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Rep. Paul Ryan and the Nuns on the Bus

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If I were Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), I would rather deal with the Democrats in Congress or President Barack Obama than with nuns. After all, the Nuns on the Bus tour of nine states has captured the imagination of the media like nothing progressive Catholics have tried in a decade or more.

This bus tour comes on the heels of the Vatican attack on the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, a move that has led to a groundswell of support for nuns nationwide. Tour organizers are taking advantage of that attack to publicize the needs of those at the bottom of the economic ladder by opposing the budget authored by Rep. Paul Ryan. At the same time, they are boldly continuing the social justice work that the Vatican complains they emphasize too much. But since the bishops also oppose the Ryan budget, the nuns can't be accused of being disloyal. Cool move!

In fact, this tour came right to Ryan's doorstep: his office in Janesville, Wis. The nuns highlighted the injustices in his budget, which slashes funds for the poor and vulnerable, turns Medicare into a voucher program (a caricature of its present self), and offers huge tax breaks to the very wealthy.

But these days, it's one thing to be opposed by Rep. Nancy Pelosi or Sen. Harry Reid or even President Obama. But nuns? I'm sure Paul Ryan thinks he's had better days.

Rep. Ryan was not at his Janesville office to greet the nuns because Congress was in session and he had to be in Washington. But he had clearly instructed his staff to be gracious and dialogic with these religious visitors. What else would you do in these circumstances? Although I don't expect his budget to change any time soon, I'm sure that congressional Democrats wish they could get the same treatment as the nuns.

For the life of me, I can't understand the political appeal of Ryan's budget for anyone except maybe the very wealthy, and some of them, like Warren Buffett, oppose it openly.

Maybe this tour will educate more people about the devastating consequences of this kind of economics.

And Rep. Paul Ryan? He is a Catholic, after all. And he tried to claim that his Catholic principles helped inspire his budget.

But -- as the saying goes -- there is an "app" for that. Maybe a nun who could give him a course in the social encyclicals from Leo XIII through John Paul II, capped with a look at the *Church in Modern World* from Vatican II. Just maybe.

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