

Los Pequeños Pepper

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Dear Archbishop Sheehan

Open letter to the Archbishop of Santa Fe, New Mexico

By Phil Sevilla,

Your Excellency:

I've just finished reading this latest news report from the *Catholic News Service* about your trip to Rome and your participation with Governor Richardson at the special ceremony at the Coliseum.

I don't intend to judge Governor Richardson's actions in Rome or your personal association with him. I realize our Lord reached out to and embraced sinners (Lk.15:3-17). But we can rightfully judge his actions as the Governor of New Mexico. Whatever Governor Richardson's reasons were to repeal the death penalty, whether it was a sincere "epiphany" or a shameless example of political grandstanding is between him and God. But let's look at the facts. Has New Mexico been a state where capital punishment has been abused or even imposed to any significant degree? The U.S. Department of Justice reports that there has only been one state sanctioned execution (2001) in New Mexico since 1977 and nine total since 1930.¹

In the meantime, Governor Richardson continues to promote and support the killing of *innocent* unborn children; the corruption of teens through sex education and pregnancy prevention programs which lead to disease, abortions and promiscuity; the legitimizing of same sex marriage, among other immoral public policies such as embryo-destructive stem cell research.

If we accept the Governor's sincere epiphany concerning the death penalty which has resulted in the execution in the state of one condemned criminal (who confessed) in over three decades, how about the 6,200 unborn children who, according to *Planned Parenthood's* research department, are executed in New Mexico by surgical abortion *annually*? That's twenty-three deaths a day!² No commutation, no life sentence, no death penalty repeal for unborn children slaughtered by *Planned Parenthood* and Curtis Boyd in Albuquerque, who commits late term abortions (up to 24 weeks). Does Governor Richardson have no compassion for these *innocent* human beings condemned to death because they are silent and bereft of an anti-death penalty lobby group defending them?

What about Governor Richardson's intention to bring back to life the domestic partners bill this Fall during a special session?³ SB12 died in the 2009 regular session. This was decided by the legislature and manifested the will of the people. He has been quoted as saying that "he wants a domestic partners law on the books as part of his legacy." Is he looking for a *quid pro quo* from the Catholic hierarchy, that is, a "yes" from the Governor on the repeal of the death penalty, for a "yes" by the Catholic bishops on a domestic partners rights bill? I, for one, pray to God Almighty that such a bargain, such a fix conceived in hell, is not in the works.

Please be aware, your Excellency, that many faithful Catholics in New Mexico are disturbed and upset by your appearance in Rome with Governor Richardson. Perhaps you had the opportunity to counsel him as a confessor and hopefully inform our Holy Father of Richardson's errors. Praise be to God if this is the case. Can there be a better opportunity for the soul of an errant Catholic politician to be directly admonished and counseled by our Holy Father, the supreme Pontiff and successor of St. Peter?

Lastly, I reflected on your photo with Governor Richardson at the Roman Coliseum, this great holy place where the blood of many early Christian martyrs soaked the ground, their bodies torn and severed by wild animals. Local news outlets have published your photo with Richardson. Would our Lord and Savior have stood together with Tiberius Caesar at this place if Tiberius had repealed crucifixions while continuing to slaughter Jews in Judea?

With filial respect always,

Phil Sevilla, president of the *Catholic Coalition* of New Mexico +

¹ <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/html/cp/2007/tables/cp07st09.htm>

² http://www.gutmacher.org/pubs/sfaa/new_mexico.html

³ <http://www.kob.com/article/stories/S872043.shtml?cat=500>

Faithful Bishops Take on Notre Dame

Amidst the sorry situation of Notre Dame University's invitation to pro-abortion President Obama to give a commencement address and receive an honorary degree, a number of US bishops have openly decried the scandal and used the moment for teaching.

Bishop Olmsted of the Phoenix Diocese, for instance, wrote to Father John Jenkins, President of Notre Dame, calling the invitation "a public act of disobedience to the Bishops of the United States. Our USCCB June 2004 Statement 'Catholics in Political Life' states: 'The Catholic community and Catholic institutions should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. They should not be given awards, honors or platforms which would suggest support for their actions.' No one could not know of the public stands and actions of the president on key issues opposed to the most vulnerable human beings.

"John Paul II said, 'Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights - for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture - is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with the maximum determination.'"

