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## **Bishops Must Respond to Attacks on CRS, CCHD & CCUSA**

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Distinctly Catholic

As a rule, it is not worth paying attention to anything published or broadcast by the American Life League, LifeSiteNews, the Population Research Institute, etc. But, their latest round of attacks are so vile, and have reached a wider Catholic audience via an interview on EWTN's "The World Over" last week with Steven Mosher of the Population Research Institute, a response is warranted.

The various charges all share a common denominator. The complaint is that Catholic social justice agencies compromise the Church's teaching by affiliating with groups that oppose varying aspects of Church teaching, especially those related to birth control, gay rights, and abortion. CRS is accused of working hand-in-glove with groups that distribute contraception. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development's director, Ralph McCloud is accused of prior political support, more than five years ago, with now-State Senator Wendy Davis, who made fame this summer filibustering an abortion-restriction bill in the Texas legislature. Fr. Larry Snyder, President of Catholic Charities USA, is accused of belonging to a group that distributes awards to other groups, some of which support efforts to end the bullying of gay kids. (The horror!)

If you want a flavor of the attacks, here is a link to a new video from ALL that attacks McCloud and Snyder.

Where to begin? The warning that "compromise" is disastrous for the Church and, in certain circumstances, that is undoubtedly true. But, the accusatory tone, on evidence that is sketchy or attenuated, puts one in mind of some early Church heresies such as the Novationist and Donatist heresies,

both of which grew out of the desire to refuse reconciliation to those who had compromised their faith during periods of persecution. The Catholic Church, rightly concluded, that God's mercy is greater than human sinfulness, and it was the 'no compromise' stance of the extremists that was labeled a heresy.

The charge that McCloud is 'at least partially responsible' for Ms. Davis's subsequent filibuster is precious. I read in Ms. Davis's biography that she is an alumna of Texas Christian University. Seeing as a college degree is something of a prerequisite for mounting a political career, and that political career led to the filibuster, perhaps ALL should charge the faculty at TCU with being 'partially responsible' for the filibuster too. Where does it end?

As for Catholic Charities, I like the way the ALL's Michael Hichborn states 'Meet Father Larry Snyder, the president of Catholic Charities USA.' Of course, anyone who knows anything about the Church's charitable work in this country does not need the introduction: Fr. Snyder is a well known advocate for the poor. Again, the charge is that Fr. Snyder is affiliated with groups that, in addition to their common efforts on behalf of the poor, also take positions that conflict with other Church teachings. ALL seems to want a different Church from the one we have, one that restricts all of its activities to working with those who share all of our views. But, as my colleague Tom Roberts likes to point out, the Catholic Church is not the Amish. Everybody admires the Amish and their way of life, but their preference for self-enclosure is not the Catholic way. We Catholics get out into the world, which is often messy. When there is a tragedy, we join hands with lots of people who do not believe what we believe. We work with Jewish groups to fight poverty, and Jews deny the divinity of Christ. We work with Protestant groups, and Protestants deny the primacy of the pope. We work with state and federal authorities who are constitutionally bound to be agnostic on such matters. The common effort is directed at ameliorating suffering, it is not construed by anyone as an endorsement of each others' doctrinal positions.

I am reluctant to quote Pope Francis on this point. He said at one of his morning Masses:

*You might say 'But Father, we might make mistakes.' I might respond, 'Well, what of it? Onward, if you make a mistake, you get up and go forward; that is the way.'*

My reluctance stems from my belief that CCHD, CRS and Catholic Charities USA have not made mistakes. It is obvious to anyone who has actually studied their work up close that they bend over backwards to make sure that their efforts on behalf of the poor do not undercut the Church's teachings. I do not think our alliances with groups to achieve a shared objective must be restricted to groups that only share the full gamut of Church teaching. But, mistake or no, I think the Holy Father has asked the right question: 'Well, what of it?' Of course, seeing as Pope Francis has put the Church's social doctrine front and center, I assume Pope Francis, too, falls under ALL's charge that 'all levels of the Catholic social justice movement' are contaminated by compromise.

There is no shame in being attacked by these neo-Donatists. Nor do I suspect that these attacks are demoralizing to the many wonderful people who work at CCHD, CRS, and CCUSA. What is demoralizing is that the bishops who run these agencies and employ these staff members are so reluctant to stand up and defend their work and their staff in the face of these vile charges. The shepherd leads the flock, to be sure, but he also protects the flock. There is no scandal in anything CCHD or CRS or CCUSA has done. There is very grave scandal, the scandal of dividing the Church and importing the polarization of the political culture into the Church, in these attacks. If they were confined to ALL's Youtube channel, they would best be ignored. But, when EWTN's Raymond Arroyo gives them a hearing, a response is required. It is time for the U.S. bishops, as a body or in the person of their President and the Chair of the Pro-Life Committee to say, and say clearly, that these attacks harm the Church and the pro-life cause. These attacks, which may cost donations from unsuspecting people, harm the Church's efforts to treat

malaria abroad and poverty at home, and those efforts are obviously pro-life as long as malaria kills and poverty continues to be the leading abortifacient in America today. These attacks insult the many CRS workers who, right this moment, are risking their lives in Darfur and in Syria to bring the healing ministry of Jesus to those who suffer. These attacks deserve a response, and not just from a blogger like me. It is time for the bishops to speak, and speak clearly: These attacks do not expose scandal, they are scandal.

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