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Marriage in a Cubicle

Anthony Esolen | Column

9/22/08

"So what if two men are allowed to marry?" we hear many a pew-warming Catholic say. "What effect can that have on marriage? I won't love my wife any the less."

True; perhaps the damage has already been done. If that sounds harsh, consider that married life in our world is a diminished thing. Husbands and wives are thought to be indistinguishable. There are no particularly paternal or maternal duties to fulfill. There is nothing left in sex to profane, fornication having sunk below the status of a sin of passion to a hobby or a part of a weekly exercise regimen. It requires an act of historical imagination -- and, for us Catholics, obedient humility -- to see the fullness of what marriage ought to be.

I recall reading in a magazine about a Coast Guard ship patrolling the stormy waters of Lake Superior. The male crew, five or six in all, were captained by a woman. "It makes no difference whether the captain is a woman," she said. But how could she know that? She was in no position to see how the men were, to hear how they talked, and to note how they felt when she was not there. I wonder whether she really wanted to know. She needed to use her imagination, bolstered by the stories of old sailors, or by humble and close observation of men.

More to the point, she did not consider how much of that ancient male fellowship in peril, that blood-brotherhood, had already been compromised. If being a captain of a ship is but to give the most efficient commands, then perhaps a robot would do, too. But then, perhaps being a captain of men is far more than we remember, or more than we care to admit.

We are in that captain's position. Yes, I love my wife. But the world I live in does not believe that it is renewed whenever members from those two warring parties, men and women, celebrate their differences

and unite in marriage. It does not believe that marriage spans the generations, linking those who came before us to those who, if God pleases, will be the fruits of our love. It has constricted the affair to something private. It smiles upon the *feelings* of a John and Mary, and no more. It has no use for their love, socially.

John and Mary are not called upon to be a father and mother beyond the walls of their house. If they like, they may divorce, and that too is a private affair, unless it involves the annoying complication of children. In such a world it becomes conceivable that two men may claim the right to marry, because we have severed the sexes from nature (including human nature), and from their calling to be mothers and fathers of their own children, and exemplars of motherhood and fatherhood for their neighbors and countrymen. We are detached from the passage of the generations. We are, except as individuals, cordoned off from the duties of our villages and cities. All is a matter of personal choice, and therefore all is arbitrary, and alienated.

It is marriage confined to a cubicle. Now the cubicle may be well lit and ventilated, with plenty of fresh food and drink. But the full expression of our natural fatherhood and motherhood is truncated. If my wife and I lived in a concrete box, I would love her; yet it is hard to claim that the box would make no difference. It would curtail a thousand ordinary opportunities for love. I could not love her as a mother to the neighborhood. She could not love me as a father at the city gates. Imagine that the cubicle is limited temporally, too. We could then love one another for a time, but without any soul-expanding sense that we were carrying on a duty from generations past. The seed may be good, but the soil is thin. The painter may be skilled, but if he has only gray on the palette, great works in gray are the best we will get.

Imagine the converse. When the poet Edmund Spenser wrote his *Epithalamion*, he meant it not only as a wedding present to his bride, but as a joyful meditation upon what marriage, especially Christian marriage, is all about. In that poem he summons the whole world to be present at the great feast -- the nymphs of the Irish forests, the rivers stocked with fish, the dashing young men of the village, the young maidens awaiting their own day to come, boys setting bonfires and running up and down the street, the sun and moon and stars and the very angels above and the communion of saints in heaven. And why not, since on that night, when he has dismissed all the partakers of the feast, and he and his bride are alone at last, they are not really alone either. They pray to God that their act of love, private as it is, will take its part too in the providential march of time, raising a large posterity to swell the number of the blessed saints.

That was good soil. That was a rich palette. No difference whether two men may marry? If you ask that, you have already reduced male and female from

mysterious creations of God to insignificant varieties of the human body, that attract according to taste. And if you have done that, or if your culture has done that whether you like it or not, then no, you do not love your husband or your wife in the same way, and with the same robust fullness of expression, as you would have done otherwise. You cannot seize an opportunity that does not exist. Let us hope at least that you can draw near to your spouse within the four walls of your private feelings. The Lord who raised the dead can visit a cubicle, too. But that does not mean we ought to build them.

Anthony Esolen is a professor of English at Providence College and a senior editor for [Touchstone](#) magazine. His latest book is [The Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization](#) (Regnery).

Obama's Faltering Religious Outreach Revs Up

Deal W. Hudson | Column

9/22/08

This week the Obama campaign attempts to restart its religious outreach with a [month-long tour](#) of its religious surrogates, titled "Barack Obama: Faith, Family, and Values." The stars of the tour will be Catholic law professor Doug Kmiec, ex-Congressman Tim Roemer (also a Catholic), Methodist theologian Shaun Casey, and Evangelical author Donald Miller.

Obama's religious outreach program has been on the rocks, not yet producing its expected results. Support for Obama among both Evangelical and Catholic voters has [dwindled](#): 57.2 percent favor McCain, versus 19.9 percent for Obama. These numbers indicate that religious voters are supporting the GOP nominee at the same level as in 2004.

That's bad news for the Obama campaign.

Restoring a relationship between the Democratic Party and the religiously active voters has been a priority for Obama and his party. *TIME* magazine's Amy Sullivan told a group of religion reporters on Thursday that the campaign had [decided](#) to cut the funding level of religious outreach. This is a subject of particular concern to Sullivan, who recently published [The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats Are Closing the God Gap](#), which we reviewed favorably [here](#).

Sullivan's remark brought a quick denial from the head of Obama's religious outreach director, Joshua DuBois. "That is just absolutely not true. It is actually 180 degrees the other way," he said.

Sorry, but I don't buy it. Sullivan going on record to express what must have been a great disappointment to her is significant. Remember, she believed that Obama's effort to close the "God Gap" was the key to the Democrats' taking back the White House in November.

Now the Obama campaign has lowered its sights to attracting "moderates" among religious voting groups, such as the 500,000 Methodists in Ohio. But don't the Obama strategists realize that very few moderates vote for religious reasons? The active religious voters come from the Right or the Left (and there aren't really that many on the Left).

