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Paprocki: Anti-Christian trends in US parallel persecution of early believers

Brian Roewe | Sep. 9, 2013 NCR Today

A growing sentiment of anti-Christian bigotry in the U.S. more closely resembles the Catholic church in Poland under communist rule or the persecution of early Christians in the Roman empire, according to one U.S. bishop.

The comments from Springfield, Ill., Bishop Thomas Paprocki came in a Sept. 3 interview [1] with William Kelly, a conservative commentator, satirist and radio talk show host. The bishop said that bigotry toward Christians, particularly in the media, reflect a cultural shift in America since his childhood, when it was common for religious films, such as ?The Ten Commandments? or ?A Man for All Seasons,? to convey religious values in the media.

?Many of the values that were in our secular world mirrored the values of the religious world, and I think what?s happening now is that relationship, or that kind of symbiosis, in some ways between our culture and the church has been ruptured, so that I think where we find ourselves now is, just in a short period, is really much more akin to where the early Christians found themselves in the Roman empire,? he said.

?We started out with being a persecuted faith, with Constantine being an accepted, established faith, and then for centuries kind of moving in that direction, of this, as I said, sort of close relationship between the secular world?s values and Christian values or Judeo-Christian values. And now, I think we?re moving in a direction that is, and not only, it?s even more than secular, it?s really a rejection, it?s an outright rejection, and it?s a pagan kind of a culture.?

The bishop further paralleled the U.S. church today to the Polish church of the 1970s, which existed in a hostile environment during communist rule.

?We still have the First Amendment of our Constitution that is being sorely tested, but I think more and more, certainly like in the environment of the media ... it is becoming more and more hostile, and I think that we have to recognize that,? he said.

Paprocki has not shied away from speaking on controversial topics in the past. Ahead of the 2012 elections, he warned his diocese [2] that voting for Democratic candidates, in light of the party?s platform support for abortion, ?places the eternal salvation of your own soul in serious jeopardy.?

In commenting on media frames that present the church through the lens of its sex abuse scandals, Paprocki labeled such views the result of ?profound ignorance,? and defended the church?s record in handling abuse claims: ?We have had our unfortunate share of scandals, it was a sin and the church is dealing with that. But ... I would venture to say of any institution in our country -- perhaps in the world -- I don?t think anyone?s dealing with it as responsibly as the Catholic church is.?

Earlier in the interview, the bishop said portrayals of supporters of traditional marriage as bigots are ?simply an erroneous viewpoint,? and emphasized that nature, not religion, provided the one-man, one-woman structure for

marriage.

Recalling an exchange in late May with the mother of a gay son at a Phoenix forum on the marriage issue [3], Paprocki said though they don't have biological children, bishops and priests care for their communities as a parent ? ?they do call priests ?Father? for a reason? ? but such compassion ?is ultimately about their salvation and eternal life.

?And to be compassionate and loving does not simply mean, oh you can do whatever you want. That wasn?t Christ?s approach to us,? he said.

Paprocki said while same-sex relationships have existed for centuries, what?s new to the discussion is ?the argument that somehow that?s a good thing, and somehow that should be celebrated, rather than being seen as something that?s sinful,? not just in the Christian tradition but other major religions, as well.

?And yet we?re being told, without any real empirical studies or evidence, that somehow this tradition [of marriage] that goes back as long as anybody can remember is wrong, and we should be accepting a new way of looking at this based on what? Based on what criteria? Just because you think or feel that?s the way it should be?? he said.

View the full interview in the Washington Times' Communities section [1].

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