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# Attacks serve a separate agenda

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Let?s speak plainly: The effort by right-wing Catholic groups to defund and disband the Catholic Campaign for Human Development has little to do with the small number of grants the program has provided to antipoverty groups that don?t meet funding criteria (See story [1]). In a large program -- the campaign has distributed more than 8,000 grants in the past 40 years -- such small aberrations, while not welcome, are hardly shocking.

No, the strange consortium that has recently risen up against the U.S. bishops? community empowerment and antipoverty program is hardly concerned about good governance or genuine accountability. Rather, they simply do not like the idea that the church uses its resources (namely, the giving power of people in the pews), to tackle the root causes of poverty. These groups do so for the same reason they oppose health care reform and other government-sponsored efforts to alleviate poverty: Their conservative political ideology trumps the Catholic idea of promoting the common good.

A telling element in this sad tale is that these groups oppose both government and, in this case, private efforts to alleviate poverty. So much for the corporal works of mercy.

There?s really not much new here. Every decade or so, the campaign comes under attack from like-minded zealots who use it as a hook to attack Catholic social teaching. A similar and unsuccessful effort was spearheaded by former Treasury Secretary William Simon in the 1980s, around the time the U.S. bishops were issuing their progressive pastoral statement on the economy. Subsequently, the ?Campaign for Human Development? became the ?Catholic Campaign for Human Development? in order to emphasize the program?s attachment to the church.

It is also noteworthy that setting up the Catholic Campaign for Human Development as a socialist anti-Catholic bogeyman provides these extremist groups with fodder for direct-mail fundraising. It?s a simple formula: Target an enemy, attack it mercilessly and without regard to actual facts, then find like-minded if naive individuals to send money to sustain the crusade (and fund the administrative costs that pay salaries).

As it happens, in a church full of opaque financial reporting and disclosure that is more frequently designed to obscure rather than enlighten, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development does a good job disclosing how it receives and allocates its resources. The relevant information is right on its Web site, www.usccb.org/cchd.

If the groups attacking the Catholic Campaign for Human Development were truly concerned about improving the efficiency of the program, or eliminating a small number of questionable grants, they would work with bishops at both the local and national level to address these concerns.

But that is not their true agenda.

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**Links:**

[1] http://ncronline.org/node/19007