The McCain campaign flirted with a similar strategy but abandoned it. They got successfully back on track beginning with a July 29 [visit](#) to the Rev. Billy Graham at his home in Montreat, North Carolina.

[Lynchburg, Virginia -- the hometown](#) of the late Rev. Jerry Falwell -- got a taste of the Obama faith tour last Tuesday. Campaign surrogate Shaun Casey held a [meeting](#) for Evangelical voters at the Starlite Café on 5th Street. "His administration will model the kind of pluralism that we long for today," Casey told the 15 people who showed up.

Unfortunately for Casey -- and his boss -- pluralism is hardly a message that ignites the passions of religious voters. Rather, it's often used as a code word for being *against* what religious conservatives are *for*: protecting the unborn and marriage between a man and a woman.

And that's the problem with the entire effort: Obama's faith tour will not be able to get out from under the shadow of what it stands against. From the very beginning, the Obama campaign's religious outreach struggled to define another kind of agenda that would appeal to religious voters. By all appearances, it failed.

There are many reasons for the downward trend of Obama's appeal to religious voters, but Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League for

Religious and Civil Rights, cuts to the heart of the problem:

People of faith will judge the candidates on the basis of their voting record -- not on some grandstanding tour. The problem for Obama is his support for selective infanticide and pledges to make abortion-on-demand a right so secure that no

state could ever rule against it. No "Faith Tour" can override that reality.

Deal W. Hudson is the director of InsideCatholic.com and the author of [Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States](#) (Simon and Schuster).

We Regret to Inform You that Christ Is Risen

John Zmirak | Column

9/23/08

Last week I went fist-to-face with one of the "new atheists," John Derbyshire of *National Review*. It's not like I make a habit of badgering those who don't share the gift of faith. Only God can give that out. At our best, we're His bicycle messengers. We really can help people cut the twine and remove the bubble wrap -- or we can act all squirrely and suspicious, and make folks refuse delivery, in case the box is brimming with anthrax spores.

But Derbyshire's latest blast at folks with faith was just plain insulting, so bullying and intemperate that I felt justified in giving him the [Full Frontal Zmirak](#). That's the intellectual equivalent of the scene in *Animal House* when a toga-clad John Belushi grabs a folk-singer's guitar and [smashes it to bits](#). Then he shrugs and mutters, "Sorry."

What drove me to it? Just this: Derbyshire had the gall to suggest that belief in Christ is a dodge for the timid, a happy little tale we tell ourselves. You know, *wishful thinking*.

It's clear that Derbyshire was never an [orthodox Catholic teenager](#). You guys out there who have been through that know what I mean: Spend enough time tightrope walking on a scapular string over the flames of hell, and you learn to agree with Waugh's Sebastian Flyte -- who answers Charles Ryder's question in *Brideshead Revisited*:

"I suppose they try and make you believe an awful lot of nonsense?"

"Is it nonsense? I wish it were."

Amen, brother. In fact, I'm writing a book on just this subject, laying out with [my usual tactlessness](#) the downside of our Faith -- the ways in which the abiding (or is it stalking?) presence of God ruins all our fun. Not our happiness. And not our "joy," that deep, soul satisfaction that saints are said to find in hunger and

thirst, abuse, and execution -- indeed, in just about *whatever* happens to them. I wouldn't know.

I'm talking about the low-grade, ordinary satisfactions we fallen men have every right to expect from life -- especially middle-class life in a high-tech, wealthy country that has stockpiled enough "city-buster" nuclear weapons to keep most of the world smiling at us nervously. The kind of middling, easy pleasures that make you wish you could live 500 mediocre years in which to try them.

To hell with quality time; I'm looking for Quantity Time™. There is too much Lite beer that needs drinking; there are too many raunchy Web sites I haven't found, too many back episodes of *Malcolm in the Middle* I haven't seen. To paraphrase the section of *The Iliad* where Achilles is offered by the gods a choice of destinies, I seek a *long* life, with absolutely no glory. No pain and no gain -- sounds like a plan.

The one thing that bothers me, that's always gnawed at the back of my mind, is the thought that scientists will come up with a cure for death . . . five minutes after I croak. Or at least some treatment that stops the aging process and lets us all stick around for centuries.

Of course, that would mean most of us will have to stop having children. (The American Catholics who are faithful to *Humanae Vitae* -- all 72 of them -- will turn down this deal, and if they're not all interned behind chicken wire somewhere in Idaho, they'll go right on filling up minivans with kids christened Patrick and Lucia, and sticking out on the road like Amish buggies: "Warning -- Procreating Vehicle.")

The rest of us will take those red-brick public schools -- to which we Catholic kids in New York were always warned we might be sent if we misbehaved, so we could get stabbed -- and turn them into Adult

Recreational Facilities. Since we won't really be aging so much as slowly growing stale, these won't need to be like nursing homes, with low impact calisthenics, Wednesday afternoon bingo games, and chipper dance instructors named Amy and Pablo to teach us all the Electric Slide.

No, with perfect health, generic Viagra, and organs replicated at need by handy stem cells, we can go right on living like Baby Boomers -- refusing at once to grow old or grow up. In fact, I predict a certain amount of regression as we wade through our second or third century of Quantity Time™. For my 200th birthday, I bet I'll be drinking Jello tequila shots and playing Twister with some perky young blonde who's half my age. We can put the "Adult" back into Adult Recreational Facility.

Of course, this isn't really a substitute for the resurrection of the body -- but at least it doesn't require that pesky cross.

Next week, I'll delve more deeply into this theme, and offer a preview of the next book I'm working on, whose full title is *We Regret to Inform You that Christ Is Risen: Seven Key Aspects of Life Where Jesus Spoils Our Fun*. Those seven areas, as I'll explain next Tuesday, are lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride.

Christ: What a buzzkill.

