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What Is a Leader?

Rev. James V. Schall, S.J. | Column

10/6/08

The verb "to lead" means to be out in front. But it also has the implication of knowing where the group that one leads is to go. The image of the lead mountain climber mistakenly guiding the troupe over a cliff comes to mind. The leader is supposed to know the way and to know when he doesn't. We look for political leaders who know the way -- to what? They seek to limit evils and to promote the reasonable flourishing of citizens to be sufficiently prosperous and humanly good.

What if, as is often the case, we do not know the way? In this case, we probably need a leader even more. To do nothing is stagnation. Any endeavor that has its result in the future is uncertain, however much we seek to anticipate eventualities. All political action is about the future, the direction of which is decided in the now. Thus, we look for a leader who is sensible and prudent in judging the way. We do not want as leader someone who thinks there is no way, or one whose proposals direct us to a goal that is impossible or unattainable by the kind of beings we are in the circumstances in which we actually live.

We often hear talk about "voting issues," not persons. I have never thought this was a particularly good idea. Generally, we have no notion of what political leaders will face once they are in office. They do not know either. We seek leaders with character, the capacity to understand, and the will to decide among immediate and long-range alternatives. The classics called it political prudence. We depend on incisive judgments.

We look for those who understand what human beings are and ought to be. We are leery of ideologues, wafflers, and libertines. A certain moderation is required that appreciates that more goes on within the polity than politics. This arena is where all citizens, including politicians, are working out their eternal destiny even in what they do within the polity.

Yves Simon had an insightful sentence about why politics, even if it must deal with serious human disorders, is noble. It reads: "The joy of the creator assumes unique intensity when the thing out of which the work of art is made is human flesh and soul." He did not imply here the Machiavellian notion that politics is a craft under the control of the political artist, to be used as he wishes to obtain whatever he wills.

Rather, Simon meant that the statesman or leader recognizes that what he deals with are not inert material lumps. He occupies himself with human beings who are to be dealt with after the manner of human beings, that is, through reason and persuasion with enough force to guarantee their possibility of acting humanly. Modern tyrannies are precisely those polities in which force allows neither reason nor persuasion. The statesman's awareness of reality includes particular knowledge both of virtue and corruption as facts existing in his polity. But also he knows them as results of human choices made under the claim of doing good.

Cicero has a provocative remark: "As the philosophers instruct, one must not only choose the least among evils, one must also extract from them any good that they may contain." No one can choose "pure evil." There is no such thing; not even the devil is pure evil. All evil is chosen in the name of some good. This good continues within the act that also lacks the good it *should* have contained, but did not because we chose not to put it there. This is how "good" can be brought from evil. This evil, however, has to be defined, admitted, and confronted. No politician can escape its burden. It will consume much of his career.

All political leaders, moreover, stand under the Socratic dictum, "It is never right to do wrong." Aristotle makes the same point. Some actions we do not praise, though we may pardon them if "one does what he ought not under pressure which overstrains

human nature and which no one could withstand." Aristotle adds, however, "Some acts, perhaps, we cannot be forced to do, but ought rather to face death after the most fearful sufferings." A society in which nothing is worth dying for is a society in which everything is permissible.

A corrupt people will not recognize a prudent leader. They will want laws that encourage and enable their vices. Still the mark of a reasonably prudent statesman is that we can rely on his judgment and courage. Even more basic, we know that he can make a decision in the light of a common good that does seek what is good.

Among the classical authors, the common opinion was that a democracy would eventually choose as a ruler a tyrant who promised them what they wanted. Then he would subject them to what *he* wanted. The American founders understood this problem, which is why they founded a republic, not a democracy.

Plato said in his Seventh Letter: "The more I reflected upon what was happening, upon what kind of men were active in politics, and upon the state of our

laws and customs, and the older I grew, the more I realized how difficult it is to manage a city's affairs rightly." It is, indeed, the most difficult of all the human occupations of this world.

Politics is about who rules and for what purpose. It is not a "science." It is dependent on character and practical wisdom. "Such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience, but a young man has no experience, for it is length of time that gives experience." These are Aristotle's words.

What is a leader? He is a prudent man who can, in an actual city, make decisions for the temporal common good of citizens who, by their characters, are already choosing their membership in one or other of the two ultimate cities, the City of God or the City of Man.

