. It is the priest's duty to help him develop a Christian conscience through prayer, the sacraments, and seeking God's will in all things.

Sadly, the poor are not ultimately helped by the socialistic approaches of Alinsky-style organizing. Like Communist groups, IAF and other community organizers are undergirded by an attitude of class envy and class warfare that works toward revolution and greater accrual of power to the organizers. Priests involved become a contradiction, ultimately serving the world, not God.

In contrast, St. Jean Vianney lived a lifestyle poorer than his poorest parishioner. He ate simple food, had few belongings, and spent the bulk of his day in the church. He became poor to serve the poor. He converted thousands of souls during his lifetime and attributed it to fasting from food and sleep and spending long hours in prayer before the tabernacle and in the confessional. Imagine what might have been if Fr. Creedon had imitated St. Jean Vianney more than Saul Alinsky. Imagine the blessing for Ted Kennedy, his entire family, and the Church.

It is a constant temptation for man to believe that he can overcome the world through his own plans and programs. But those who seek the world's answers often create, not a utopian paradise, but a dystopia where "solutions" are dehumanizing and serve the culture of death. Such is the normal outcome for the community organizer's grand ideas. Only those with eyes focused on the Lord can, like St. Jean Vianney, transform the world around them and lead souls to salvation. I echo the final words of Pope Benedict in his letter to clergy, "Dear priests, Christ is counting on you. In the footsteps of the Cure of Ars, let yourselves be enthralled by him. In this way you too will be, for the world in our time, heralds of hope, reconciliation and peace." Saints, not community organizers, transform societies. ☞

Caritas in Veritate

The new Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI regarding “integral human development in charity and truth.”

By Stephanie Block

Saul Alinsky, the consummate community organizer, said, “To hell with charity. The only thing you get is what you’re strong enough to get – so you had better organize.” He was defining “charity” in the very narrow sense of a “handout,” which obviously can only take a person so far. Alinsky and his followers sought to address social problems such as poverty at a deeper level, believing them to be *systemic* – the rotten fruit of corrupt institutions and an intrinsically flawed social order that can only be changed by the demands of organized people.

Like any influential social movement, there is some truth in these ideas. Suffering either rooted in misuse of individual freedom or in “systemic” defects – legalized slavery or legalized abortion, for example – can be changed. Organizing people to demand that change is one way to accomplish it.

Addressing systemic defects – sometimes referred to as “the social question” – has been an important discussion for several hundred years and raises many questions in the mind of a sincere and intelligent activist. What are the humanly-generated root causes of human suffering? How do we address them *appropriately*, without making the problems worse? How do we protect our organizing from power plays that have nothing to do with authentic justice? Will a new system be any better than the old system? Anyone with a heart for social justice needs answers to these questions. False solutions cause as much suffering – or more – than the problem.

The Catholic Church has answers to some of these questions.

Real Charity

Alinsky and common usage to the contrary, “charity” doesn’t mean a “handout.” It’s the Latin word for “love,” which *Caritas in Veritate* calls “an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace.” [CV 1]

“Charity” – which “is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine” – also isn’t *sentimental*, “detached from ethical living” or from moral truth. [CV2, 3] In fact, without that truth, social justice activism (“charity”) is no more than “subjective opinions and impressions,” limited by cultural and historical circumstances. A false assessment of the value and substance of things ultimately leads to *injustice*. “Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation, especially in a globalized society at difficult times like the present.” [CV 5]

To guide those seeking to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice, with charity and in truth, Benedict XVI revisits Paul VI’s teachings on *integral human development*. “[A]uthentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension,” the Pope writes. “Without the perspective of eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing-space. Enclosed within history, it runs the risk of being reduced to the mere accumulation of wealth; humanity thus loses the courage to be at the service of higher goods, at the service of the great and disinterested initiatives called forth by universal charity. Man does not develop through his own powers, nor can development simply be handed to him.... Only through an encounter with God are we able to see in the other something more than just another creature, to recognize the divine image in the other, thus truly coming to discover him or her and to mature in a love that ‘becomes concern and care for the other.’” [CV 11] The “*fully human meaning of the development that the Church proposes*” has a number of important components. It rejects amoral and anti-human technological development. [CV 14, 31, 68-77] It respects human sexuality, “locating at the foundation of society the married couple, man and woman, who accept one another mutually,

in distinction and in complementarity: a couple, therefore, that is open to life.... [A] society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized. ... These important teachings form the basis for the missionary aspect of the Church's social doctrine, which is an essential element of evangelization." [CV 15]

