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Catholic identity demands the work the CCHD promotes

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 26, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

With the release of a report from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on ?The Review and Renewal of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development,? an immediate question emerges: Will this exhaustive and thorough report satisfy CCHD?s critics?

The answer is likely to be a mixed one.

On the one hand, there are those who were genuinely scandalized by the fact that a handful of groups funded by CCHD (5 out of 270, according to the report) were involved in, or belonged to other organizations that were involved in, the promotion of ideas antithetical to Catholics beliefs about human dignity -- especially those that promote abortion.

The Church?s pro-life commitment is so foundational -- and efforts to help the poor while simultaneously advocating abortion are so morally incoherent -- that such grants were a genuine cause for concern and, indeed, they violated CCHD?s own policies and guidelines.

Renewed vigilance is called for and, in the new report, promised.

Other critics, however, seem determined to shut down CCHD.

In a Sept. 23, 2009 statement on InsideCatholic.com [1], Deal Hudson, the director of the organization, called for ?the elimination of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.?

?No amount of house-cleaning is going to make this arm of the USCCB worthy of our donations,? Hudson wrote in the statement.

The American Life League, never much for discriminating moral evaluations, evidenced an even greater hostility to CCHD.

?The closer we look at the Bishops? Conference [staff and programs], the more we find a systemic pattern of cooperation with evil,? Michael Hitchborn, the Life League?s lead researcher said in a press release Feb. 1. [2]

There is probably nothing CCHD could do that would satisfy these critics whose objections to CCHD run deeper than concerns about abortion funding. Their devotion to the free market, despite the market?s demonstrable inability to aid the poor, makes them suspicious of CCHD and other programs designed to help the poor through non-market-worshipping methods.

There is a third variety of criticism that has emerged from CCHD itself. The USCCB report calls for renewed efforts to involve local parishes in the work of CCHD. Currently, the only contact many parishioners have with CCHD is the annual collection to support its work. The report calls for renewed efforts at the diocesan and parochial level to involve Catholics in the work of CCHD.

In recent years, the USCCB has cut back on some of its services to local dioceses, according to a source involved in the drafting of the report, and they hope to reverse that trend -- providing local churches with the tools to actively engage in the work of helping the poor.

Sometimes, in life, what we first encounter as a blessing turns out to be a curse, and what at first blush appears to be a curse, turns out to be a blessing. This common fact of spiritual life is rooted in a dogmatic fact: Salvation comes through the Cross. No one likes being criticized, but the criticisms of CCHD have led to something the critics did not foresee.

What becomes clear from every paragraph on every page of the new report is that, while the critics questioned the Catholic identity of CCHD, it is precisely that Catholic identity that demands the work the CCHD promotes.

?Justice is the primary way of charity,? the report quotes Pope Benedict XVI?s encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. ?The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. This is the instututional path?of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbor directly.? [CV 6, 7]

?No less excellent and effective.? Those words are not mine. They are not the words of some leftie. They are not the words of the CCHD staff. They are the words of the Pope.

I hope some of CCHD?s critics will move beyond their snarky attacks on CCHD, applaud the reforms announced in the new report and come to realize that Catholic identity is not a conservative talking point.

If it is true -- and I believe it is -- that the Catholic identity of CCHD was compromised by funding of organizations that also support abortion, then it is also the case that Catholic identity is compromised everytime we fail to heed the call of justice.

Last Sunday, the psalm response was ?The Lord hears the cry of the poor.? We who claim to be the Lord?s followers must hear that cry too.

It turns out that Catholic idenity is a two-edged sword. Conservatives invoke the phrase to castigate those they perceive as insufficiently Catholic. Groups like the Cardinal Newman Society question the Catholic identity of certain colleges and universities that do not meet their somewhat selective standards of orthodoxy. Raymond Arroyo at EWTN casts aspersions against the Catholic identity of Sr. Carol Keehan because she supported health care reform.

If this new report on the CCHD shows anything, it is that an integral part of Catholic identity is concern for the poor -- not just for individual charitableness towards the poor, but for an integral approach to achieving justice for all.

Those who fail to embrace the report must pose the question of Catholic identity to themselves.

There is one other aspect of the CCHD story that must be confronted squarely.

The attacks on CCHD have often been quite personal in nature, focusing on the staff at the USCCB, and casting aspersions at Mr. John Carr and others. ?The Scandal of John Carr at the USCCB,? read the headline on the conservative Web site Speronews.com Feb. 2. [3]

To be clear, nothing done by John Carr was scandalous. What was done to John Carr was scandalous. You do not question the reputation of a devoted servant of the Church because he once served on the board of an organzation that, after he left the board, joined with a group that supported abortion.

The charges against Carr always smacked of guilt by association and they were unjust in the extreme, if not calumnious, as I wrote at the time they were leveled. [4]

Carr was intimately involved in this thorough review of CCHD and his critics owe him an apology.

For more coverage of the U.S. bishops' statement on the Campaign for Human Development, see:

- Jerry Filteau: CCHD wants to woo back bishops who left campaign [5]
- Michael Sean Winters: Catholic identity demands the work the CCHD promotes [6].
- Jerry Filteau: Bishops defend Catholic Campaign for Human Development [7]
- Jerry Filteau: Any room for trade-offs in CCHD? Leaders say no. [8]

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