

The marginalized pay for the church's ideological battles

Jamie Manson | Apr. 11, 2012 Grace on the Margins

Earlier this week, [The New York Times reported](#) [1] on social service groups who are being denied funding by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development because of supposed alliances with organizations that support equal rights for gay, lesbian and transgender persons.

The article focuses on [Compañeros](#) [2], a small, Colorado-based organization that aids Latino immigrants with access to health care and legal advice.

CCHD provides the group with \$30,000, almost half of its annual budget. But Compañeros might not receive their grant this year because they are members of an immigrant rights coalition that also happens to have created an alliance with a statewide group that advocated for civil unions.

Nine social service organizations have already lost their CCHD funding under similar circumstances. [Preble Street](#) [3], an agency that works with the homeless in Maine, had been a recipient of CCHD funds for the 13 years until they participated in a marriage equality campaign.

[VOCAL-NY](#) [4], a group that works with homeless victims of HIV and AIDS, was told they could continue to receive funding on the condition that they signed a statement that conflicted with the fundamental values of their mission to the sick.

Add to these groups the foster children who were [abandoned by Catholic Charities in Illinois](#) [5] because of a law allowing gay and lesbian parents to adopt children, and we begin to realize that one injustice gives birth to many more.

Ultimately, LGBT people aren't the only ones who lose in these ideological battles. The poor, the immigrants, the homeless, the orphans and the sick do, too.

How does CCHD know which groups to target? Through the relentless research of the American Life League, which has created a list of all CCHD-funded agencies that haven't passed the orthodoxy tests. They even have a website, [Reform CCHD Now](#) [6], for their endeavor. (I recommend visiting it only after you've taken your blood pressure medication.)

The hierarchy is letting the ideology of extreme social conservatives, not the teachings of the Gospel, determine where and how the poor will receive aid.

How many social evils will the Catholic hierarchy ignore? How many injustices will they overlook in order to fulfill its zealous mission against equality for members of the LGBT community?

Apparently, quite a few.

Last week, explosive documents were released confirming what many in the marriage equality movement had

long suspected: For years, the right-wing National Organization for Marriage (NOM) has intentionally tried to galvanize the black community against the gay community.

The NOM document reads:

"The strategic goal of this project is to drive a wedge between gays and blacks -- two key Democratic constituencies. Find, equip, energize and connect African American spokespeople for marriage; ... provoke the gay marriage base into responding by denouncing these spokesmen and women as bigots."

NOM also targeted Latinos with a strategy to "interrupt the process of assimilation" that could sway them to support gay rights. Their goal was to tap "glamorous" Latin-American spokespeople to speak out against marriage equality.

One of NOM's strongest allies has been the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and one of their key funders is the Knights of Columbus.

In their zeal to defeat marriage equality, the bishops have colluded in a system where blacks and Latinos were exploited as political tools. How many more of its own social justice doctrines will the hierarchy continue to defy in its hell-bent desire to deny gays and lesbians equal rights?

The poor have been similarly victimized by the bishops' other great battle against contraceptive coverage.

At the peak of this debate, back in January, some were stunned to find sympathy for the bishops on the part of several progressive voices, most notably Mark Shields, Chris Matthews or Cokie Roberts. Of course, these opinion-makers are well paid and, no doubt, have excellent medical benefits. Even if their insurance didn't cover a particular test or treatment, they could easily bankroll it.

Most bishops, clergy and religious in this country live remarkably comfortable existences. Few have to worry about where their next meal is coming from, losing their insurance coverage or not making the rent.

None of these pundits or religious leaders stood to lose in this so-called battle over religious liberty. Only those who could not afford the \$30 a month for birth control pills did. And perhaps the greatest victims are those Sr. Carol Keehan called the "parish housekeepers" who will never be entitled to contraception coverage. They are the women (often poor and often immigrant) who clean, cook and do the laundry for countless priests throughout this country.

Ironically, for all of their outspokenness about political issues like gay marriage and contraception, the bishops were remarkably mute last month when the Paul Ryan budget went before the House. Ryan's proposal contradicted profoundly the principles of Catholic social justice teaching, espousing what amounts to a preferential option for the wealthy and powerful.

If the bishops criticized these policies, they might also compromise their alliances with Republicans, tea partiers and evangelicals. Apparently the needs of hungry children, disadvantaged students and the elderly just aren't worth the risk.

But who can blame the hierarchy for pandering to right-wing groups? At a time when Catholics are leaving the church in droves, parishes and schools are closing, and legal fees and settlement payments are mounting, conservative extremists offer two crucial elements of survival: radical devotion and economic power.

Killing off a few small nonprofit agencies in order to appease wealthy, arch-conservative forces seems a small price to pay for self-preservation. The Roman Catholic Church's own fear of becoming impoverished and empty

is driving them to overlook the neediest.

Because, ultimately, it is the poor, the sick and the marginalized who must bear the burden of these ideological battles. All of those whom Jesus mandated we care for and protect are being sacrificed for the sake of political crusades.

[Jamie L. Manson received her Master of Divinity degree from Yale Divinity School, where she studied Catholic theology and sexual ethics. Her columns for *NCR* earned her a first prize Catholic Press Association award for Best Column/Regular Commentary in 2010.]

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- [1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/06/us/catholic-fund-heightens-scrutiny-of-recipients-ties.html>
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