Benedict XVI challenges "the model of development adopted in recent decades" to help people rise out of hunger, poverty, disease, and illiteracy in an increasingly interdependent world and calls for a "*new humanistic synthesis*" [CV 21], liberated from ideologies [CV 22], and progressing in ways that are not merely economic or technological [CV 23].

Addressing Specific Concerns

Lest these foundational points be understood as minimizing the need to respond to specific sources of human suffering, *Caritas in Veritate* looks long and hard at the contemporary world. Globalization, international trade, and international financial systems bring a host of social problems. Nations are understandably concerned about limits to their sovereignty and "new forms of political participation, nationally and internationally" [CV24]. Systems of protection and welfare, workers' associations to defend their members' rights in a world of international labor migration [CV 25], problems caused by "cultural leveling" [CV 26], preventable hunger and "food insecurity" [CV 27], violent denial of religious freedom [CV 29], the earth's "ecological health" [CV 32], and an entire range of issues concerning peace and stability must all be tackled.

At the heart of these concerns lie the evils of abortion, contraception, and euthanasia. "One of the most striking aspects of development in the present day is the important question of *respect for life*, which cannot in any way be detached from questions concerning the development of peoples. It is an aspect which has acquired increasing prominence in recent times, obliging us to broaden our concept of poverty and underdevelopment to include questions connected with the acceptance of life, especially in cases where it is impeded in a variety of ways.... Morally responsible openness to life represents a rich social and economic resource." [CV 28; CV 44]

How is any of this achievable? Chapter three of *Caritas in Veritate* makes it clear that if mankind imagines it will work its way out of its problems alone, it is sorely deceived.

"Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action and morals" [\[CV 34, quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church\]](#).

The pope has a few general comments about "the market," but his point is not to teach economics, *per se*, but to stress that these matters must be at the service of humanity. "The Church's social doctrine holds that authentically human social relationships of friendship, solidarity and reciprocity can also be conducted within economic activity, and not only outside it or 'after' it.... It is part and parcel of human activity and precisely because it is human, it must be structured and governed in an ethical manner." [CV 36]

Similarly, the encyclical is more concerned with the potential to use the fact of globalization for human good. "We should not be its victims, but rather its protagonists, acting in the light of reason, guided by charity and truth. Blind opposition would be a mistaken and prejudiced attitude, incapable of recognizing the positive aspects of the process, with the consequent risk of missing the chance to take advantage of its many opportunities for development. The processes of globalization, suitably understood and directed, open up the unprecedented possibility of large-scale redistribution of wealth on a world-wide scale; if badly directed, however, they can lead to an increase in poverty and inequality, and could even trigger a global crisis." [CV 42] The term "redistribution of wealth" doesn't, in the context of the encyclical letter, imply an international Robin Hood but refers to the availability of abundant resources that, thanks to "the mobility of capital and labor" benefit developed countries disproportionately. A "humanizing goal of solidarity," however, will "steer the globalization of humanity in relational terms, in terms of communion and the sharing of goods." [CV 42]

Ethical business practices and humanizing globalization are only possible when the "deepest moral needs of the person" are met. In the face of conflicting "systems of morality," the Church's social doctrine, "based on man's creation 'in the image of God' (Gen 1:27), [provides] a datum which gives rise to the inviolable dignity of the human person and the transcendent value of natural moral norms." These "two pillars" of human dignity and moral truth are the rock on which economic and financial systems must be structured. [CV 45].