Bishop John M. D'Arcy was no less eloquent. In response to Father Jenkins' protestation that the USCCB statement referred to by Bishop Olmsted didn't apply to the Notre Dame situation, Bishop D'Arcy said, "When there is a doubt concerning the meaning of a document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, where does one find the authentic interpretation? A fundamental, canonical and theological principal states that it is found in the local bishop, who is the teacher and law-giver in his diocese." The local bishop in this case was, of course, himself—and Bishop D'Arcy was adamant "that the USCCB document, *Catholics in Public Life*, does indeed apply in this matter."

By April 28, 2009, 52 bishops publically expressed disapproval of Notre Dame's invitation to President Obama:

1. Bishop John D'Arcy - Fort Wayne-South Bend, IN
2. Bishop Samuel Aquila - Fargo, ND
3. Bishop Gregory Aymond - Austin, TX
4. Bishop Gerald Barbarito - Palm Beach, FL
5. Bishop Leonard Blair - Toledo, OH
6. Archbishop Daniel Buechlein - Indianapolis, IN
7. Bishop Robert Baker - Birmingham, AL
8. Bishop Fabian Bruskwitz - Lincoln, NE
9. Archbishop Eusebius Beltran - Oklahoma City, OK
10. Auxiliary Bishop Oscar Cantú - San Antonio, TX
11. Bishop Paul Coakley - Salina, KS
12. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo - Houston, TX
13. Archbishop Timothy Dolan - New York, NY
14. Bishop Thomas Doran - Rockford, IL
15. Auxiliary Bishop John Dougherty - Scranton, PA
16. Bishop Robert Finn - Kansas City-St. Joseph, MO
17. Bishop Joseph Galante - Camden, NJ
18. Bishop Victor Galeone - St. Augustine, FL
19. Cardinal Francis George - Chicago, IL; President, USCCB
20. Bishop Gerald Gettelfinger - Evansville, IN
21. Archbishop José Gomez - San Antonio, TX
22. Bishop William Higi - Lafayette, IN
23. Archbishop Alfred Hughes - New Orleans, LA
24. Bishop Peter Jugis - Charlotte, NC
25. Bishop Joseph Latino - Jackson, MS
26. Bishop John LeVoir - New Ulm, MN
27. Bishop Jerome Listeki - La Crosse, WI
28. Bishop William E. Lori - Bridgeport, CT
29. Bishop Paul Loverde - Arlington, VA
30. Bishop George Lucas - Springfield, IL
31. Bishop Robert Lynch - St. Petersburg, FL
32. Bishop Joseph Martino - Scranton, PA
33. Bishop Charles Morlino - Madison, WI
34. Bishop George Murry - Youngstown, OH
35. Archbishop John J. Myers - Newark, NJ
36. Archbishop Joseph Naumann - Kansas City, KS
37. Bishop R. Walker Nickless - Sioux City, IA
38. Archbishop John C. Nienstedt - St. Paul-Minneapolis, MN
39. Archbishop Edwin O'Brien - Baltimore, MD
40. Bishop Thomas Olmsted - Phoenix, AZ
41. Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk - Cincinnati, OH
42. Bishop Glen Provost - Lake Charles, LA
43. Cardinal Justin Rigali - Philadelphia, PA; Chairman, USCCB Pro-Life Committee
44. Bishop Kevin Rhoades - Harrisburg, PA
45. Bishop Alexander Sample - Marquette, MI
46. Bishop Edward J. Slattery - Tulsa, OK
47. Bishop Richard Stika - Knoxville, TN
48. Bishop Anthony Taylor - Little Rock, AR
49. Bishop Robert Vasa - Baker, OR
50. Bishop Thomas Wenski - Orlando, FL
51. Archbishop Donald Wuerl - Washington, D.C.
52. Bishop David Zubick - Pittsburgh, PA

Unfortunately, that leaves another 200 or so missing. +
(As of publication, there are 10 additional bishops in this group.)

Daniel and the Lion's Den

Thoughts on the Woman Taken in Adultery

By Marie P. Loehr

*The Moving Finger writes, and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall turn it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.*

- Omar Khayam, *Rubaiyat*, stanza 51

One of the more puzzling behaviors of Christ appears in John 8:1-11. It takes place during the crucial feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Christ comes to the Temple at daybreak. John notes that Christ was staying on the Mount of Olives, no doubt in the Succoth, a booth built of pales and vines and branches, of traditional fruits and grains. Tabernacles or Succoth is a harvest feast. It is a joyous feast, a thanksgiving festival.