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Voting with the Tribe

David Warren | Column

9/23/08

Had her family not joined the Wasilla Assembly of God when she was four years old, Sarah Palin would most likely be today -- together with her adversaries Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi, John Kerry, Ted Kennedy, etc. -- one of America's most prominent Catholic politicians. She was, after all, baptized by a Catholic priest -- according to my information, at Christ the King Roman Catholic Church in Richland, Washington, on June 7, 1964.

Catholics represent one-quarter of the U.S. electorate, and according to surveys, closer to one-third of those actually voting in American elections. They (I must use this pronoun because, although Catholic, I am a Canadian citizen) have long been associated, as a constituency, with the Democratic Party.

For various reasons, abortion has been presented in the mainstream media as if it were the single issue of concern to the "old men" in the Catholic hierarchy. With this comes the notion that Catholics who fail to vote Democratic or "progressive" are backward and insulated people, whose obedience to the hierarchy on this one issue obviates all political thought. This is an argument on a level with the assertion that only a racist could vote against Barack Obama.

Catholics may have discovered America, but in the parts ruled by the British Crown they were once extremely unwelcome. As a fresh Catholic convert, one of my first pleasures was attending the Mass at Old St. Joseph's Church in Philadelphia, just a couple of blocks from Independence Hall. This venerable Jesuit establishment (celebrating its 275th anniversary this year) was the first place in the entire British Empire where Catholics could legally meet and pray, after the English Reformation. By the time the United States became independent, Catholics were less than one percent of the population -- many having fled north with my own Protestant ancestors (the United Empire

Loyalists), counting their chances better under the British Crown than with the American Revolutionists.

Populist campaigns to purge American politics of Catholic influence date back at least to the "Know Nothing" movement of the 1850s, itself a reaction to the first waves of Catholic immigration from Ireland and Germany. The belief that Catholics are a voting bloc, waiting for instructions from the Antichrist in Rome, survives today in the much milder form of questions about the authority of bishops to deny Communion to apostate Catholic politicians.

Through the 20th century, the Catholic electorate evolved as a force characteristically "conservative" on social questions, "liberal" on economic ones. For the two major parties, the task was to drive the wedge into this constituency in the right way. The Democrats generally did a better job of it, and through labor unions and the like enjoyed preponderant Catholic support for many decades. Today, the struggle over the Hispanic vote provides an echo of this, as once again the Democrats appeal more to Hispanic collective and tribal interests, Republicans more to their individual principles and beliefs.

The abortion issue has been a red herring. All professing Christians -- not just Roman Catholics -- were opposed to abortion until very recently in historical time. It is the mere existence of a visible Catholic hierarchy that makes Catholic rebels against Divine commandments more visible through the media than Protestant rebels. And yet, evangelical America is not exactly silent on the abortion issue; only the "mainstream" Protestant churches acquiesce, which are anyway fading toward extinction.

I have never met Sarah Palin's parents, nor did I live in Wasilla, Alaska, in the late 1960s, when they resolved

to leave the Roman Church -- perhaps more consequentially than they realized at the time. My comments must thus be restricted to observing that not only Palin, but seemingly all members of her extended family, take the Christian religion seriously. Moreover, Palin's decision to let her son, Trig, live -- even though diagnosed in the womb with Down Syndrome -- speaks more than many sermons.

Should Catholics, looking at the vice-presidential portion of the party tickets, support Sarah Palin because she shares their most fundamental moral beliefs? Or should they instead support Joe Biden because, while he openly rejects Christian teachings, he is nevertheless nominally a fellow Catholic today?

It is this old question that the liberal media try to confuse by making an issue about the pope and his bishops "interfering" in the working of American democracy. Each Catholic must decide, individually, how to cast the secret ballot.

Do you vote with your conscience, or do you vote with your tribe?

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Why Abortion and the Iraq War Are Not Equivalent

Rev. Dwight Longenecker | Column

9/24/08

The intricacies of Catholic moral theology have never been my strong suit. Rather than use the law to nitpick and condemn people, I'm far too inclined to be on the side of the sinner and give people the benefit of the doubt. For those who quibble over the morality of a particular action, I'm too inclined to skip the detail work and look at the big picture.

But it doesn't take a Jesuitical moral theologian to figure out a recent moral conundrum that has taken the fancy of some American Catholics. In this presidential race they are faced with the choice of one party that is in favor of abortion and another party that is in favor of a war that many believe to be unjust. Some Catholics who wish to vote Democratic justify their choice by saying, "We're going to have the killing of innocent people one way or another. With Democrats, innocent people will die through abortion. With Republicans, innocent lives are lost through war. There will be terrible deaths both ways. Let's focus on immigration and the economy."

The unnecessary suffering and death of any human being at the hand of another is to be decried, and while all human life is equally precious, not all killing is of the same moral seriousness. The rape and murder of an innocent ten-year-old girl is more horrific and wicked than the death by lethal injection of the man who did the crime. Likewise, the deaths caused by abortion are not to be equated with the lives lost in war. This is not to minimize the horror of war, or argue that a particular war is just or unjust. It is simply to make the simple moral argument that the war in Iraq is not of the same moral order as abortion -- and here's why.

First we have the question of proportionality of both numbers and time. How many people have been killed through abortion, and how many people are being killed in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan? There have been around 4,000 military deaths in Iraq and about 1,000 in Afghanistan, and there have been

around 90,000 deaths caused by internecine violence in Iraq. The war has been going on for five years. In comparison, deaths from abortion in the United States have been going on for 35 years, and [abortions worldwide](#) number about 42 million per year. The sheer number deaths over time involved in these two issues are not morally equivalent.

Second, it's argued that, in both abortion and war, innocent lives are lost, but we must consider the "innocence" of the deaths. In abortion, a totally innocent and vulnerable unborn child who is incapable of self defense is killed. This is more morally outrageous than the killing of an armed opponent in war. An opposing combatant has chosen (at least partially) to take up arms and be involved in killing, and is therefore not innocent. The armed combatant also has the possibility of defending himself.