The encyclical gives a good deal of attention to ecological matters. Eschewing any tendency to "view nature as something more important than the human person...[leading] to attitudes of neo-paganism or a new pantheism," [CV 48] "the Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone.

She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood. The deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: when “human ecology” is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.... If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology.” [CV 51]

Further Dimensions of Human Development

These materialistic concerns, however important, are only a fraction of what constitutes authentic human development. The pope examines “other kinds of poverty,” such as that “produced by a rejection of God’s love, by man’s basic and tragic tendency to close in on himself, thinking himself to be self-sufficient or merely an insignificant and ephemeral fact, a “stranger” in a random universe...” [CV 53] He particularly laments relativistic moral education that “makes everyone poorer and has a negative impact on the effectiveness of aid to the most needy populations.” [CV 61]

The Church, says *Caritas in Veritate*, is “a sign and instrument of human unity. Relationships between human beings throughout history cannot but be enriched by reference to this divine model.” [CV 54] How is this manifest? “The Christian faith, by becoming incarnate in cultures and at the same time transcending them, can help them grow in universal brotherhood and solidarity, for the advancement of global and community development.” [CV 59] By contrast, the alienating tendencies of syncretism or the subjugation of the person to occult powers are counter-productive. Where “love and truth have difficulty asserting themselves...authentic development is impeded.” [CV 55]

As other encyclicals on social justice have done, *Caritas in Veritate* stresses the principle of subsidiarity, closely linked to the principle of solidarity, as an “effective antidote against any form of all-encompassing welfare state” and a vehicle for “managing globalization.” [CV 58] Wealthier countries are encouraged to be generous in giving economic aid to poorer countries. [CV 60] Countries are urged to address the phenomenon of migration, involving enormous numbers of people, with cooperative policies and respect for the individuals involved. [CV 62] The great dignity of human work and the contributions of labor unions are affirmed. [CV 62, 63] These are classic themes of Catholic social teaching.

The call “for a reform of the United Nations Organization, and likewise of economic institutions and international finance, so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth” is not so classic. “[T]here is urgent need of a true world political authority...regulated by law, to observe consistently the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, to seek to establish the common good, and to make a commitment to securing authentic integral human development inspired by the values of charity in truth....[I]t would have to have the authority to ensure compliance with its decisions from all parties.” Such a world body, if it is to be *just*, must meet the criteria set forth in the beginning of the encyclical, that is, of operating with true charity, rooted in moral truth.

“Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is.” [CV 78]

Human “[d]evelopment needs Christians with their arms raised towards God in prayer,” the encyclical concludes. “Christians moved by the knowledge that truth-filled love, *caritas in veritate*, from which authentic development proceeds, is not produced by us, but given to us. ... Development requires attention to the spiritual life, a serious consideration of the experiences of trust in God, spiritual fellowship in Christ, reliance upon God’s providence and mercy, love and forgiveness, self-denial, acceptance of others, justice and peace.”

The “systemic change” called for here is a good deal more radical than any Alinskyian will ever grasp. ☞

The Not-So-Green Pope

By Samuel Gregg D.Phil

“The Green Pope.” Ever since Joseph Ratzinger’s election as pope in 2005, this has been a popular description of Benedict XVI. It’s partly fueled by events such as the Vatican City State adopting solar power paneling, and, more significantly, Benedict’s discussion of environmental questions in several papal documents. The label will proliferate following the recent announcement that the pope’s 2010 World Day of Peace message will focus on the connection between peace and respect for God’s creation.

The problem, however, is that the present hype about “the greenest pope in history”—to cite another headline—is misleading. A somewhat different picture emerges from careful analysis of Benedict’s formal pronouncements on environmental matters.

These quickly demonstrate that Benedict’s attention to environmental subjects is grounded, unsurprisingly, in a very orthodox Christian theological analysis. Indeed, it sometimes generates hard questions about many contemporary environmentalists’ priorities and philosophical assumptions.

Exhibit A is Benedict’s recent social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. The text is replete with warnings about real and potential environmental degradation. Yet it also makes points impossible to reconcile with much contemporary environmental thinking.