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I'm Catholic, Staunchly Anti-Racist, and Support David Duke

William A. Donohue | Column

10/7/08

The following is a tongue-in-cheek reply to Nick Cafardi's article, "[I'm Catholic, Staunchly Anti-Abortion, and Support Obama.](#)"

I believe racism is an unspeakable evil, yet I support David Duke, who is pro-racism. I do not support him because he is pro-racism, but in spite of it. Is that a proper choice for a committed Catholic?

As someone who has worked with minorities all his life, I answer with a resounding yes. Despite what some say, the list of what the Catholic Church calls "intrinsically evil acts" does not begin and end with racism. In fact, there are many intrinsically evil acts, and a committed Catholic must consider all of them in deciding how to vote.

Last November, the U.S. bishops released "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," a 30-page document that provides several examples of intrinsically evil acts: abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem-cell research, torture, racism, and targeting noncombatants in acts of war.

Duke's support for racist rights has led some to the conclusion that no Catholic can vote for him. That's a mistake. While I have never swayed in my conviction that racism is an unspeakable evil, I believe that we have lost the racism battle -- permanently. A vote for Duke's opponent does not guarantee the end of racism in America. Not even close.

Let's suppose the 1964 Civil Rights Act is overturned. What would happen? The matter would simply be kicked back to the states -- where it was before 1964. Overturning the 1964 Civil Rights Act would not abolish racism. It would just mean that racism would be legal in some states and illegal in others. The number of racist incidents would remain unchanged as long as people could travel.

Duke's opponent has promised to appoint "judicially activist" judges who would presumably vote not to overturn the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But is that sufficient reason for a Catholic to vote for him? To answer that question, let's look at the rest of the Church's list of intrinsically evil acts.

Both Duke and his opponent get failing marks on embryonic stem cell research, which Catholic teaching opposes. The last time the issue was up for a vote in the Senate, both men voted to ease existing restrictions.

There's another distinction that is often lost in the culture-war rhetoric on racism: There is a difference between being pro-choice (e.g., the right to choose racist practices) and being pro-racism. Duke supports government action that would reduce the number of racist incidents, and has consistently said that "we should do everything we can to avoid unprovoked confrontations that might even lead somebody to consider racist behavior." He favors a "comprehensive approach . . . where we teach the tenets of civility to our children." And he wants to ensure that therapy is an option for bigots who might otherwise choose to commit a racist act.

What's more, as recent data show, racist incidents drop when the social safety net is strengthened. If Duke's economic program will do more to reduce racism than his opponent's, then is it wrong to conclude that a Duke presidency will also reduce racism? Not at all.

Every faithful Catholic agrees racism is an unspeakable evil that must be minimized, if not eliminated. I can help to achieve that without endorsing the immoral baggage associated with the party of Duke's opponent. Sustaining the 1964 Civil

Rights Act is not the only way to end racism, and a vote for Duke is not somehow un-Catholic.

The U.S. bishops have urged a "different kind of political engagement," one that is "shaped by the moral convictions of well-formed consciences."

I have informed my conscience. I have weighed the facts. I have used my prudential judgment. And I conclude that it is a proper moral choice for this Catholic to support David Duke's candidacy.

William A. Donohue is the president and CEO of the [Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights](#).

Praying the Rosary for the Election

Deal W. Hudson | Column

10/7/08

"I would exhort people to say the rosary every day for life and for the success in this election of those defending life." These are the words of Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua, the retired archbishop of Philadelphia. When I spoke to him yesterday, the cardinal emphasized that he neither spoke officially for the archdiocese nor was he endorsing any specific candidate.

"I am speaking as an individual person, an individual cardinal, who believes very strongly in the importance of praying for the good of our Church and our people in this election." Cardinal Bevilacqua told me it was a mistake, in his opinion, for any priest to endorse a candidate, because people will always identify that priest with the Catholic Church. "This I cannot do -- we have to respect the separation of Church and state."

Cardinal Bevilacqua and I spoke on the eve of the [Feast of the Holy Rosary](#). St. Pius V introduced this observance after the defeat of the Turks at the Battle of [Lepanto](#) on October 7, 1571. That day in St. Peter's Square, a rosary procession was held on behalf of the Holy League's fleet, which was facing Muslim invasion in the Gulf of Patras off the western coast of Greece. The Holy League's victory saved Europe from subjugation to Muslim power.

