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Cardinal's comparison is nonsensical

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An NCR Editorial

Whether Chicago?s Cardinal Francis George went into a Dec. 21 television interview intending to compare the gay community with the Ku Klux Klan or impulsively gave voice to something that popped into his mind at the moment, it is clear that he welcomed any opportunity to pick a fight.

His incendiary comment, spur of the moment or not, betrays a larger context that, in the cardinal?s universe, is no secret. And that context is that anti-Catholic hordes ? gays, materialists, certainly *The New York Times*, politicians who won?t hew their views and strategies to the Catholic line, and other societal forces ? lurk around every corner and are largely responsible for all the church?s troubles.

Serious issues ? of conscience and principle, of clashes between the state?s obligations and church teachings ? do indeed exist and are fair game for religious leaders to address.

But a cardinal who assesses a conflict between the time and route of a Gay Pride Parade and a Catholic Mass with the line, ?You don?t want the gay liberation movement to morph into something like the Ku Klux Klan, demonstrating in the streets against Catholicism,? diminishes any standing the church might still have in the public arena. The important issues get buried beneath the understandable outrage such comments invite. His words were not only embarrassingly imprudent, they are nonsensical as historical comparison.

The facts also defy the cardinal?s assertion that he was backing up a pastor. Fr. Thomas Srenn did express concern that the parade route would go past the church this year at a time when the parish would be celebrating Mass. But his tone, in a statement posted on Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish website, was far more conciliatory. He noted the parish has a 125-year history in the East Lakeview neighborhood, is proud of the area?s diversity and considers the Pride Parade ?one of the hallmarks that make Lakeview unique and we in no way wish to diminish its place in the community.? As a matter of fact, he met with parade organizers and the time of the parade, which doesn?t occur until June, has already been changed.

This is not the early 20th century, anti-Catholic mobs are no longer marching through our major cities and, one presumes, the Gay Pride organizers would probably welcome a float from the archdiocese if it cared to join in. Gays, on the other hand, might perceive the church as the bully in the current circumstance. After all, it is the institution that has declared that homosexuality ?is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.?

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