He is sitting in the Temple, teaching whoever comes to listen. Presumably the floor of the Temple is stone, dusty with the parade of worshippers and pilgrims and gawkers in and out every day, but especially during this feast.

It was and is the custom of the feast that everyone builds a tabernacle or booth in their yard or garden. Those who came from other countries to Jerusalem for the feast would build these shelters on the hillsides and in the fields outside the city. These booths are meant to be lived in for the duration of the festival—prayer, meals, conversation, games, napping, even night time sleep took place in the tabernacle booth. It would not have been difficult for the scribes and Pharisees, seething with frustration over Christ, to skulk among the makeshift, flimsily built booths, seeking a victim to aid their plot to entrap Christ.

We see no humor in this. We might consider the irony that on this festive occasion, when morality often relaxes in the almost picnic atmosphere, the plotters turn a feast of harvest ingathering into an ingathering of the adulteress. They've caught her in the bower of tabernacle leaf and flower - signs of fertility and God's prodigal gifts for the life of the people. Perhaps there is a hint of farcical humor in the thought of her lover, breaking through the walls of the booth, and fleeing, half-naked. Encumbered by her clothes and her panic, the woman would be easy pickings for these predators.

At any rate, they drag her through the crowds to throw her like carrion at the feet of Christ. Here, we discover the black irony of Christ's sometimes sardonic humor.

"Moses said ... what do you say?" There is sibling conflict, in the tone, wheedling, whining. "Mother said . . . top this!" There is no doubt some display of low humor among the men, in the background, nudging one another, gloating, an attitude of "we have him now!" Like the pretentious pompous banker or the self-righteous, self-congratulatory townspeople in the silent movies and B Westerns of yesteryear, they are pride going before a fall.

They have not reckoned with the nature of Christ. They know nothing of the king's fool, the clown, the coyote trickster who turns the tables and stands conventional reality and smug pride on its head, much less the Son of God. They are ripe for the banana peel underfoot. And Christ tosses it there . . .

He bends down, silent, and begins "to write with his finger on the ground." Is there a hint of both sorrow and humor in his eyes? There are occasions when pain is so great only laughter saves us from tears or collapse.

No doubt there is indignation in their reaction to this. They keep pestering him, ignoring the writing at first. Finally, Christ straightens, looks at them, and suggests—black irony, teasing wit: "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone." He speaks almost lazily, casual, a tease in fact. Who among men is without sin? A tease, a riddle, even a conundrum. It is the sort of intellectual game beloved of pundits and scholars.

Then he returns to his enigmatic writing. Enigmatic to us at least - John himself teases us here. But how could he know our ignorance of Scripture and Christ's deep knowledge of the Prophets and the eschatological writings?

What was he writing? His moving finger writes in the dust on the stones. Some exegetes suggest he is enumerating the sins of each man there.

In any event, they slink off, one by one, says John, beginning with the eldest—who is the one most likely to realize what Christ is actually saying with the writing on the stones. He literally sees the handwriting on the wall. That triggers recognition in the others, one by one, like the pack animals they are. As they draw farther away from Christ, do they break into a cold sweat, then run, stumbling, tumbling over one another in their haste to flee his unspoken judgment? That possibility in itself has elements of the old Keystone Cops, whose righteous pursuit of

crime inevitably ends in the futile chase and its bumbling confusion.

But, why so?

In *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile*, Brant Pitre—a contributor to Scott Hahn’s *Letter and Spirit*, a journal of Catholic biblical theology—discusses Christ’s knowledge and use of the Prophets and the eschatological books, of both the Jewish Scripture, and the non-canonical books, including Second Temple Judaism. He ties together Christ’s discussion of the end times, its tribulations, and the eschatological ingathering of the lost and dispersed tribes of Israel, and eventually even the Gentiles.

He places particular emphasis at certain points on Christ’s references to the book of Daniel—references which escape modern man, but would not escape the knowledgeable Jew of his own time—as the scribes and Pharisees were.

When we think of Daniel the prophet, we most often remember the story of Daniel being thrown into the lions’ den, a part of the royal zoo, no doubt, of the Babylonian king. The king—in anger - orders him thrown to the lions. The lions are expected to tear Daniel limb from limb and devour him, of course. In fact, after a momentary surge toward their prey, they slink back and avoid him like the plague. Daniel does not feed the lions; but an angel feeds Daniel, and Daniel praises God in his captivity, until he is finally released, having proved no fun whatsoever.

