

A Moral Challenge for Pope Francis

Exclusive: In modern times, the Catholic Church has made excuses for unjustifiable wars even as it has made abortion a cardinal sin, a hypocrisy that will be tested as Pope Francis visits the United States, a country immersed in all the immorality that comes from warfare, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Pope Francis could use his visit to the U.S. this week to make unmistakably clear that the Catholic Church's teaching on the "sanctity of life" applies to more than just the first nine months of gestation.

If he does so, he would face formidable opposition. The bishops appointed by Francis's two predecessors had to swear allegiance to anti-abortion principles while showing less commitment to saving lives from war. The phalanx of right-wing bishops that Francis inherited were eager to be used, *twice*, to help elect President George W. Bush because he said he opposed abortion.

These bishops then aped the silence of the German bishops who could not find their voice when Adolf Hitler began what the post-war Nuremberg Tribunal defined as a "war of aggression." Bush's unprovoked attack on Iraq fit that definition to a T complete with what Nuremberg called the "accumulated evil" that inevitably results from such a war. Think lies, racism, kidnapping, secret prisons, torture, millions of refugees.

One can only hope that someone has told Francis that he would not have to start at Square One to rescue "the sanctity of life" from those who would confine it to abortion. The Pope needs no jackhammer to break through abortion-hardened concrete. Readily available are the writings of the justice-oriented Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, whose most important contribution before he succumbed to cancer in 1996 was a simple formula he proposed the "seamless garment" to link the Church's "consistent ethic of life" to a whole range of moral and social issues.

Bernadin raised consciousness about the sanctity and reverence due all human life from conception to death. "The more one embraces this concept, the more sensitive one becomes to the value of human life itself at all stages," wrote Bernadin. "This consistent ethic points out the inconsistency of defending life in one area while dismissing it in another. ... there is a linkage among all the life issues, which cannot be ignored."

If Pope Francis has the courage to endorse Bernadin's approach to the sanctity of life, many presidential candidates will have to find a way to dance around it. One, Sen. Marco Rubio, told ABC's George Stephanopoulos on Sunday: "I'm a

Roman Catholic. For me, the Pope ... has authority to speak on ... theological matters. And I follow him 100 percent on those issues; otherwise I wouldn't be a Roman Catholic. And so I believe that deeply. ...

"On the social teachings, essential issues, like the sanctity of life and things of this nature, those go deep to the theology of this – of the faith. And I do believe – those are binding and I believe strongly in them."

However, during the same interview, Rubio told Stephanopoulos that Obama was not forceful enough in making war in the Middle East. U.S. airstrikes, Rubio said, "are not, quite frankly, as vibrant as they should be." Odd word, "vibrant."

Will Francis find words to make it clear to Rubio and other U.S. officials that sanctity of life includes those tens of thousands of non-Americans who may not look like Rubio but who nonetheless deserve to be protected from the death that rains down from U.S. bombs, Bernadin's "consistent ethic of life"? Will the Pope go beyond applauding the countries that are taking in hundreds of thousands of refugees and address Washington's role in the wars and other violence that create refugees?

Will the Pope remind the Catholic majority of the U.S. Supreme Court justices that execution is against Church teaching? And will he remind flamboyant, right-wing Catholic Justice Antonin Scalia that it has been 500 years since the Church condoned torture?

Techniques Like Waterboarding

It will be interesting to see if Pope Francis has enough sensitivity to the horrors of the Inquisition, and the role played by the Jesuits in it, to suggest that presidential candidate Sen. Lindsey Graham go easy on using that sordid history to brag about the "effectiveness" of torture. At a May 13, 2009 Senate Judiciary Committee hearing discussing waterboarding, Graham said: "One of the reasons these techniques have been around for 500 years is apparently they work."

That torture "works" is a lie, unless your aim is to produce false confessions. That worked like a charm when President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney ordered interrogators to obtain "evidence" of operational ties between Al Qaeda and Iraq in order to associate Saddam Hussein with the 9/11 terrorists. (Before the invasion of Iraq, 69 percent of Americans had been led to believe that Saddam Hussein played a role in the attacks of 9/11.)

However, whether or not torture "works" is not the point here. When the Jesuits taught me ethics at Fordham College a half century ago, we learned of a moral category called "intrinsic evil," inhabited by rape and slavery as well as

torture. I had no idea that “intrinsic evil” could be somehow rehabilitated. But at Fordham, at least, it has been and in a most Jesuitical way.

Those graduating from my alma mater in 2012 encountered this not-so-subtle change when they objected to the invitation extended by Fordham’s President Rev. Joseph M. McShane, S.J. to “extraordinary rendition” aficionado John Brennan to give the commencement address in 2012 and to receive an honorary doctorate in humane letters (I am not making this up).

McShane had fallen victim to what more grounded Jesuits call the “celebrity virus.” At the time, Brennan, a Fordham College alumnus, worked in the White House (before becoming CIA director). It did not seem to matter very much what he did for the U.S. government. Confronted by graduating seniors who had been taught that torture was always and everywhere evil, McShane gave a glib gloss on torture and on Brennan’s role in compiling lists of those to be killed by drones with these words: “We don’t live in a black and white world; we live in a gray world.”

