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Bill Donohue Makes My Day

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 30, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

Nothing quite like being attacked by Bill Donohue to make a liberal Catholic?s day. Donohue is to informed discourse what Hurricane Isaac is to the Louisiana coast, all blustery and destructive wind. Yesterday, Mr. Donohue issued this press release [1]attacking my post about the arrest of Archbishop-elect Salvatore Cordileone for driving while under the influence.

The key paragraphs are these:

> *Winters, like a lot of embittered Catholic ?progressives,? is obsessed with homosexuality. That is why he was unable to write one paragraph in his screed against Cordileone without mentioning this subject. The context? Winters wants the bishop to ?think with greater compassion about the complicated lives we all lead today.? He also wants the bishop to show an ?approriate [sic] humility and humanness.? All of this is code for ?shut up and leave the culture to us.?*
>
> *Gay blog sites have also picked up on this theme. Why? San Francisco is a city where men [read: gays] are free to walk around naked in the street in front of women and children. They can even walk into McDonalds totally nude and park themselves next to Ronald McDonald, provided, the law says, they place a towel on their seat (hygiene matters). Next month homosexuals will whip each other in the street and have sex in public at the Folsom Street Fair. This is the city that Cordileone will soon inherit.*

First, I do not think any fair reading of my many blog posts would reveal an ?obsession? with the issue of homosexuality. Certainly, I have never written a paragraph like that second one quoted above which is dripping with the kind of explicit detail that leads one to wonder if the author?s interest in the topic is not properly termed prurient. I was certainly unaware of the laws about entering McDonald?s naked, or the goings-on at the Folsom Street Fair, but Mr. Donohue seems unnaturally fascinated by them. I wish he had kept his fascination to himself: I will never enter a McDonald?s with the same blissfully simple desire for a Big Mac again without being disturbed by the image he so painstakingly paints.

Second, my post criticized Cordileone not only for his bad judgment in failing to grab a cab rather than risking a DUI, but for the way he handled that fact in the media. Donohue is evidently content with Cordileone?s apology and his admission that he brought disgrace upon the Church and upon himself. I am not so content. I thought it was incumbent upon the Archbishop-elect to give some evidence of the enormity of what he did. In 2009, by way of example, 10,839 Americans died in drunk driving accidents. The Archbishop-elect ran into a DUI-police check. He should be grateful he did not run into a child on the side of the road or into another vehicle.

Third, I am not sure why this is seen in liberal v. conservative terms at all. The webiste "Vatican Insider" had two articles on Cordileone and that website is not known as a hotbed for dissent. One of the articles [2] speculated on many aspects of the case that I did not consider but raised the issue of whether Cordileone will be able to lead the archdiocese given this blot on his record. After all, we expect sports stars to behave themselves because of their prominence in the culture and the way children look up to them. Should we not expect the same from prelates?

Fourth, I am not writing any ?code? and I do not want to ?silence? Cordileone. But, he has earned a reputation as the kind of prelate known for what is often called ?affirmative orthodoxy.? I do not find much that is affirmative in it. The culture warrior style seems to me to turn the Church?s teachings into a series of ?No?s? rather than presenting the Gospel as the great ?Yes? to life, and just so, it is unattractive and uninviting. Pope Benedict has warned about this. I think one can contrast Archbishop-elect Cordileone?s statements on same sex marriage during the political fight over Proposition 8 in California with the measured, thoroughly orthodox, but deeply compassionate statements that Bishop Blase Cupich has issued in Spokane on the same issue. I did not invite Cordileone to be silent about the Church?s teachings because he got arrested. I invited him to reflect on how his own need for forgiveness and compassion in this situation might suggest a more forgiving and compassionate way of presenting the Church?s teachings on such hot-button issues as homosexuality and contraception, issues where clearly the Church?s leaders have often been far from persuasive, even with their own flocks.

I am deeply sorry for dropping one "p" from the word "appropriate."

When Donohue states ?It just so happens that Cordileone holds orthodox Catholic positions on sexuality, the kind of views hated by both secularists and left-wing Catholics. Consider Michael Sean Winters of the dissident weekly, the National Catholic Reporter,? I am left to conclude that he is a man quick to take liberties with the reputations of others. I may be a ?left-wing Catholic? in Donohue?s estimation, although many would quibble with that characterization. I do not ?hate? the Church?s teachings. I have publicly defended Humanae Vitae, on several occasions, in the pages of this ?dissident weekly.? Donohue is permitted to hold whatever opinion of me and of my writings he wishes. But, he has taken liberties here. Slander is a sin, sir.

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[1] http://www.catholicleague.org/trying-to-silence-bishop-cordileone/
[2] http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/world-news/detail/articolo/cordileone-dolan-stati-uniti-us-estados-unidos-vescovi-bishops-obispos-17729/