Does Christ also remember this story, in this situation with the scribes and Pharisees? He has driven the money-changers and profiteers from the Temple, saying they have made his Father’s house a den of thieves. This gang makes it a lions’ den—and he is their Daniel.

There is irony in this as well. But his moving finger, writing in the dust on the stone, is more than ironic. It is the comedic reversal—not comedic in the sense of slapstick, although there is an element of that in the accusers’ flight, and the woman’s daze. It is comedic in the sense Dante uses it in the *Commedia*. There is a build-up of tension, of crisis, the expectation of tragedy—and then what the Greeks called the “eucatastrophe,” the happy ending. In this case there is an ironic, even a sardonic, cast to the subtle humor of this occasion.

What is Christ writing then? What is so fearsome that it sets these self-righteous men fleeing?

Given the feast of ingathering, and its eschatological implications—and Tabernacles does indeed have such implications, especially when we realize it is the Jewish precursor to our All Saints—as well as the situation, surely Christ cannot help but advert to Daniel. Yes, in the lions’ den. But also in the great banquet, Belshazzar’s feast.

Belshazzar has ordered the sacred vessels, stolen from the Temple sanctuary when the Jews entered the Babylonian Captivity, to be used for the pagan feast, a profanation of vessels, consecrated to God. In the course of this abuse, a hand appears and begins writing on the wall of the banquet hall. There is great consternation.

No one understands the writing. But all are shocked and fearful. The queen urges the king to send for Daniel. She assures Belshazzar Daniel will know what the moving finger has written.

Daniel does indeed. The writing on the wall reads, “*mene, mene, tekel, and parsin.*” The King James translation reads, *mene, mene, tekel upharsin.*

The meaning of this is: “mene”- God has measured your sovereignty and put an end to it; “tekel”- you have been weighed in the balance, and found wanting; “parsin”- your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

That same night, says Scripture, Belshazzar was murdered, and Darius the Mede became ruler.

When we speak of the “handwriting on the wall” or “the moving finger ...having writ, moves on,” it is this episode from Scripture that is behind those sayings. They sound innocent enough, but they portend the judgment of God.

This is what Christ writes, this is what he re-members for the assembled accusers. To re-member in Jewish usage is to make present. It is no abstract recollection.

He reveals to them that in their lust for power and Christ’s downfall, they have in effect profaned the woman, adulterous though she be. As a human in God’s image and likeness, she is to be seen as an end in herself, not an impersonal object for the ends of others. She is, adulterous or not, a sacred vessel, the bearer of life.

The occasion of the feast, the harvest feast, the ingathering, is also profaned by this plot. As is the Temple, which they desecrate in their plotting—against God, if the truth be known. Of all the things Christ might have written, nothing could have so powerful an effect. The judgment of God has fallen upon them.

They are ridiculous before God and man. They are no more than comic relief in the end. They recognize it. They remember the entire book of Daniel—its eschatology, its prophecy, its warning, its judgment. And their folly is transparent to their eyes. Thus they flee. If they have truly grasped his message, they are “as doomed as doomed can be,” as the Ed Grimley character of SCTV comedy would intone.

Then Christ looks at the woman—frozen as any prey, facing death. Here too he speaks with wry humor, gentle teasing, although we are unlikely to realize that rueful bit of wit. “Has no one condemned you?” As the author of

that reversal, having stood her accusers on their heads faster than a banana peel on the sidewalk, he knows perfectly well no one is left to accuse her.

It takes her a minute to “get it.” Then the realization strikes as she looks around. She too responds with dry irony. “No one, Lord.”

We’ve all experienced the moment of leaving confession, floating, unburdened. What must she have felt, seeing his generous humor and hearing his absolution? “Neither do I. Go, and sin no more.” Surely her face lit, and she soared.

Her story is entirely one of the deepest divine humor—its irony, its generosity, its gentleness toward the weak, its fierceness toward the hypocrite, its reversal of the expected outcome.

The banana peel is the writing on the wall and pavement. The pratfall is Belshazzar’s downfall and the hypocrites’ recognition of the handwriting on the stone, and their flight. The happy ending is that sly tease, gentle as it is, and the woman’s release in recognition and response, her liberation—in spirit and in truth.