No one should be surprised that Benedict insists that people are intrinsically more valuable than nature - a point disputed by some Green-leaning philosophers. Nor should we be shocked to discover that Benedict describes positions that question humanity’s innate superiority to the natural world as facilitating “attitudes of neo-paganism or a new pantheism” (CV 48).

In this connection, it’s worth underscoring *Caritas in Veritate*’s extensive disputation of the “population-growth-is-evil” thesis (CV 44). Population alarmism has been a staple ingredient of much environmentalist ideology ever since Paul Ehrlich’s infamous 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, predicted (wrongly) that “in the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death” and enormous environmental damage would flow from millions futilely trying to feed themselves.

The dominant theological lens through which *Caritas in Veritate* views environmental concerns is that of stewardship. Stewardship concerns humans protecting and cultivating nature for their own and God’s purposes, and even using new technologies to enhance nature’s ability to serve us (CV 50). In short, nature is neither to be deified nor arbitrarily exploited. That’s a Jewish and Christian motif as old as the Book of Genesis itself.

Also telling is Benedict’s insistence upon a holistic understanding of what we mean by the word ecology. “The book of nature”, Benedict insists, “is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations” (CV 51). In other writings, Benedict highlights the incongruity of people being outraged about wanton environmental destruction, while ignoring or even promoting the deep damage done by ethical relativism to society’s moral ecology.

Incidentally, the phrases “climate change” or “global warming” appear nowhere in *Caritas in Veritate*. Again, this is not surprising. Benedict has been careful not to prejudge the science of this complex subject. In his 2008 World Day of Peace message, Benedict observed that in thinking through environmental problems, “It is important for assessments...to be carried out prudently, in dialogue with experts and people of wisdom, uninhibited by ideological pressure to draw hasty conclusions.”

As someone who has labored ceaselessly for the priority of truth over ideology, Benedict knows that neither international organizations nor public opinion determine the truth about climate change and its causes. That’s a question for science, and many reputable scientists dispute aspects of the prevailing tenets of climate change to which some environmentalists seem religiously wedded.

The most recent such example to surface is the internationally renowned Australian geologist Professor Ian Plimer (who, incidentally, is also a fierce critic of creationism). His *Heaven and Earth* (2009) argues that climate change has little if anything to do with man-made greenhouse gases. The book is making intellectual waves across the globe, selling 30,000 copies in its first month.

Plimer's meticulous analysis of the facts has also impressed prominent Catholic clergy such as Cardinal George Pell of Sydney. Neither Plimer nor Pell are climate change deniers. They do, however, question conventional perceptions about its causes. They also consider as positively harmful to the cause of scientific truth the thuggish tactics (such as starving climate-skeptics of funding) employed by some politicians, environmentalists and academics to try to terminate any debate.

As anyone who has studied his life and thought knows, Joseph Ratzinger has never been intimidated by political correctness. Certainly Benedict affirms our greater sensitivity to the environment's fragility and the ongoing necessity for orthodox Christian theological reflection upon man's relationship with the natural world. But Benedict does not make the mistake of romanticizing nature, which can, after all, be very cruel. Nor is he afraid to underline the dark, anti-human side to much Green ideology.

In this regard, Benedict's "greenness" turns out to be rather pale. ❧

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“I’m from the Government; I’m Here to Help You!”

Big Nanny Nurse Strikes Again

By Marie P. Loehr

*... the Constitution was written to protect man from the government. The Bill of Rights was not directed against private citizens, but against the government—as an explicit declaration that individual rights supersede any public or social power. -Ayn Rand, “Man’s Rights,” *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**

Why a quote from Ayn Rand to head this column? Ayn Rand espoused Objectivism, extreme individualism, and emotion-free intellectualism. Her rejection of religion was based on her perception of all religion as being as superstitious and oppressive as any of the collectivist philosophies and practices she so fiercely opposed. That said, Ayn Rand and the Catholic Church have more in common than either might realize, much less admit. Both stood against the sweeping socialist collective that began with the French Revolution. In *Quadregesimo Anno*, Pius XI warns that “no one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true Socialist.” He stated this in 1931.