To be sure, there are also civilian casualties in war, and these -- especially the children -- are innocent of wrong doing. That they are injured or harmed is a terrible injustice, but is even this morally equivalent of abortion? I think not, because of several other considerations. Nearly 90,000 have been killed by fellow Iraqis, not by American soldiers. Along with this we must consider the intention of the American forces. While the American invasion of Iraq may have opened the door to the internecine atrocities, the Americans never intended for civilians to be killed, and have made huge sacrifices to eliminate the terrorists and end the atrocities and anarchy by bringing law and order.

Which brings us to the third point: In judging the morality of any action we not only consider the objective act itself, but we also consider the intention. A general who plans to go into battle does not consider first and foremost how he can best kill enemy

combatants. His first goal is something else, like the liberation of a city or the elimination of a military threat or a strategic facility of the enemy. He accepts that he may have to kill enemy soldiers, but that is not his first objective. Even when a soldier goes into combat he may be trained to kill, but he is also trained to kill only as a last resort. He is first trained to avoid killing and to take the enemy prisoner if at all possible, and he is supposed to treat the prisoner humanely. It is true that in war this does not always happen, but we are considering here the intention, not the ultimate outcome.

In contrast, the abortionist or one who procures an abortion sets out to kill as the first intention. They may have an ulterior motive that seems good, but the primary intention of their action is to take an innocent life. Politicians who support abortion therefore enable those who wish to kill innocent and defenseless children. Even if the particular war is unjust, the soldiers and politicians who instigated the

war were doing so (even if in a debased way) not to promote killing, but to promote an ultimate goal of justice and peace.

Abortion and the war in Iraq are not the only issues in this election. Each voter has the responsibility to weigh all the moral concerns our country faces, but they must do so intelligently, prayerfully, and sympathetically. People of good conscience may be opposed to a war they consider unjust. They may also be opposed to abortion, but to pretend the two are of equal moral culpability in order to justify their support of one particular candidate is irresponsible, untrue, and unjust.

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Obama Campaign Calls Abortion Survivor Story a 'Despicable Lie'

Deal W. Hudson | Column

9/24/08

Gianna Jessen survived a saline abortion 31 years ago. "I didn't have any burns anywhere on my body -- it was amazing." The saline, however, did leave Jessen with a mild case of cerebral palsy, a slight limp, and a life-long commitment to oppose abortion.

Jessen is featured in a television ad presently running in Ohio and New Mexico, criticizing Barack Obama's four votes against the Born Alive Infant Protection Act (BAIPA).

I asked her why she teamed with Jill Stanek's organization, [Born Alive Truth](#), to make the ad. "It's very important for the American people to know how [Obama] feels about the most vulnerable among us," she told me. ([Stanek](#) is the Chicago nurse who began lobbying to secure legal protections for babies born alive during abortions.)

Jessen has been active in the anti-abortion movement for 16 years and testified before Congress in 2002 about the BAIPA. At those hearings she met Stanek, who approached her several months ago about doing the ad. "I was thrilled to do it. It's as if I have been preparing many years for this moment."

Obama responded to Jessen's commercial with an ad of his own, dismissing it as "truly vile" and a "despicable lie." He wasn't the only one: Jonathan Martin, a reporter for *Politico*, called Jessen "a self-proclaimed abortion survivor." When Stanek produced the evidence of Jessen's claims, *Politico* removed Martin's slam.

Jessen lives in Nashville where she came with her adopted family 16 years ago. After she survived the abortion, she was given back to her biological mother but was shortly placed with a foster family. At the age

of three, Jessen was adopted by her foster mother's daughter.

I asked about her mother's reaction to the failed abortion. "I don't know how she felt at the time. But she came out of nowhere two years ago to meet me at an event. She was a broken woman and quite angry. I told her I had forgiven her for what she did, even though she didn't want any forgiveness."

She isn't concerned about the way Obama describes her ad. "I don't really care what he says. I know he voted four times against proper medical care for babies born alive. That's the kind of man he is." So how have people reacted to the commercial? "Some of [Obama's] supporters will be less than kind, but generally the reaction has been very positive."

Jessen spends her time as a speaker, writer, and real estate investor. She took up distance running several years ago because she "wanted to feel God help me in that situation, to have him carry me over the finish line," though she's given up marathons.

No doubt Jessen, whose visibility is growing daily, will need a similar attitude as she is buffeted by the political winds of a presidential campaign. Since her ad started airing in Ohio, polls there have indicated a shift in McCain's direction. No wonder the Obama campaign responded so quickly.

Deal W. Hudson is the director of [InsideCatholic.com](#) and the author of [Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States](#) (Simon and Schuster).

Caesar and Mammon: Together Forever

Mark P. Shea | Column

9/25/08

I don't know nothin' 'bout economics and high finance. But I have eyes and ears. The national conversation about the Great Wall Street Meltdown, such as it is, appears to be something that takes place in secret government chambers, with news bulletins to us trembling laity who do not speak or understand the strange hierophantic language in which it is conducted. Those bulletins say, "It's *really* bad. If we were to tell you how bad, you would probably drop dead on the spot. So we won't. But, trust us, it's really bad. (And no, there's no point in trying to tell you how it got that way. Mistakes were made, mostly by poor people. Trust us on that, too.)"

Then our Masters tell us, "We are working to fix (well, okay, more 'stave off') the problem. Meanwhile, continue your normal life. Remember, you are consumers first and citizens second. We have things under control, but we are telling you now that you will need to give us vast and well-nigh dictatorial power -- power without a right of appeal, nor oversight, nor accountability of any kind, and do it without thinking too much because the need is so urgent!"

Our response: "It says here on the news that these guys are working on it. I don't want to ask too many questions because I feel stupid not understanding this giant problem. And besides, it's a huge scary emergency and what we need is action -- not reflection, self-examination, repentance, or responsibility, and still less a serious look at the people and policies that got us here. All that kumbaya touchy-feely stuff is for the weak, not the consumers of a proud superpower. So I'll just go ahead and support whatever it is they do because they've certainly done a great job up till now."

Forgive me, but I have a strict rule of only allowing myself to be stampeded into one world-historical blunder per decade, and the Iraq War has used up my limit. For what it's worth, here's what I can make of the latest fraud to emanate from our Ruling Classes.

