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Ignoring & Attacking the Pope

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 12, 2013 Distinctly Catholic
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There are a variety of different ways to attack the pope, or to minimize what he has to say, or otherwise ignore the direction in which he is trying to guide the Church.

Over at The Catholic Thing, [1] John Zmirak joins the list of conservatives attacking Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Madariaga, for his speech at the University of Dallas. Zmirak's comments are just as vicious as those of Fr. Dwight Longenecker which I called attention to last week [2]. No one should be confused about what is going on here: The conservatives do not want to attack the pope directly, so they are attacking his most prominent advisor. It is an old tactic.

So democracies like ours are ?neoliberal dictatorships,? which the Church will help reform through the ?globalization of mercy and solidarity,? that is, by helping governments to seize wealth from some people, skim its own share off the top, and distribute that wealth to others. Those ?others? will doubtless be grateful, as Hugo Chavez?s supporters were in Venezuela; indeed, they will form powerful voting blocs dependent on state redistribution of wealth, as directed by humble clergymen.

Yes, Cardinal Rodriguez discerns a dictatorial quality in modern neoliberal economies. I would suggest that one has to be blind not to see it. Indeed, the strangest thing about this particular brand of serfdom is that it does not flow from the wishes of a particular tyrant. It flows from ?the rules.? Even good people must seek to maximize their profits at all costs in order to stay afloat. You get penalized in the modern, hyper-financialized economy if you pay your workers more than your competitors, or decline to re-locate to a ?right-to-work? state because you support union rights. But, the alternatives are not spread eagle capitalism and full blown socialism. The invocation of Chavez is a strawman.

Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone spoke to the body of bishops yesterday about the workings of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, which he chairs. No ?who am I to judge?? from His Grace of San Francisco. He spoke harshly against the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, ENDA, which seeks to bar discrimination against gays and lesbians in the work place. +Cordileone suggested such laws help lead to same-sex marriage laws. Then, strangely, he chose an example from New Mexico, which does not allow same-sex marriage, but did have a recent court ruling that a photography studio cannot discriminate against a gay couple who sought the studio?s services. (Taco Bell anyone?) I would like Archbishop Cordileone to explain why those who offer public services should be permitted to discriminate against anyone? I thought we had that fight in the 60s when the nation passed the Civil Rights Act? To recall, there were religiously based objections to letting blacks eat at the same lunch counters as whites also.

+Cordileone, however, was just warming up. He said that the Church had not lost the fight against same sex

marriage, and that young people would come around just as they did on abortion. Now, to be clear, +Cordileone was not explicitly comparing abortion to same sex marriage, only the way young people react to the two. But, apart from lacking any real empirical data to support his claim, did he really have to mention the intentional termination of a human life with the aspirations of gay people to have the security in their relationships that civil marriage confers? That is the kind of tone deafness that not only keeps bishops fighting the culture wars but keeps them losing them. And, not a word about the pastoral care of gay and lesbian Catholics, which is one of the exact questions asked in the questionnaire for next year's Synod.

We will see what today brings. If the bishops as a group want to thumb their noses at Pope Francis, they will elect one of the culture warriors as their new president. My money is on Archbishop Kurtz to move up from the VP slot and I do not discern much of the culture warrior in +Kurtz. I am hearing a lot of conflicting buzz about who will be elected VP: Some think Archbishop Jose Gomez is the man for the job, but worry that leading a 4.4 million member archdiocese is enough for one man, to say nothing of the grim prospect of six years of red-eye flights to D.C. Others think Archbishop Dennis Schnurr of Cincinnati is the leading candidate because he could clean up some of the dysfunction within the USCCB secretariat. And, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo?s name is being floated because there is a sense that there should be a cardinal in the top ranks of leadership, although more often than not, this was not the case.

So, stay tuned. The question before the bishops, in both their elections today and in the various issues to be discussed tomorrow in executive session, is a simple one: Are they going to let them warm to the new pope?s call to be a less judgmental Church, one hunkering in the bunker and whining about secularization, or will they, like Francis, confront the forces of secularization, not with law suits and culture wars, but with the sweet mercy of the Lord Jesus? I share the concerns of many about a culture that has become forgetful of God and in which the forces of secularization hold sway. Against those forces, I do not think lawsuits and culture wars stand a shot. But, I think the exciting example of Pope Francis? leadership is already cutting off secularization at the knees.

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