Ayn Rand might go still farther and suggest no one can be truly human and still be a dedicated socialist. She opposed all forms of collectivism as a reduction of the human community to no more than a herd or a pack of animals. She does not say that in so many words, perhaps. But she scorns the dissolution of private initiative, particular talent, and personal intelligence into the coerced collective.

The Church in its turn presents and upholds objective truth, *i.e.*, there is an external reality beyond the self and its ego, as well as an absolute reality and truth which demands our discovery and assent. The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is a true “communio” in Christ, through his Church. It is spiritual union in him that nonetheless respects the free will and individual personality God gives each of us. The Church—and Christ—encourage us to find our own gifts and use them, as individuals in knowledge, love, and service, without being dissolved into the faceless, even amorphous, “collective.”

We are to restore all things in Christ. That includes the original role of the intellect as head, and the will as heart—and subject to reason. We are not living interior life in Christ if we indulge in unrestrained feeling and “empty sentimentality.”

This reality of spiritual direction in and through the Church is countered by the various collectivisms that have stood against the Church. From the pagan *imperium* to modern dystopias we see an emphasis on ideals that oppose themselves to objective truth, to the *communio* that balances individual goals with community goals, and to emotional discipline and self-detachment, all in imitation of Christ himself.

The French Revolution's vaunted cry of “liberte, egalite, fraternite” were code words for a new secularist religion and socialist collective. The bloody reality was a ghastly caricature of those ideals. They are fine examples of Orwellian doublethink and doublespeak—saying one thing on the surface, meaning the opposite subliminally. Marxism, Fascism, Nazism all sprouted from that poisoned tree. All began, not merely as socialism of varying stripes, but as determined collectivism. There are three main characteristics to their mythos, all diametrically opposed to the reality of Christ and his Church.

1] They are entirely subjectivist—based in feeling, emotion, reflexive animal sentience; the intellect must be subordinate to the passion of the moment, and its sweeping objectives.

2] They are entirely collectivist—demanding that the individual be submerged in the collective whole; everyone, even children, becomes a faceless cog in the greater machinery of the omnipotent—and omnipresent—state.

3] They are entirely sentimentalist—ruled by “the tyranny of feelings,” as Fr. Benedict Groeschel calls it; every citizen must surrender to, and be swept along whole-heartedly with whatever feeling the state commands at any given moment.

This last point proceeds inevitably from the first two points. The state is god, no less than it ever was in any pagan empire. The government elite and its technocrats are pope and priests. And the state is a very jealous god.

We have seen this in a succession of 20th century dystopias that purported to be human salvation—but left only death and despair in their wakes. Yet the myth persists. Where is the Augustine who might write *The City of God* for our age, and hold up modern counterfeits to expose their falsehood and corruption of God’s truth for us?

The populist, progressivist strain in this U.S. politics has had for at least a century, perhaps a century and a half, a distinct messianic content. It aims for controlled order. It seeks uniformity of outcome in all endeavors. It demands that only the technocrat elite are capable of determining what is good or true or beautiful. It seeks to organize and order our individual AND community lives “for our own good.” This is remarkably similar to all the other collectivist experiments that have been tried and failed elsewhere in the world.

For such minds, the Constitution is outmoded. The Catholic Church is a grating obstacle. Their aims are always couched in “the greatest good for the greatest number,” “for your own good,” and inevitably for them the end always justifies the means. When we study these “isms” we find that whatever is good in them, (and evil always presents its temptations in the guise of good to snare us), is in fact stolen from Catholicism. They counterfeit Catholic truth like those predators who take on the coloration of harmless rocks or leaves or animals to entice their prey.