Broadly speaking, it appears to me that over the past 30 to 40 years or so, the State (whose function is to preserve the common good against the onslaughts of the various effects of original sin) got it into its head that capitalism was magically immune from the effects of original sin. Possibly this was due to the fact that Caesar and Mammon had been seeing each other, sleeping together, and falling deeper into addiction to a cocktail of various drugs.

It would appear that Caesar then told people in the grip of one of the capital sins -- Greed -- that they could go ahead and police themselves while he did a line of coke with Mammon up in the penthouse.

Some of these people in the grip of Greed were in the private sector and some were in the public sector. All behaved like people in the grip of serious sin. Sin makes you less free. It does this by, among other things, darkening the intellect, disordering the appetites, and weakening the will -- all of which are a very unsound basis for policing oneself for Greed and other capital sins. That's why Scripture describes it as "slavery." This slavery we called "the free market."

And in the grip of this particular capital sin of Greed, we then became very stupid indeed due to that ol' darkened intellect and burned through trillions we don't actually have, all while telling people to go shopping because we were locked in an existential struggle for survival. If I were to do this with my family finances, we'd be living in our car. But when you do it on a titanic scale, you are called a bold entrepreneur by people who are also in the grip of capital sins. This is but one of the reasons our descendants will call us the "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot?" Generation.

Now we have reached the point where the Mighty go to the State that has ceded them oversight of their

own folly and tell Caesar, "You can't afford to let us fail. You need to confiscate money from those people over there who still actually have assets and give it to us. This time we *promise* we'll be trustworthy." So Caesar (who was sleeping it off after an all-night rager with Mammon), dutifully rolls out of bed, dons his police uniform, and goes out to declare a state of emergency and order every man, woman, and child to pony up vast sums in perpetuity to "fix" the problem.

Caesar knows he has a big job to persuade the people with actual assets to knuckle under and give it to Mammon and his servants.

First trick: Blame poor people first. As Jesus clearly said, "Those to whom little is given, much will be required! Blessed are the rich! For they can always be trusted and they aren't responsible for anything that goes wrong." So explain it all by saying that it's pretty much all the fault of poor people and their damned mortgage defaults that they got into just because every lender in the world was telling them they could make their dream of home-owning happen, urging them to take the risk, and assuring them that this is a normal part of the American Way as they signed on the dotted line and got the toaster. Those poor people were *evil* for trusting the giant lending institutions who reassured them that being in debt was a normal part of home-buying and handed them a free toaster on their way out the door!

Second trick: Don't mention what one of my blog readers pointed out -- that every single sub-prime mortgage in this country not already owned by the government could be purchased for less than what it cost to bail out Bear Stearns, about \$300 billion. Ignore the fact that some banks and funds have \$250 in outstanding loans for every dollar kept in reserve (and that, as the reader pointed out, "at that leverage ratio, a drop in value of your assets of 1/2 of 1% makes you technically bankrupt"). Ignore the fact that these institutions have been hiding this by lying on their balance sheets, and that the reason they are now stealing \$700 billion from taxpayers is to cover that up. And above all, ignore the fact that this patch job won't

work, in no small part due to the fact that it rewards the crooks and book-cookers who got us where we are.

Otherwise Caesar may actually have to go to rehab, get clean and sober, break off his co-dependent relationship with Mammon, and set about creating an actual system that keeps the capital sin of Greed from destroying the common good. Caesar doesn't want to do that. He loves the disco night-life too much. And Mammon? She's been a junkie so long she can't even imagine changing. In fact, they've both worked very hard to make us enablers of the good thing they've got going. And they've been very successful. That's why, for most Americans, such a fundamental change is not even on the radar, since almost nobody in our culture even knows what weird Catholic jargon like "common good," "capital sins," or "sin enslaves the will and darkens the intellect" means. We've been trained to reflexively respond, "Don't impose your religious values on me!" and we recite it better than a parrot. An analysis of the role of the State using Catholic social teaching as a guide? What's next? Aristotle, thumbscrews, and *The Handmaid's Tale*?

Meanwhile, as we freedom-loving Yankees fend off the Phantom Theocratic Dictator and the Imminent Papal States of America, we welcome the Saviors who hand us a bill that subjects every American company that handles financial instruments to the absolute power of the Treasury Secretary -- a power not subject to review by any outside agency or court:

Sec. 8. Review. Decisions by the Secretary pursuant to the authority of this Act are non-reviewable and committed to agency discretion, and may not be reviewed by any court of law or any administrative agency.

You read that right: Under the bill, the Treasury Secretary could command Goldman Sachs to sell \$1 billion in stock to Morgan Stanley at \$1. It would be lawful, without appeal, and without judicial review. Every company that issues bonds and stock options to its employees would be enslaved to the absolute

diktats of the executive branch. That used to be called "tyranny." Now it's called "Bush Conservatism" and "Democrats Looking Out for the Little Guy."

And so it goes. Of course, reality has a way of imposing on wishful thinking anyway. Sooner or later, we will reach the point where we begin to *seriously* say, "Men have forgotten God; that is why all this has happened." But we are not close to that yet. We still readily believe that the sleazes and crooks who got us here will save us and that we can go back to living beyond our means and looking the other way when the Titans of Finance and State do the same.

For my part, I think the only sound advice in this hour is, "Repent! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and save yourselves from this corrupt generation." It was *always* the only sound advice; hours like this make you realize that.

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This Old World's Tawdry Voices

David Mills | Column

9/25/08

"That means they're anorexic," said a young woman I know when asked why the great majority of the girls at her elite college had declared themselves vegetarians or vegans. I thought she was being sarcastic, but she wasn't.

She was being witty. The ideological self-description has become a code word for an illness the girls didn't want to admit, she said. Being a vegetarian or vegan justified eating very little, and explained why you didn't go to the dining hall or got only a small salad when you did.

The girls at this college are all high achievers, driven, type-A personalities who have succeeded at almost everything they've tried in life, capable of long hours of intense work and assured, as much as anyone in this world can be, of future success. And yet an astonishing number hate their bodies and try to starve them into an image of perfection they know is ridiculous and unnatural, not to mention culturally determined and commercially driven.