As the cardinal puts it, "This feast brings back the power of the rosary and how the Church has strongly advocated its use for any good cause, whether personal, national, or international." For centuries the rosary has been identified with the military victory at Lepanto, but it has now become identified with the pro-life movement. "Once the rosary was used for Lepanto, today we must emphasize its use for protecting life. Many times when I have marched in groups on abortion clinics, we have prayed the rosary along the way -- when people think of life, they should think of the rosary," he said.

Other Catholic leaders have asked that Catholics pray the rosary daily before the election, which is now less than a month away. Rev. Thomas Euteneuer, president of Human Life International, [writes](#) about the rosary as a "spiritual weapon" that "batters the gates of hell." Rev. Frank Pavone, president of Priests for Life, explained it this way:

The rosary has been a powerful tool for the victory of good throughout the centuries. It has defeated heresies and paved the way for a civilization of love based on the Gospel. This is precisely the struggle that this election represents, and the rosary is precisely the right tool. By praying it, believers can awaken the consciences of voters to realize that everything, including the voting booth, is under God's dominion.

Cardinal Bevilacqua made the same point: "We can turn the people against abortion and for life by prayer. People have come into the pro-life cause because of the rosary." He added that the rosary also strengthens those who work to defend life: "Many times people are mocked and abused for taking a position that is not very popular. It requires courage to defend life, and the rosary strengthens those people."

At the conclusion of his recent [pastoral letter](#), Bishop Joseph Francis Martino of Scranton wrote about the importance of seeking strength from the rosary:

October is traditionally the month of the rosary. Let us pray the rosary for the strength and fortitude to uphold the truths of our faith and the requirements of our law to all who deny them.

And, let us ask Our Lady to bless our nation and the weakest among us. May Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Lord of Life, pray for us.

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*).

The Joy of Sloth

John Zmirak | Column

10/8/08

Two weeks ago, I promised to lay out for you, one week at a time, the "seven key areas of life where Jesus ruins our fun." By this I mean the categories of normal human experience that make up the bulk of our lives -- where our instincts, habits, and egos have patched together perfectly serviceable habits of schlepping through, day to day. We'd just as soon our coping strategies weren't disrupted by some fish-multiplying wonder-working God-Man who speaks in riddles. But hey, thanks for thinking of us . . .

This week, I'll look at the whole Christ thing from the standpoint of those whom moralists from that old, stale time some historians call "the past" would have labeled as suffering from Sloth.

First of all, that word is offensive. The polite term is Inerto-American or "inertful." There are millions of them out there, and the only reason they haven't raised their voices up till now is . . . well, why attract attention? If you put up your hand you might just get called on. Then the teacher will know just how much of the reading you really did. No reason to ruin his day. In fact, it's uncharitable.

Studying -- okay, *skimming* -- the Gospels, the inertful man can appreciate that Jesus means well, but wonders just how well He appreciates human nature. When Christ says that the creator of the universe "numbers all the hairs on our heads," the natural response is: "Enough with the baldness jokes! I have a hard time just reading my Dish Network bill to figure out if they're ripping me off."

In matters religious, there are certain fundamental questions that vex each human soul. Each of us has a governing passion, a distinctive thorn in our spirit or flesh. Those of us who dwell in that mild, middle state we call *inertia* have our own question, which is asked not so much of God but of ourselves: "Is it really worth it?" This simple criterion can be applied to every area of

life, and it nearly always serves to lighten the pressure. Try this at home: *Is it really worth it . . .*

- to brown that sandwich in a skillet? The microwave would get it nice, hot, and spongy in under a minute -- with nothing left over to scrub.
- to train the church choir to sing something difficult, something written before 1970? And those old songs are all so heavy.
- to put on a tie for Mass? What is this, a funeral or something?
- to iron out the last few details in that assignment they gave you at the last minute, as usual? What do people expect from you, perfection? Then they should be paying you more.
- to repeat all those mind-numbing prayers? Once you've hailed Mary once, do you really have to keep on pestering? Doesn't that cross the line into stalking?
- to go to Mass, fast, or pray a single time more than the absolute requirements you read about, 20 years ago, in that . . . Catholic book you had to read? As Jennifer Aniston said in your favorite movie, *Office Space*: "You want me to wear 37 pieces of Flair? Then why don't you say so?"
- to get all enthused about the godforsaken sporting event/dance recital/drug intervention your wife insisted you attend? Your parents never went to *your* games. You had to go cold turkey from *nasal spray* all by yourself. Won't coddling your kids like this make them turn out *soft*?