This is true whether we speak of Jacobinism, communism, Nazism, fascism or existentialism. It’s true in populist progressivism. We see it in ‘liberation theology.’ Leftist “Catholics” in this country have swallowed that poisoned bait hook, line, and sinker. And let’s call a spade a spade yet again, many of the Roman Catholic bishops in this country have aided and abetted leftist agendas, out of blindness or laziness or ignorance or malice. They’ve sold their souls for government hand-outs. They’ve used the government to do their proper work of teaching, educating, healing and shepherding their flock.

They have sown the wind, and they will reap the whirlwind. Obamacare is only the “growing tip” of things to come.

Usurpation of individual rights, property and work, as well as healthcare, is nothing new. Even the Christmas story is a story of government mandate intruding on the right of a couple to live their life and bear their child in the peace and safety of their home and their town, among their friends and family.

When Rome mandates its census, Mary is close to term. But no census takers come to the doors of all those affected by its mandates! There is no form via mail to be filled out and mailed back. Every man must go to the place of his birth or family origin to be registered, and his dependents with him.

Thus the Holy Family sets out on that trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem. At Bethlehem there is no room in the local caravanserai, with all its noise and movement and crowding. We have a certain dismay at the idea of a baby being born among the animals sheltering in the stable/cave, but the caravanserai would have been no better, and was probably worse in terms of animals cheek by jowl with humans. They would have included camels with their foul tempers and drool, as well as horses and donkeys, and the inevitable by-products of their digestion and nervousness in the confined and swarming space.

The stable/cave is at least quiet, with only their own donkey—assuming they had one, and perhaps one or two cattle. It would have been easier to make a clean space and prepare a welcoming nest for the new baby. Where there was a shelter for the domestic animals, we may also assume there was a spring or well of some sort, close by, to provide water for drinking and cleansing.

But the relative security of home, with the women of the extended family, and the services of the local midwife—with experience and knowledge of delivering many babies, and how to deal with emergencies, was not available to them, thanks to government mandates.

We know Mary had gone to Elizabeth’s house as soon as she knew Elizabeth was pregnant, in order to help her with the last months of pregnancy, and delivery. So we may assume that Mary—as most Jewish girls, from onset of menses, must have—knew something about “birthing babies.” Even in modern times, if you were the oldest daughter, you were in charge of the younger brothers and sisters, especially when a new baby was on the way. You

learned much by observation, both visual and by listening to the adults discuss pregnancy and birth. Mary would have had far more accurate first-hand observation and knowledge to see her through her own final days of pregnancy and delivery.

Was there a local midwife, with experience and herbal helps? At least one apocryphal gospel cites the services of a local midwife. In her astonishment and temerity at the miraculous birth, she thought to test Mary's virginity after the delivery of the Christ Child, first hand, so to speak. She might have been able to attest to Mary's undamaged virginity, but that offending hand was withered, as punishment! That's an apocryphal tale. Yet even myth has a kernel of truth. What does this portend for those abortionists and ob/gyns who routinely violate the relative safety of the womb to abort babies, or to recommend abortion, after amniocentesis reveals "defective" babies?

Contraception, abortion, infanticide, and the euthanizing by murder, abandonment of failing or useless family dependents was a fact of pagan Roman life. Life since the Fall has always been precarious. Medical care has varied from age to age. We laugh at the exaggerations of Steve Martin's Barber of York, but this butcher's treatment was sometimes fact. Almost anyone could set up shop as an herbalist or "surgeon," until fairly late in human history. But even government regulation is no guarantee of good care.

The Church's call to the corporal, as well as spiritual, works of mercy, was simply a continuation of the healing work of Christ. Over the centuries the Church's work ameliorated much medical misery. The religious orders of the Middle Ages in Europe were often dedicated to healing work from their beginning to the present. Mother Teresa's work in India, and then around the world, is simply a continuation of that original mandate. With or without the pharmaceutical and technological developments of modern medicine, the sick must be cared for with compassion and cleanliness and comfort, one way or another. This is done as Christ did it, even in a hospital setting--heart speaking to heart as individuals, to each person as a soul loved by God, a temple of the Holy Spirit. It is the antithesis of the thrust of socialized medicine under secular government sway--often merely good veterinary treatment, as befits "higher animals" like humans, in the secular viewpoint.