The closest to this depth and art of humor we ever experience is in the comedies of Shakespeare. So God jolts us out of our egocentricity and self-pity and pomposity. The king’s fool turns out to be the king himself, drawing us into *His* feast and its fest. +

New Liturgical Movement

For those who think the “old” Latin Mass will wither and die (and you know who you are—we heard you preach that sorry excuse for a homily last month), the *New Liturgical Movement* website, www.newliturgicalmovement.org, carries news and resources about Latin Mass developments. Among them:

Excerpts from...

“We Are at War”

Bishop Robert W. Finn, Diocese of Kansas City - St. Joseph, keynote address to the Second Annual Gospel of Life Convention

...**We are at war.** Harsh as this may sound it is true – but it is not new. This war to which I refer did not begin in just the last several months, although new battles are underway – and they bring an intensity and urgency to our efforts that may rival any time in the past.

....The more dangerous “human enemies” in our battle are those, who in this age of pluralism and political propriety seek ways to convince us of their sincerity and good will. With malice or with ignorance, or perhaps with an intention of advancing some other personal goal, they are willing to undermine and push aside the values and the institutions that stand in their way. They may propose “tolerance” and seem to have a “live and let live” approach to all human choices – even if the choice is not to “let live,” but actually to “let die,” or “let life be destroyed.” These more subtle enemies are of all backgrounds. They may be atheists or agnostics, or of any religion, including Christian or Catholic.

....This dissension in our own ranks should not surprise us because we all experience some dissension against God’s law of love within our own heart. But the “battle between believers,” who claim a certain “common ground” with us, while at the same time, they attack the most fundamental tenets of the Church’s teachings, or disavow the natural law – this opposition is one of the most discouraging, confusing, and dangerous.

....The battle we face for the salvation of our souls is the most important one we face – bar none. Where I spend all eternity; where you spend eternity – in bliss or in damnation – is important beyond any individual choice I make. But the individual human choices I make – even one grave choice in which we remain unrepentant – can determine the direction of my salvation.

To deliberately destroy a human person, and without any justification of self-defense, is to preempt without an equal and sufficient cause, the right to life bestowed by God alone. Life is a gift which we have from God, not from man. This right cannot be taken away by means of a human law. It ought to be protected and assured by human law.

The constant magnitude of this crime against humanity is staggering. We must never get used to it. In the United States there are 4000 abortions every day. Compare that to the tragedy of September 11, or to any other war, or even to the genocidal Holocaust of six million Jews and many others under the Nazi regime.

The count of abortions over the 36 years, since its legalization in January, 1973, is beyond 50 million human lives. These are just the reported abortions. There are more. There are many, many more worldwide. But keep reflecting on 4000 killings a day of innocent babies. Recently someone told me the number of abortions had gone down. I don’t believe it, but if you wish, you can think of 3500 killings a day or even 3000 per day.

Thousands of human lives every day: If we keep saying this – first of all – some people will get very upset with us. They will want us to stop. They may quote other statistics about the tragedies of poverty and war. We must truly share their horror at these things too. However, in the end the measure of our society is in how we treat the most vulnerable in our midst. The unifying thread is “the value of human life and the dignity of the human person.”

4000 abortions each day in the United States. This is the tally of the enemy. Are we in a war? Absolutely. Are we winning? Are we even battling to win? Or do we consider this someone else’s war?

We can hardly know how many human embryos have been destroyed in pursuing *in vitro* fertilization, and other experimentation, or through abortifacient contraceptives. Our President has just signed a law providing government funding – your tax money and mine – for the funding of these human embryonic stem cell experiments. Are we at war? Absolutely.

The fight for life is a constant warfare. Those who vied for the leadership of our country last November offered Americans a clear choice in this regard. The President is keeping his promises – one by one. We are getting what we chose. Is the war over? Never. Is the battle over? We must not give up. Remember: we already know the final outcome. The battle now is about our readiness to remain faithful – our readiness to suffer while we peacefully, legally, and prayerfully seek the victory of life.

....Occasionally we still hear an elected official speak of his or her personal opposition to abortion, while they support the legal right to an abortion. We should be very clear: Such a person places him or herself completely OUTSIDE the moral framework, the moral imperative of *Evangelium Vitae* and other Church teaching on these

issues. They are NEITHER defending human life against the forces of death, NOR are they taking steps to build a culture of life. They have abandoned their place in the citizenship of the Church. Quite simply they have become warriors for death rather than life.

