NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Vile, vile, vile

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 17, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

Over at the American Spectator [1], George Neumayr has a particularly vile column in which he attacks, well, just about everybody. He laments the decision of Cardinal Donald Wuerl not to turn the communion rail into a trench in the culture wars, writing:

Cardinal Raymond Burke, who is the foremost authority on canon law as the head of the Vatican Supreme Court, has said repeatedly that priests should deny her [Nancy Pelosi] Holy Communion. But Wuerl refuses, saying, simultaneously, that denial isn?t ?pastoral? and sniffing that Pelosi isn?t a member of ?his flock.? That comically craven and contradictory copout is all one needs to know about the emptiness of ?pastoral? Catholicism.

First, Cardinal Wuerl does not ?sniff? unless he has a cold. Second, there is nothing craven nor contradictory about the stance Cardinal Wuerl has taken, Cardinal Burke?s statements notwithstanding.

Neumayr writes: ?The pews of the big bad pre-Vatican II Church were full; the pews of ?pastoral? Francis-style Jesuit shepherds are empty.? It is true that the Catholic Church in recent decades has seen Mass attendance rates drop, and drop precipitously. I will note, however, that the rise of the ?nones,? those who claim no religious affiliation, only began to tick upwards in the Pew polls after the Moral Majority had been at work presenting a caricature of the faith in the public realm for ten years. The reasons for the drop in Mass attendance rates are varied and complex, and I would decline to lay the blame to any one cause, but if I had to do so, it would be the cultural effects of the market that would top my list. From a very early age, we are bombarded with promises of store-bought happiness. Who needs heaven when you can get a new toy, or a new car, or a new girlfriend, all on the internet, and all at half-price.

Like Neumayr, I caught my breath when I read in the Washington Post of a client who told their counselor that ?I am a Pope Francis-Nancy Pelosi Catholic.? Unless the patient knew both Ms. Pelosi and Pope Francis personally, I can only assume that the judgment had to do with their public personas, and I see little in common between those two personas myself. But, most likely, this person was using the two names as shorthand to describe themselves as someone who cares about social justice. I think Ms. Pelosi?s inability to extend her concern about her fellow humans to the very littlest ones is a large mark against her claim to promote social justice. That said, I applaud Pelosi for her willingness to stand up against those who would cut food stamps but never touch an oil company subsidy. I applaud Papa Francesco, too, when he notes the bizarre moral calculus of our times that weeps bitter tears when a bank goes under but cares not a whit about children who go to bed hungry.

Conservatives like Neumayr should be applauding, not fretting, Pope Francis. He is causing many, many people to give the Church a second look. I do not know how many of them will turn away again when they realize that the pope is not going to ordain women or not going to preside at a same-sex marriage ceremony. It is my hope, however, that some will, as the Pope has urged, go out and meet the poor and there encounter the Lord, and that

the Lord will lead such people in His own good way and His own good time. Neumayr?s time would be better spent fretting about the lack of hierarchic leadership these past few decades that has reduced our rich faith to a few political talking points spouted by right-wing pols, and how and why Pope Francis? different style is achieving the fuller pews the conservatives claimed they wanted.

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[1] http://spectator.org/archives/2013/10/16/a-pope-francis-nancy-pelosi-ca