For the inertful, it's a tough enough slog from the morning coffee to the nightly melatonin capsule without asking for one more thing to worry about. Introduce the (frankly creepy) idea of eternity, and you bring to mind a Monday that drags on for millions of years. Here's how the organizer on your celestial phone will read:

7 a.m. Praise to the Celestial Father and Creator of the Universe.

8:15 a.m. Praise to His Consubstantial and Coeternal Son.

9:45 a.m. Praise to His Holy and Life-Creating Spirit.

10:50 a.m. Praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to the Coeternal Majesty of the Three Divine Persons.

11:30 a.m. Ambrosia break.

12:05 p.m. Gratitude workshop with Patriarchs and Confessors. Optional: Break-out sessions with Victim Souls, Incorruptibles.

1:35 p.m. Exercise period; Sacro-Cardio sessions and Glorified Body-building.

And so on, *ad aeternam*.

I know it's intrinsically impossible to get across the kind of ecstatic something-or-other that holy people will enjoy in the next life, so I'll cut the saints some slack. But most of the descriptions I've read of beatitude in scriptures and devotional books lean pretty heavily on

promises of golden streets connecting palaces made out of diamonds, and freakish animals performing amazing tricks, like opening scrolls and speaking. Frankly, the whole thing sounds to me a lot like Vegas -- without the showgirls. (Mohammed knew a thing or two about addressing Everyman.) No wonder most of us go through life thinking of Heaven as "the place that isn't Hell."

If you want a picture of paradise that will interest the inertful, it had better include fuzzy slippers. Nice, foamy baths, and radio comedy hours with sempiternal Lutherans like Garrison Keillor, who gently lob nice, simple jokes right over home plate. Or if we have to do some work, we'd appreciate a clearly labeled series of straightforward tasks that will keep our minds occupied, drowning out that drone of praise and adoration. And maybe a pair of shades to dim the glare you see in all those icons. Don't those painters know that candlelight is a heck of a lot more flattering?

How about a little soup? What would it hurt? Nothing too hot or cold. Serve it up Goldilocks-style . . . just right.

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Literalischtick

Mark P. Shea | Column

10/8/08

Bill Maher is on the loose with his new film *Religulous*. Proving yet again that within the breast of every dime-store atheist beats the heart of a Christian fundamentalist crank, the latest pop paladin of Truly True Scientific Atheist Thought sallies forth to combat the ravages of faithheads like Louis Pasteur who promote irrational superstitious belief in unseen realities like "God" and "germs."

Maher's method for dismissing religion puts me in mind of something that once happened to me while I was in Ireland to do a series of talks about *The Da Vinci Code*. I was being interviewed by the umpteenth UK journalist and answering, for the umpteenth time, the question, "But seriously. You don't mean to tell me you, a man of the 21st century, take the bible literally, do you?"

I had tried repeatedly to answer that question with long, wordy distinctions and carefully parsed sentences over the course of several interviews with different reporters, only to see one MSM Brit after another glance at their watches in the middle of my nuance-filled replies and abruptly cut me off with something like "Mmmhmm. Look, we're up against the clock. Thanks for talking about your quaint backward religion, which we totally respect. Next up: Posh Spice and Paris Hilton go bar hopping!" Then the firm handshake, the walk to the studio door, and the distinct sound of snickering just before it closed.

This time, however, was different. I was tired from running all over Dublin. It was the end of the day and this was my last interview. So when he asked The Question in that "What a maroon!" tone of voice and looked at me across the table in the radio studio with that "Let's see if the American Howdy Doody wahoo can form a coherent sentence" look, I wearily mumbled, "Which part of the Bible do you mean?"