It is, at first sight, baffling. Girls who profess a Marxist contempt for large corporations want to look like the girls in the ads those corporations use to sell their dresses, shoes, perfume, luggage, vodka, cars. They take for their personal ideal an image created by people whose ability to tell the truth about the world they flatly (and rightly) deny.

You hear of a girl you know, an active, intelligent Christian, obviously successful, apparently discerning, apparently confident, who thinks she's fat and ugly when she is quite beautiful. I have heard the explanations for this, and they all make perfect sense. Still, I cannot understand how such an obviously insane and self-destructive ideal has taken such a hold on so many young women.

I have been reflecting on this as a father of two daughters. But I have also been reflecting on this simply as a father. The world lies to my children, and I cannot always keep them from hearing the lies of the world and believing some of them. I have but one voice, and the world has many. It not only preaches with attractive confidence but seduces with flattery and false promises. It has vast resources for bribery.

Worse, it makes the wicked, the cheap, the mediocre, and the tawdry all feel normal. Recently I went to Barnes & Noble to look at the books being written for teenagers for a talk I was giving at a local parish. It was a mixed lot, as you could guess. Some offered lessons one could endorse, but even in these the lesson was usually mixed with some form of immorality: The teenager learns a painful lesson in telling the truth, perhaps, but only because she is caught lying to a boy she has been sleeping with and loses him. That sleeping with the boy is itself a form of lying is a moral insight far beyond the author.

Other books told stories of silly children, almost always girls, living the anxious but oddly chipper life of the teenage libertine, concerned with the acquisition of boys and things and the status derived from both. Pitched at younger children, these seem to be the better selling.

In either case, the books' heroes (if there are any, as admirable males are rare in these stories) and heroines do not live the kind of life a Christian father wants his children to emulate. They do nothing very heroic or sacrificial or self-abnegating. They respond to no higher call or self-transcendent principles. In the better stories, they get by; in the worse, they get boys, designer clothes, and a place in the inner circle.

Ever since our children were very young we have read to them from the great books, immersed them in the life of the Church, shared with them the pleasures of good music and good art and good conversation, and pointed them to the saints and other heroes. We have shielded them from the worldly influence of television (we don't watch it at all) and trivial magazines. We have showed them how to enjoy the world's productions (we do watch movies on DVD) while discerning what they teach.

And still we see the world in them all, as I can still see it in myself. They have heard some of those worldly voices and believed what they said, probably without knowing it. There's only so much a parent can do to keep out the world; you can't keep it completely out of your own mind, much less theirs.

But even I, with an Augustinian realism about the ubiquity of the world, did not see how powerful it was. I think now that I relied too much on arranging our life the way we did -- not that we ought to have done less,

but that we should have done more to make obvious the love that drove us to live such a life.

You cannot keep your children pure by force of will and the application of techniques. You must love God so that they learn to love Him too, giving them at once the power to resist the seductive, relentless old world and the desire (with God's help) to keep themselves free from its stain till the day they die.

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The Presidential Debate

Ronald J. Rychlak | Column

9/26/08

InsideCatholic is headquartered in Washington, D.C., but I write from Oxford, Mississippi. Oxford has a population of about 14,000, which approximately doubles when the University of Mississippi students are in town. So, as you might imagine, the presidential debate here at Ole Miss tonight -- assuming it comes off -- is a big deal. The whole town is gearing up. My parish, St. John the Evangelist, is even doing its part: Our newly built but not-yet-occupied church building, which is next to the site of the debate, is slated to serve as Secret Service headquarters.

The debate here was originally scheduled to be on domestic affairs, but the theme was lately changed to focus on foreign policy. Since I am currently teaching a course on international security and terrorism, the university asked me to become involved in some of the pre-debate festivities. I'm looking forward to it.

One thing I had to do was prepare a more-or-less non-partisan "viewers guide" to the debate for a local newspaper. They didn't want my opinions, just a review of the topics that we might want to focus on during the debates. It was an interesting exercise; I even used it to teach class one day.

The international issue that jumps immediately to mind, of course, is the war in Iraq. Senator Obama has promised a quick withdrawal, and Senator McCain has pledged to stay as long as necessary for victory. Those broad parameters are clear, but at what point would McCain consider the situation adequately under control to justify a complete withdrawal? Would Obama agree to stay engaged if it became clear that withdrawal would lead to more bloodshed?

The ethnic and tribal conflict in the Darfur region of the Sudan is another hot spot. At what point would either candidate consider military action to end the violence? Are we only interested in intervening when there is a direct national interest, or do we step in for

humanitarian reasons? Is oil a legitimate national interest?

Voters are also interested to know what role the United Nations will play in future international conflicts. Before military operations in Iraq, the United States tried to get the UN to take action. When it refused to go beyond sanctions, President Bush sent in American troops. Regardless of whether the candidates agree with *that* decision, what about the next time? Would they *ever* be willing to act without UN approval? Assuming so, how long do they wait for the UN to act or for sanctions to work? What position does each of them hold on the International Criminal Court?

The most serious threat to world peace currently seems to be coming from Russia. Its move into Georgia went largely unchallenged by the outside world. What would a McCain or Obama administration do in this situation? Perhaps more important is Russia's threat to Poland. The United States has agreed to place defensive military systems in Poland. Russian leader Vladimir Putin has threatened an attack against Poland if the missiles are put in place. How would an Obama or McCain administration proceed? Should we pull the plug on the project, or go ahead and risk war? What happens if Poland is attacked?

It is also well within the realm of possibility that the next president will have to deal with an active military situation involving Israel and Iran. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called for Israel to be wiped off the map. His nation is actively pursuing nuclear capabilities. Most observers believe that Israel will not allow that to happen. Israel might strike Iran in an effort to stop development, as it did with Iraq in 1981. How would Senators Obama and McCain respond if they were in the White House?

Finally, with America having just watched the Beijing Olympics, how do the senators stand on China? Many observers believe that China is a serious military threat. Nevertheless, we continue to give it "most favored nation" status, which facilitates trade. Would either candidate want to change the U.S. approach on that front? On a related point, do the recent economic upheavals make economic sanctions infeasible?