In the history of that first Christmas Herod is the epitome of "I'm from the government; I'm here to help you" with the Magi. How he fawns and flatters and feigns concern for their quest and for this wondrous child. He urges them to return and share the good news with him, so he too can worship, even "help" this new baby king and his little family.

Herodian "healthcare" is pretty much selective culling by killing, whether it's his family, those infants that might be a usurping Messiah, or the Jewish elders held hostage to his whim. He is power corrupted and run amok. His concern is not for the health of his family or subjects, but only for his own health and longevity in power. This is totalitarian government at its peak of contempt for others. People, even intimates, are mere cogs in its machinations, expendable chess pieces to inflate its power, to satisfy its swollen, ever-expanding, self-regarding political ambitions.

Charles Rice notes, in an editorial in *The Wanderer* for 15 October 2009, that: "The federal takeover of health care, one sixth of the economy, is essential to the success of that coup [as Rice calls Obama's unprecedented actions and demands: "an extra-constitutional coup"]. It would open the door to federal control not only on what medical care you can receive but potentially also on what you eat, how much you weigh, your exercise regime, the level of heat and noise in your home, and whatever else might affect your health and therefore the cost of your health care to the taxpayer."

This is not far-fetched or paranoid. It's not inconceivable that doctors themselves will be subject to sanctions and censure unless their patients' vital stats conform to federal guidelines, however unrealistic. There are already protocols in certain healthcare providers, recently put into place, that demand a certain number of lab tests and blood work. Those who don't do the lab work, as soon as the protocol dictates, don't get needed prescription renewals. Big Nanny Nurse feels deeper pain when you thwart her will than any patient possibly can feel by that inadvertent thwarting. Patients must jump when BNN says jump, "for your own good," or else! This is extortionate healthcare, since without scrip renewals as needed, blood sugar and blood pressure, blood cholesterol and other lipids, all the complicated chemical processes of the human body can soar out of control, leading to sickness and/or death.

Isn't such coerced concern simply sensible and legitimate medical intervention to protect you from your own indolence or ignorance or general fallen perversity?! Perhaps—if we were all animals or infants or mental deficient . . . Government mandates are always one size fits all, ignoring all human variables of any sort, genes, experience, intelligence, religious belief, ethical conscience, or even the ethnic traditions government claims to respect.

But it doesn't stop at common sense reminders or interventions or, worst case, preventions. It never does. Already this writer is getting weekly calls from a local health provider, some automated, some not, warning we have

not seen our PCP recently— we had, only a couple of weeks previously, and several explaining as to a toddler what diabetics must do yearly, and catechizing the phone patient as to whether these have been done. Since they had, and frequently, this patient hung up in mid-call. There are also regular, ie, monthly calls reminding us of all the procedures, invasive and otherwise, that we must all go through “for our own good.” Whether we have a family history of the conditions these procedures purport to forestall, or not...

Even without these pre-obamacare protocols and intrusions, we know from past experience of government programs that such programs never go away. They only increase in cost and expand exponentially, like the Blob in the old Steve McQueen B-horror flick!

Pius XI says in *Quadregesimo Anno* that “The true aim of all social activity should be to help individual members of the social body, but never, never to destroy or absorb them.” Benedict XVI says in *Caritatis in Veritate* that “Subsidiarity is the most effective antidote against any form of an all-encompassing welfare state.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that:

The principle of subsidiarity is opposed to all forms of collectivism. It sets limits for state intervention. It aims at harmonizing the relationships between individuals and society. It tends toward the establishment of true international order. -CCC, n. 1885

Healthcare reform that disallows “freedom of conscience”, that mandates policies that serve the “culture of death” - in all its Herodian glory—are wrong. Healthcare that enforces coerced mandates on the relatively helpless people of this nation, or abrogates our constitutional rights and freedoms in its avowed claim and pursuit of “good” has lost sight of the principles on which this country was founded. Those bishops who support such reform, even with the excuse of helping the poor and disadvantaged and ignorant, have lost sight of Catholic principles founded in Christ. They have ignored the principle of subsidiarity and genuine Christian *caritas* based on *veritas* in their myopia or ambition or timidity or dependence on government handouts.