Such a person who makes a public stand – and acts directly – in defense of the right to kill - endangers their eternal salvation. If you and I support such a person who has so flatly told us of their intentions to protect a fraudulent Right to Death, a Right to an Abortion, we make ourselves participants in their attack on life. We risk our salvation, and we better change. Why? – because Bishop Finn is going to condemn you? No, I must say what the Church says, but I will not finally judge any human soul.

....Please note: This is NOT partisan politics on the part of bishops or their flock. This is zeal for life, pure and powerful. This is care for truth, and attention to the salvation of souls. It cannot and must not be neglected, even if it means we might get scolded at times by those who want us to speak less. We bishops should note it carefully – how our people are starving for more leadership – more unanimity – more courage in this regard.

Every believer is called to be a warrior for righteousness – a soldier in support of human life. Are we at War? It is clear we are, and we will each stand before Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life.

....Dr. Scott Hahn makes an interesting observation about a well known passage from Matthew's Gospel. St. Peter is entrusted with the leadership of the Church; he is handed the "keys" to the Kingdom. "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." (Matt 16:18). Hahn points out that it is not just the work of the Church to hold strong against the powers of hell. Rather: in the battle, the Church must beat upon the gates of hell. We must not give up until those sorry gates fall off their hinges and the victory of Jesus Christ is made full and complete and final. Bishops are called to teach, lead and sanctify. These are not defensive postures – but elements of a powerful offensive designed to promote and extend the Kingdom of God.

It is not enough for us to defend against the assaults of Satan. It is not enough for us even to defend innocent human life. Of course, if we fail to do this, we fail in our most urgent task. But by good deeds of love and charity, we must build this active culture of life that is ready and capable of turning back hell itself. If we won't put the abortionist out of business we are pitiable souls. If we don't enact laws and work tirelessly to change human hearts so that life is forever revered and protected, we have not fought the good fight which is our charge as the Church Militant. As warriors we must first beat back the enemy. But then let us not forget that we are warriors for the victory of life!

How do we arm ourselves for what is first and foremost a supernatural war? First: Unless we are living in God's life we should not go near this battle.

....Pray. Be a prayer warrior. One modern day saint said when you are going out to try to change someone's heart determine to make your effort 80 % prayer and 20% words or actions.

....Don't worry very much about numbers. If you read the accounts of the Old Testament battles, over and over again God used a tiny misfit army to overthrow a legion 1000 times its size. In this way it is so much clearer that God is fighting the battle. We are only His instruments.

What will happen to us if we take up this war in faithfulness? Do you really want to know? You will be hated by some powerful people. You may be rejected by those whose approval you most desire. You will be loved and supported by some and this will be a wonderful encouragement. You will be misunderstood by many – and this can be very painful. After you have suffered a little in your battle, some will tell you that you have done nothing – or that you have done it the wrong way.

Yes, if you push – others will "push back." We should always be very careful to obey the law. But, regardless, some will threaten you with legal action, and law suits cost money and you may suffer that difficult hardship. In the end, dear friends, if we err let it be on the side of life.... +

The Center for American Progress

By Stephanie Block

If you've listened to any conservative talk radio lately, you may have heard about the *Center for American Progress* (CAP) or its head, John Podesta, in connection with a new censorship movement. CAP published a report in 2007, "The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio," which found that "of the 257 news/talk stations owned by the top five commercial station owners... 91 percent of the total weekday talk radio programming is conservative, and 9 percent is progressive." CAP seeks (according to the recommendations of this report) to remedy the imbalance by restricting ownership of commercial radio stations and fining "commercial owners who fail to abide by enforceable public interest obligations."

In addition to its censorship project, CAP helped establish *Media Matters for America*, an Internet site "devised as part of a larger media apparatus being built by liberals to combat what they say is the overwhelming influence of conservative commentators." [Jim Rutenberg, "New Internet Site Turns Critical Eyes and Ears to the Right," NY section of the *NY Times*, May 3, 2004]

So, what we have here is a two-pronged response to the "conservative" message – censor and attack. Wait, there's yet *another* prong, *Faith in Public Life*, which CAP also helped establish – and what is this *Faith in Public Life* "resource center" but a network of religious progressives gathered together to reshape the media perception about Christian values. Their writers and speakers – abortion "rights" activists and homosexual "rights" activists prominent among them – claim to represent the "true" voice of morality... beautifully bolstered by progressive politics. Censor, attack, and make it look as though God is on your side...you have to hand it to CAP.