Despite the importance of these questions, the candidates are unlikely to bind themselves to a particular course of action. International relations are necessarily fluid, and a president must be free to adapt to events as they take place. As observers, we might not even want the candidates to commit to a particular

policy. We do, however, want to hear their answers to questions like these. Those answers reveal the positions that are likely to shape the next administration. That is what we need to know, and that is why we will watch the debates.

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The House in North Street

Joanna Bogle | Column

9/26/08

cycle past the house often. It stands at the end of the street, next to what was once, long ago, the village green -- still a pleasant area in busy suburbia. It's a solid Victorian house, one of several in a row. They look out across the road to the grounds of a large, modern technical college (known locally as "the Tech").

But last week the house had a sign outside: "For Sale." I knew I had to go in. We are, theoretically, house-hunting, but I knew perfectly well that this large four-storied house was far out of our price-range, and beyond our modest needs. That wasn't the point.

Long ago, in a different Britain, my grandparents lived in the top two floors of that house. In the Second World War, they had been bombed out of their London home and moved to the suburbs. Later, with their children grown up and married, they needed something smaller and so moved into the modest accommodation offered by the top rooms in the old Victorian house.

Going in through that front door, I didn't want to be fraudulent. We had sheaves of paper in our hands showing various local properties. "We are looking at houses on this road," I said truthfully, but then blurted out "My granny and grandpa lived here long ago -- in the 1950s and early 1960s. They had a flat on the top two floors."

And the owners of the house grinned and understood and were pleasant. We chatted comfortably as they showed us the house. It was luxurious. The large downstairs rooms -- which I never saw in my childhood, as they were owned by Granny and Grandpa's landlord -- were beautifully furnished and welcoming, a lovely family home. The large kitchen had been extended and looked out on to the sunny garden. Here I gasped with memories. The old wall was still there, the lawn where we played, and the sense of pleasure from being in an enclosed space filled with trees and flowerbeds. It had always been a place of enchantment.

But it was the rooms upstairs where the memories gushed back. By some extraordinary gift of providence, they were empty -- we had arrived just as the family was beginning to sort and tidy things. So the rooms were silent, the sloping ceilings just as I remembered. Here I had slept on visits, waking in the morning to accompany Grandpa to early-morning Mass, Granny tying my scarf across my mouth and nose against the fog.

On the floor below, Granny had had a tiny kitchen adjoining the living room, where a picture of St. Thomas More hung over the fireplace, and books, books, and more books lined the walls. In the winter, Grandpa always had a terrible cough -- a legacy of being gassed and wounded "in the Trenches" -- and used to inhale from a big bowl of steamy water with Friar's Balsam in it.

There was a television, but watching it was regarded as something of a ceremony, with much discussion, checking of program timings in the newspaper, rearranging of chairs, and drawing of curtains to block out the light "to make the picture better." Then no talking because the television was on, and it was the news and very important. Afterward we watched as Grandpa turned off the set and the picture shriveled to a dot. Then we could talk, and there would be tea around the large table.

The house was big and dark, with somber brown paint and an unlit hall. There were big old suitcases on the tops of dark cupboards, filled with old things. The halls and stairways were cold -- but all halls and stairways and passages were cold in the Britain of my childhood, as were all bedrooms. The small gas fire in the main room made roaring noises. I don't think there was a refrigerator -- certainly no electric mixer or any other gadgets. There was no washing machine. The grownups still talked about the War, which seemed to

us to have taken place years and years ago but was only just over a decade earlier.

Who owned the house? That was my first introduction to geo-politics and the Cold War. The house belonged to Gus, whom my parents loved and who loved them in return. He called my grandmother "Mama." He was friendly and kind, but his eyes were sad. He spoke with a thick foreign accent and came from Latvia. He couldn't go back to Latvia because the Russians had invaded and imposed Communism there. Thousands and thousands of people had been taken away to prison camps, but Gus had escaped and come to England. He didn't know what had happened to his family. Gus was kind and let us play in the large garden, which was actually his but open to these small grandchildren-from-upstairs whenever we came to visit. He was big and tall, and Granny talked to him and gave him little treats -- nice things that she cooked -- because he was sad and a refugee and missed his family.

From the window, up in Granny and Grandpa's flat, I could watch the milkman delivering milk -- he still had a horse-drawn cart right into the middle 1960s -- and double-decker buses went by, which was most satisfactory. Our own house -- not far away -- was in a quiet road where little traffic was seen.

Staying with Granny and Grandpa was a treat, and we went there for tea every Wednesday, my mother having spent the afternoon there and my father joining us after work. Life was ordered. Meals were eaten together around a table, with a certain formality. Something Edwardian still pervaded the household; something eccentric and romantic, too. Granny and Grandpa had eloped and married when very young, against family disapproval. His being badly wounded in World War I, and then later his conversion to Roman Catholicism, all added zest to the story -- as did the death of their oldest son ("your Uncle John, you never knew him . . ."), serving with the Royal Air Force in World War II, shot down somewhere over the North Sea.

I knew that I was very fortunate to be English. We were among the most fortunate children in the world, we were told, because Britain hadn't been invaded since 1066 and no one was marching around putting people into prison camps. The history of our country was a glorious one -- although perhaps bad things had been done, there were people like St. Thomas More who stood up for things that were right. In England it rained a lot, which made it very beautiful. There were no droughts or earthquakes or deadly spiders. Everything was practically perfect.

We were an island, and every summer brought sunshine and trips to the sea and apples in the garden, and every autumn brought bonfires and fireworks for November 5th. In winter there was Christmas and in the springtime Easter, with blossom on the trees and chocolate eggs on Easter Sunday. The Queen was in charge, sort of, and lived at Buckingham Palace; long ago there had been Queen Victoria and everything had been splendid but then came two dreadful World Wars so things could never be quite all right, but we were still fortunate to be English. That was the worldview as I understood it.