The sneer slowly melted into a blank look of bewilderment. Through the fog of exhaustion, as I watched him quietly begin to panic, it dawned on me that I'd accidentally been clever. So I pressed him: "Do you mean to ask if I take it literally that David hid from Saul in a cave? Or do you mean to ask if I take it literally when Genesis speaks of talking snakes and the psalmist says his life is poured out like wax?" By this time, he looked pretty shaken and muttered something about how he didn't know anything about the Bible. Now fully awake and suddenly unexhausted by the smell of prey, I suggested to him that he perhaps should stop asking that question if he didn't know what he was talking about. It was a gratifying moment after a week of having reporters talking to me like I'd just fallen off the turnip truck.

And it's something I'd suggest to Maher, too. The dude needs to learn how to read books written for grownups and not just content himself and other illiterate literalists with *Beavis and Butthead* levels of laughter at Christianity.

Here's the thing: The Bible, while it is a single book authored by God, is also 73 books authored by men writing under inspiration. Those men were not robots zapped by a God Ray and forced to write against their will. They were perfectly free and writing exactly what they wanted to write. This means, among other things, that they were writing a lot of different kinds of literature and were by no means all writing newspaper language. Therefore, the very first step we should take as readers in understanding a biblical (or, for that matter, any) text is to determine what literary form the author is employing. Is the passage poetry? Historical narrative? Philosophical reflection? Pastoral instruction? Apocalyptic? Myth? Scripture is simply crammed with a wide variety of different kinds of writing, and the kind of writing you are reading will

greatly influence the way in which it is intended to be read.

For Bill Maher, it is all the *National Enquirer*. This leaves him ill-equipped to cope with a complex adult document like the Bible, because when he is confronted with the fact that -- mark this -- *every biblical text has a literal meaning*, he instantly assumes a "literal meaning" is identical with a literalistic meaning.

In theological terms, the "literal" sense of Scripture is, "What the author was saying in the way he tried to say it." But Maher makes the mistake of assuming that an author who uses metaphor, fiction, hyperbole, or various other figures of speech does not *have* a literal meaning. Thus, for instance, if I say, "My heart is broken," people like Maher mistakenly imagine that I "meant nothing literally." But, of course, I do. I *literally* mean I am deeply grieved and I am expressing that grief via a metaphor. Likewise, if I say, "The line for *Religulous* was so short, you could measure it in microns," I am using an exaggeration to communicate another literal meaning: Not many people are going to see Bill Maher's ignorant rant against the Christian faith. Indeed, more often than not, figurative language is exactly the right vehicle for conveying a literal meaning and is far better than nonfigurative language. The shortest distance between two minds is a figure of speech.

That is why Scripture employs dozens of different devices to communicate literal meanings. "I am the vine and you are the branches" employs a metaphor to express the literal meaning of the Christian's complete dependence on Christ. Likewise, the author of Genesis uses various linguistic devices (such as measured Hebrew poetry and the image of six "days" of creation) to convey a literal meaning, but many modern readers mistake the device for the meaning. The literal sense of the author was, "Creation is the orderly act of a loving Creator God." What the modern fundamentalist -- both atheist and Christian -- often hears, however, is, "The universe was made in six 24-hour days." This is as wrong-headed as taking me to mean that my cardiac tissue has been torn in half or that Christ had delusions of being a grape plant. It is necessary therefore to

distinguish between the literal meaning of an author and the various literary devices he may employ to communicate that meaning.

Take, for instance, the parables of Christ. Jesus tells us the parable of the prodigal son. In relating this story to us, does Luke intend as his literal sense to tell us a true story about a historical Palestinian domestic dispute? Obviously not. His literal meaning is, "God forgives the repentant sinner." But he has used a particular literary device employed by Christ to get that literal meaning across.

All this is fairly smooth sailing. But when we get to *fiction* rather than parable as the means for conveying a literal sense, the waters can sometimes get a little choppy. Good examples of this are books like Tobit or Judith in the Old Testament. For some reason, the Mahers of the world who (one hopes) have no difficulty recognizing that the fictional parable of the prodigal son communicates a literal meaning somehow are mystified when Old Testament books also aim to communicate truth via fiction. Thus, when Tobit or Judith are shown to contain a number of historic and geographic inaccuracies, some people get the vapors and imagine this means they could not have been inspired by God.