There is a long list of writings and attempts to achieve heaven on earth. A short list would include Plato’s *Republic*, More’s *Utopia*, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Butler’s *Erewhon*, Orwell’s *1984*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*. There have been many attempts to establish political utopias from the French Revolution to Marxist Communism in all its applied forms, to fascism, Nazism, liberation theology, and similar experiments. All of these rely on government or political or revolutionary coercion of some sort. All require the citizen to surrender his privacy and freedom [as opposed to license or libertinism] for the good of the tribe or the party or the nation as idol. All mistake the coerced collective for the *communio in veritas* and *caritas*. Many Catholics succumb to this delusion, too. The coerced collective is not even close to Christ’s “*cor ad cor*” *communio*.

Healthcare that becomes coercive “for our own good,” has stepped over the line our Founding Fathers drew in the sand of European “divine right.” By their fruits you will know them, Christ tells us. The fruits of Obamacare may be judged against the Bill of Rights, and Judie Brown’s list of inviolable principles:

- 1] No chemical, medical, or surgical abortion
- 2] No contraceptive services
- 3] No embryonic stem-cell research or therapy
- 4] No sterilization procedures
- 5] No allowance for euthanasia
- 6] No provision for assisted suicide
- 7] No healthcare rationing

Plus one more:

8] No violation of freedom of religion or conscience or individual rights in the pursuit of an idol and idyll—a false and unattainable ideal—of “good health” by government fiat.

That utopian goal is like a drug, seductive, addictive and, once acquired, a habit hard to kick. Before it hooks us, we need to do what Nancy Reagan counseled in the drug wars of the Eighties. By vote and veto, by petition and prayer, by study and steadfastness for principle, let’s “Just say NO!” to any healthcare reform that violates our Catholicism, our Constitution or our conscience. ∞

Which is worse?

A wee exhortation by Alan Peter

Which is worse?

- Obama or Bush
- Republicans or Democrats
- Heaven or Hell

We live in a 24/7, Blackberry World with constant Internet access. Turn on the 10 o'clock news; YouTube if you can't wait; *Time* and *Newsweek* and *People Magazine*, every week. Did you hear the latest; I'm getting a Tweet as we speak. It's tempting to give every issue equal weight.

These questions aren't equal, however. Serious as the comparative merits (and demerits) of our presidents may be, they are temporal considerations. The last question, on the other hand, has eternal resonance.

As Catholics, we are taught that we should constantly meditate on the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. Sometimes we *do* ask if we aren't living in *the* End Times...

Perhaps we are, but a quick read of history would indicate that ours is not the first age beset by trouble: World War II; the French Revolution; Martin Luther; the Black Death; two and even three Popes simultaneously; etc, etc. It takes more than trouble to make *the* End Times.

The more critical question is: are we living *our own* End Times? Most definitely. Each of us will pass from time to eternity and will have our Particular Judgment, when our souls for all eternity will be permanently fixed in either Heaven or Hell. Eternity is not "time without end" but "the end of time." That judgment should be the primary focus of our lives.

But isn't *Health Care Reform* important? As it furthers the Social Kingship of Jesus Christ, yes. As it follows Thomistic thought on life, yes. But being caught up in a debate about health care reform for any reason other than its moral dimension or its pleasing-ness to God is wrong.

As numerous people far smarter than myself have pointed out, Satan's most important breakthrough in the 20th Century is convincing people that he does not exist, and that Hell does not exist. He has craftily done that by creating the "24 hour news cycle" and "representative government" and a whole host of things to keep us busy and focused on everything but eternal matters. Saint Augustine wrote centuries ago, "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

This earth is not our home. We need to stop spending our time worrying about *Washington, fashion, and technology* and start worrying about our place in eternity. Time is one of the few things we have on this earth, and we should spend it much more wisely. Heaven is our true home and we should live like it is. ☞