Now, a little background on the operations of this media machine:

- In December 2004, national religious leaders (including Jim Wallis) laid the groundwork for creating *Faith in Public Life*. It had a board in place in 2005, and on June 20, 2006 issued a press release announcing its "official launching," though it had been operational six months earlier. Wallis' *Sojourners* is mentioned as one of the groups FPL supports.
- June 28, 2006, Obama spoke at a *Call to Renewal* Conference hosted by Jim Wallis' group *Sojourners*. The speech argued that Democrats needed to grasp proper role of faith in the public square. Religion wasn't the property of the Christian right and there are "values" of import to believers besides gay marriage and abortion.
- April 13, 2008, *Faith in Public Life* organized the *Compassion Forum* at Messiah College, where Democrat presidential nominees Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were questioned by religious leaders, among them Jim Wallis, about "value issues" and their religious beliefs.
- As an aside, by the time Obama accepted his party's presidential nomination (June 3, 2008), the *Democratic National Convention* had launched an initiative to organize "faith communities" around the party's values. An August 24, 2008 Interfaith "Service" before the Democratic National Convention in Denver, designed "to honor the diverse faith traditions inside the Democratic Party," included Jim Wallis among its featured participants.
- In mid-August 2008, Obama appeared with John McCain at mega-pastor Rick Warren's Saddleback Church to answer questions about his policies and his religious beliefs. Obama already knew both Wallis and Warren. At the 2006 *Call to Renewal* speech (see above), he had said, "Pastors, friends of mine like Rick Warren ...Religious thinkers and activists like our good friend Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo..." According to the *NY Times*, the forum was cosponsored by *Faith in Public Life*.

The target of all this activity, remember, are "faith communities." CAP was founded on July 7, 2003 due in no small measure to the generosity of billionaire George Soros (also one of the major funders of the *Democratic Alliance*, with its "religious outreach" component, including *Faith in Public Life* representation), who wanted to create a progressive think tank, able to respond quickly to conservative media "attacks." CAP has over a dozen spokespeople to which are added *Faith in Public Life's* capabilities, directed particularly to people of various religious traditions. CAP posts daily "Talking Points" and a daily email newsletter, *The Progress Report*. It has several associated blogs, a youth outreach program, and a "sister advocacy organization" - the *Action Fund* – a 501c-4 lobbying arm. *Faith in Public Life* also has daily "faith news" emails – linked summaries of various media reports, usually with a progressive bent. Big money is being spent to change the values of religious people. +

Sursum Corda: **Boston College**

With so much sorrow over the betrayals of Georgetown and Notre Dame, it's good to be reminded – or to learn for the first time – that there is also new growth in the Church.

Over the 2009 winter break, Jesuit-run Boston College finished placing various pieces of Christian art as well as crucifixes back into its classrooms, a project that had been going on, slowly, for some time but was completed with some vigor during the break.

There were howls of protest: “A classroom is a place where I am supposed, as a teacher, to teach without any bias, to teach the truth. And when you put an icon or an emblem or a flag, it confuses the matter,” said Amir Hoveyda, the chemistry department chair. Dwayne Eugène Carpenter, chair of the romance languages and literatures department and co-director of the Jewish studies program, calls the presence of religious art “divisive.”

Speaking for the College, however, Jack Dunn said “The effort was to present Christian art in classrooms as a way of manifesting our pride in and our commitment to our religious heritage.”

Rev. T. Frank Kennedy, chair of the committee on Christian Art, wrote (in part): “I suppose a question might be posed to Boston College as to what purpose this Christian Art serves? In a world that is pretty successfully driven by media (imagery) ours is a response that seeks to pose the age-old invitation of Christ to enter into love – a love that is made perfect in its unselfishness. John Paul II spoke of the crucifix on September 15, 2002 saying ‘It is the sign of God, who has compassion on us, who accepts human weakness, who opens to us all, to one another, and therefore creates the relation of fraternity.’ The Pope also went on to say that though this symbol has been abused in history, it is the Christian’s duty to reclaim that symbol as an invitation to love. An invitation to love, and an invitation to faith is exactly that, an invitation. One is not required to respond, one can decline, and one can have many reasons for declining the invitation, but to imply that a Jesuit and Catholic university is not free to offer this invitation is simply an impossibility.”

We applaud Boston College’s embrace of its Catholic identity despite strong pressures to assimilate with secularism’s dictates. Perhaps the Jesuits are making a comeback. +