After the Senate Intelligence Committee released its major study on CIA torture in December 2014, a faculty-initiated petition asked McShane to revoke the honorary degree given to Brennan, calling “indefensible” his defense and support of torture. McShane rebuffed the petitioners. Another sad day for Fordham.

In his autobiography, *To Dwell in Peace* published 28 years ago, Vietnam War protester/prophet Daniel Berrigan, S.J., now 94 and spending his last days in Fordham’s infirmary for elderly Jesuits, wrote of “the fall of a great enterprise”, the Jesuit university. He recorded his “hunch” that the university would end up “among those structures whose moral decline and political servitude signalize a larger falling away of the culture itself.”

Berrigan lamented “highly placed” churchmen and their approval of war, “uttered with sublime confidence, from on high, from highly placed friendships, and White House connections.”

“Thus compromised,” warned Berrigan, “the Christian tradition of nonviolence, as well as the secular boast of disinterested pursuit of truth, these are reduced to bombast, hauled out for formal occasions, believed by no one, practiced by no one.”

It will be interesting to see if, during his visit to New York, Pope Francis decides to visit a Jesuit prophet named Berrigan or the celebrity virus-afflicted McShane.

Sexual Abuse

As if Francis needs additional sanctity-of-life issues to address during his visit to the U.S., a front-page, above-the-fold article in Monday's New York Times provides yet another. Joseph Goldstein writes about the orders given to U.S. troops to ignore the sexual abuse of young boys by Afghan "allies." Until now, the mainstream media had avoided this story, but it is not new.

Those who took the trouble to read the information leaked to WikiLeaks by Bradley/Chelsea Manning were aware of this ugly story several years ago. I alluded to this depravity in December 2010 toward the end of a short interview on CNN. I have not been invited back since, but it was worth it.

Sexual abuse, of course, is a major problem that Pope Francis, as well as his predecessors, have had to deal with. During his U.S. visit seven years ago, Pope Benedict chose to dwell on steps to address the Church's pedophilia scandal to the exclusion of much else, but he got a free pass from the media in disguising his own role in trying to cover the whole thing up.

While still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he headed The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith the Vatican office that once ran the Inquisition. In that capacity he sent a letter in May 2001 to all Catholic bishops throwing a curtain of secrecy over the widespread sexual abuse by clergy, warning the bishops of severe penalties, including excommunication for breaching "pontifical secrets." Lawyers acting for the sexually abused accused Ratzinger of "clear obstruction of justice."

Very few American bishops have been disciplined. And when Bernard Cardinal Law was run out of Boston for failing to protect children from predator priests, he was given a cushy sinecure in Rome. In my view, he should be behind bars.

Barring Female Priests

While Pope Francis's popularity stems largely from his penchant for doing unexpected things, sadly, he has shown zero flexibility with respect to the ban on women priests, and no miracles can realistically be expected. The prohibition on female priests is another "truth" that has been set in concrete, even though it lacks firm foundation in either Scripture or early Church tradition.

One still hears, "But Jesus did not ordain women." Truth is Jesus did not ordain anyone. "Ordination" did not exist until well over a century after Jesus. At that point, power-hungry males decided to marginalize women to make the Church more "acceptable" in sexist societies.

How many people are aware that, in the years right after Jesus was killed, many of the men and women who knew him personally worshiped in house churches led by women? THAT tradition (women in leadership positions) does have firm foundation

in Scripture as well as in Jesus's behavior toward women, but has been ignored by the self-ordained theologians and prelates often to the point of absurdity.

Thomas Aquinas, for example, followed Aristotle in attributing the conception of a woman to a defect of a particular seed, resulting in a failed male. Can it be that this is still part of our Catholic tradition? With his limited vision of 800 years ago, Aquinas explained:

"Woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher observes." (Prima pars, q. 92, a.1)

Sadly, there seems to be little hope for equality for women in the Catholic Church anytime soon. At the same time, it is not impossible to hope that Francis will reaffirm Cardinal Bernadin's inclusive approach on the sanctity of life.

How good it would be to remind American Catholics that ALL have a right to a decent life including not only those in utero, but also babies, young people exposed to predators, and adults with no economic or educational options but a poverty draft into the armed forces.

In addition, we Catholics, and most Americans, do need reminding that Bernadin's "seamless garment" and "consistent ethic of life" apply to people of all nations; that intrinsic evil should not be given a facelift; and that Thou Shalt Not Kill still applies even to a country claiming special privileges as the "sole indispensable country in the world."

Ironically, it was Russian President Vladimir Putin who, in [an op-ed](#) in the New York Times on Sept. 11, 2013, took issue with Obama's oft-proclaimed claim of American exceptionalism. Putin wrote:

"It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal."

For more on the last papal visit, see: Consortiumnews.com's ["What About the War, Benedict?"](#) For an op-ed appearing in Sunday's Baltimore Sun, see: ["Will Pope Francis Be Polite or Prophetic"](#)

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