



(Dreamstime/R. Gino Santa Maria/Shutterfree, Llc)



by Michael Sean Winters

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@michaelswinters](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

December 21, 2023

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

It's that time of the year. Santa has drawn up his list of who has been naughty and who has been nice, and so have I.

Cardinal Raymond Burke is on the naughty list for continuing to misrepresent what the pope and those who are obedient to him say and do. In a [recent sermon](#) on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the cardinal said, "Some, even among bishops, would tell us that the church has to change her doctrine, her sacred worship, and her discipline in order to accommodate the culture."

Where and when did any bishop say that they were advocating reform "in order to accommodate the culture"? Burke is throwing verbal darts at a caricature.



Cardinal Raymond Burke at a conference, "The Synodal Babel," in Rome Oct. 3
(CNS/Lola Gomez)

Pope Francis has been clear throughout his pontificate that his aim is not accommodation but a preaching of the Gospel that is truer to its initial kerygma. "At times we find it hard to make room for God's unconditional love in our pastoral activity," [Pope Francis wrote in *Amoris Laetitia*](#). "We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel."

He didn't say he wanted to accommodate the culture. He said he wanted us to stop reducing the Gospel to a moralistic checklist, heavily centered on sexual sins. That is

quite a different thing.

Bishop [Mark Seitz](#) of Texas made the nice list this year — and every year! The bishop of El Paso [has become a champion of migrants](#) both in his role as bishop of a border diocese and as chair of the migration committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

At a time when Republicans have made animus and bigotry toward immigrants part of their core message, and Democrats have not been able to articulate a position that is morally sustainable or consistent with America's own history, Seitz's witness on behalf of migrants stands out.



Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, Texas, greets a Salvadoran migrant in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, June 27, 2019. The migrant was deported after crossing the Paso del Norte international border from El Paso. (OSV News/Reuters/Jose Luis Gonzalez)

Also on the nice list, but anonymously, is whoever at EWTN required Raymond Arroyo to swap out a discussion with Fr. Gerald Murray — [one of his regular guests](#) — because they mistakenly asserted that Bishop Joseph Strickland had been barred from saying Mass in his former diocese. Instead, they led with a segment interviewing Bill Donohue, head of the Catholic League. [Arroyo also added a programming note](#). EWTN uploaded a different introduction but forgot to [redo the description of the episode](#).

All this confusion could have been avoided if it had occurred to Arroyo that LifeSiteNews is not exactly a trustworthy source. Still, whoever at EWTN decided Arroyo needed to be held accountable can expect something nice in their stocking this year.

The Colorado Supreme Court made this year's naughty list just under the wire, with a ridiculous [ruling that bars Donald Trump](#) from that state's election ballot because he engaged in an insurrection against the United States.

Advertisement

[The 14th Amendment](#), drafted in the wake of the Civil War, bars anyone who has taken an oath to uphold the Constitution, and then joins an insurrection against the Constitution, from elective office. Trump has not been found guilty of such insurrection in any court of law, at least not yet. The U.S. Senate acquitted him after the House impeached him. (They were wrong, to be sure, but that is a different matter.)

The 14th Amendment doesn't give a state court the right to decide who did and didn't engage in insurrection. What is more, the Colorado court's decision is a boon to Trump, and all of those challenging him for the GOP nomination [were compelled](#) to come out and defend him. The momentary thrill of watching Republicans attack federalism is not enough to alter the verdict: Colorado Supreme Court, naughty list for you!

Also on the naughty list is the former archbishop of Colorado's capital city, Denver, Archbishop Charles Chaput. His most recent attack on Francis, published at the "[What We Need Now](#)" substack.



Now-retired Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput in 2016
(CNS/CatholicPhilly.com/Sarah Webb)

"Francis is intolerant of even respectful disagreement. His manner can often seem mean-spirited. His complaints about the Church in the United States are insulting and uninformed, and they embarrass the dignity of his office," Chaput writes. "They also discourage many bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful who heroically live the Gospel in an age of aggressive secularism and hostility to the Church. And — most regrettably — his ambiguity on matters of doctrine creates confusion and feeds division in the Church when we already have a surfeit of both. If saying these things

is 'disloyal,' then so is the truth."

Intolerant? Mean-spirited? Uninformed? Of that trio of insults, it is the last that is most telling. What His Grace means is that the pope listens to people other than himself and his ilk. Coal for Chaput's stocking.

At the very top of my nice list are the millions of Catholics in the pews, some of whom voted for President Joe Biden and some of whom voted for Trump, some of whom love Pope Francis and some of whom struggle with this most dynamic of pontificates, those who make it to Mass every Sunday or almost every Sunday, who teach their children to pray and who make the church's witness credible.

It is the lay faithful — and many religious and clergy, too — who give to Catholic Charities or Catholic Relief Services, who help with the Knights of Columbus winter clothing drive or the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry, those philanthropists, and the people who work for them, who dedicate enormous resources to the various ministries of the church, who get to the church hall early to set up the tables for coffee and doughnuts after Mass, in short, those who extend the healing hands of Jesus into our broken world through the ministries of the church. They make the top of my nice list.

A blessed and holy Christmas to you all.