After Grandpa died, Granny came to live with us. It wasn't easy. By now we were all denim jeans and pop music, and Granny's Edwardian worldview -- she and Grandpa had been Fabians, and she a keen suffragette in her day -- didn't figure on our map at all.

Gus came to Granny's funeral, carrying a sprig of rosemary, still sad and dear and kind. But then, over the next years, we lost touch. I hope he had some contact with Latvia before he died. I don't think he would have lived long enough to see its freedom.

Buildings hold memories and help to shape your world, your ideas, and opinions. Fast-forward to now: I left the house in North Street with gushing thank-you's and a pretense that we'd consider it as a home purchase after looking at other properties. The owners weren't fooled but they weren't cross, either. I think they enjoyed the visit, possibly with the pleasure that

comes from a sense of financial superiority, and the knowledge that life had treated them well and in old age they'd do better than two stories on the top of an old house with dark paint and a solitary gas fire.

The Britain of my childhood has vanished, along with horse-drawn milk carts, fog, and men who cough because of the Western Front. I still think I am fortunate to be English, although all the old certainties have gone and all sorts of things have changed, some for better, some not. Things that really matter are still there and seem more important than ever -- the Mass, books, family meals, St. Thomas More and his message.

Whatever we now pass on to the next generation won't be via two wars or decades of hardship, but via the perhaps more lethal culture-crushers of television, the sex industry, the collapse of academic standards, and the destruction of common values. I hope we pass something on faithfully.

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The House of War

Michael J. Ard | Review

9/19/08

Islam at the Gates: How Christendom Defeated the Ottoman Turks

Diane Moczar, Sophia Institute Press, \$17.95, 256 pages

Once upon a time in the West, our ancestors clashed with peoples from the East. Europe was born at Marathon in 491 B.C., when Athenian hoplites defeated an invading Persian army. The defeat of Darius and his hordes foreshadowed many battles to come.

Long after the ancient era, the threat from the East took on a new dimension with the introduction and spread of Islam. This warrior creed, motivated by holy war against the unbeliever, challenged the West with matchless energy.

One of the most zealous groups of later converts was the Turks led by the warlord Osman, who appeared out of Anatolia in the 13th century. His people originally were driven westward by the relentless Mongols. These "Ottoman Turks" formed their own centralized state out of the surrounding Turkish principalities and began eyeing lands in Greece and the Balkans.

In *Islam at the Gates*, Medieval historian Diane Moczar briskly chronicles several centuries of Turkish advances on the Christian peoples of Eastern and Central Europe. Her book sheds light on a story that most Americans, schooled in world history from a Western European perspective, know little about. Moczar usefully reminds us that while parts of Europe fought parochial "wars of religion," Eastern Europe struggled for its very survival.

Supercharged by Islam, the Ottoman Turks justified their will to power as service to Allah. They imposed heavy tribute on conquered peoples, including the "boy tribute" of *dersirme*: forced conscription into the Ottoman army. The famous troops of Janissaries formerly were Christian lads from the Balkans. The

Turks also established the slave trade in their territories. Moczar scoffs at contemporary historians who either minimize or ignore Ottoman abuses. She likewise claims the Turks, in keeping with their former barbaric ways, sometimes slaughtered the inhabitants of captured cities.

European leaders were slow to react. By the 15th century, popes like the courageous Pius II could organize Crusades only with great difficulty. Bigoted Catholic rulers saw little reason to defend Orthodox Christians, and France even forged an alliance with the Turks to counter the Holy Roman Empire. Some Italian city-states made fortunes by trading with the Ottomans. In short, internal disputes, shortsightedness, and greed facilitated the Turkish advance. As Moczar writes, "Fallen human nature got in the way of ideal courses of action."

Despite the odds against them, some Christian leaders stood up to Turkish power. Many all-but-forgotten heroes emerge in Moczar's narrative, including the indomitable Skanderbeg, the Catholic ruler of Albania who defeated army after army; and St. John Capistrano, who aided the stern defense of Belgrade.

Nevertheless, the Turks overcame resistance due to superior organization and military power. After conquering Byzantium in 1453, one of the first uses of massed artillery in history, the Turks drove into the Balkans. With French encouragement, the sultan's armies invaded Hungary and defeated King Louis II at the Battle of Mohacs. But it is worth recalling that Ottomans were expanding eastward and southward as well. In time they conquered Persia, Saudi Arabia, and

Egypt to establish a universal caliphate. At its peak, the empire controlled the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. The formerly Latin lake practically came under Turkish control.

In the 16th century, Suleiman the Magnificent represented the climax of Turkish expansion and grandeur, and like Alexander the Great, he sought to unite East and West under one universal kingship. But it was during his long rule that Christendom, with some effective political leadership from the Hapsburgs, started turning back the tide.

The Knights of St. John Hospitaller, a society of medieval special forces who attacked Turkish shipping, blocked Suleiman's goals. He evicted these corsairs for Christ from their fortress headquarters in Rhodes, but the knights settled on the island of Malta. When they captured a merchant ship in 1565 owned by his harem, Suleiman sent an armada to annihilate the knights. After several months of relentless fighting, the knights, aided by Maltese and Spanish troops, outlasted Suleiman's forces in one of the most celebrated battles of the Renaissance.

Six years later, Don Juan of Austria, half-brother of the king of Spain, would defeat an even larger Turkish invasion in the galley battle at [Lepanto](#). The long decline of Turkish power had begun.

Throughout her compact book, Moczar narrates engagingly. But to cover such a lengthy period in limited space, some pivotal events are breezed over. As for the role of Islam in her story, the reader might conclude that the will to dominate and the push for living space motivated the Turks as much as religious zeal did. Unlike the initial period of Islamic expansion, the Turks aimed for power, not forced conversions, and few Europeans in conquered lands became Muslim.

Thankfully, Europe's challenge today is not how to confront the Turks, but how to integrate them. Leaders in Western Europe, whose ancestors once struck alliances with the sultans, want Turkey included in the European Union. Central and Eastern Europeans, including Pope Benedict XVI, tend to be more skeptical. Readers of *Islam at the Gates* will understand their different perspective on history.

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