This is why it is so important to notice what the Church says in *Dei Verbum*: that we must interpret the books of Scripture "following the rules of sound interpretation." When we do this, we find the Church teaches that, to understand the truth of Scripture, we have to have in mind *what the author was actually trying to assert*, the way he was trying to assert it, and *what is incidental* to that assertion. So, for instance, when the Gospels say the women came to the tomb of Jesus at "sunrise," they are not mistakenly asserting the truth of Ptolemaic astronomy or promulgating a dogma that the sun rises rather than the earth moving. The "error" of the Gospels here is an illusion because the Gospel writers are not making any particular truth

claims about astronomy to be in error. They are simply using human language in a human way.

All this appears to be very clear when you think about it. But it becomes more complicated when we are talking about a text that really does intend to tell us, at times, about supernatural and miraculous events. How do we distinguish between the miraculous and the merely fabulous? Tune in next week!

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Will the Church Split Along Red and Blue Lines?

Deal W. Hudson | Column

10/9/08

An Obama victory on November 4 is far from certain, but the momentum behind his campaign prompts me to wonder: What impact could an Obama administration have on the Catholic Church?

The Bush victories in 2000 and 2004 brought a flood of commentary on the so-called [red and blue](#) states. If Obama wins in 2008, I would not be surprised to see the emergence of a similar division among Catholics.

Many will finally realize, and admit to, the power of the political Left in their Church. This may lead to a kind of red state, blue state divide among Catholics in the United States. Such a divide could extend to the dioceses, reflecting both regional differences and the leadership of present and past bishops.

Most Catholics miss the institutionalized dissent, political liberalism, and Democratic Party alignment that exists throughout parts of the Church in this country. It exists in a network that includes parts of the USCCB and extends through chanceries, universities (especially Jesuit), Catholic organizations, and much of the Catholic media.

This network has become adept at cloaking its dissent, its political intentions, and its disdain for the agenda of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. It's a [well-chronicled story](#) that is gaining traction with more Catholics because of events surrounding this election.

Some evidence of the red-blue separation is anecdotal. I have received many reports of priests touting the virtues of Obama from the pulpit. These are the same parishes where Respect Life Sunday was completely ignored. People are shaking their heads in disbelief; they didn't realize it was "that bad," they told me.

But there have also been public indications of this red/blue tension. This election year, a record [number](#) of

individual bishops (see the list below) have made public statements in response to Catholic supporters of Sen. Barack Obama. All of them have reminded Catholic voters of the Church's teaching on when life begins, and the issue's relevance in politics.

Although the number of bishops speaking out is remarkable, there are another 200-plus who have said nothing individually. Furthermore, Catholic supporters of Obama are referring to the outspoken bishops as a "[rogue group](#)" and are [lecturing](#) "one-issue bishops" on the "correct" interpretation of Catholic teaching.

The aggressive style of Obama Catholics in this election was presaged back in February when a prominent Catholic journalist wrote an [op-ed](#) in the *Washington Post* ending with, "Sounds like I'll be voting for the Democrat [Obama] -- and the bishops be damned."

There is no public record of how the bishops responded, but the still-growing list of prelates who have publicly corrected Biden, Pelosi, or defended life in this election suggests they are not cowering.

Some of these bishops come from blue states like New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Illinois -- a fact that might prove my thesis about the coming divide wrong. Yet the Catholic vote in these states has consistently been in support of pro-abortion Catholic politicians. These heavily Catholic states are blue because Catholics have made them so.

If Catholic voters help to elect Obama, it will be a wake-up call for some in the Church and a cause for celebration to others. The theological and political divide among Catholics, along with regional differences, could be exacerbated. Dioceses may begin to appear more red or blue as a result.

The following is a list of those bishops who have made public statements about Catholics in politics in this election. Regarding those bishops not on the list, it should be mentioned that the joint [statement](#) by Justin Cardinal Rigali, chair of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Bishop William Lori, Chair of the Committee on Doctrine, carries the unified voice of all the bishops.

1. Archbishop Charles [Chaput](#) of Denver
2. Bishop James [Conley](#), auxiliary of Denver
3. Archbishop Donald [Wuerl](#) of Washington, D.C.
4. Justin Cardinal [Rigali](#) of Philadelphia, chairman of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities
5. Bishop William [Lori](#) of Bridgeport, chairman of the Committee on Doctrine
6. Edward Cardinal [Egan](#) of New York
7. Bishop Samuel [Aquila](#) of Fargo
8. Bishop David [Zubik](#) of Pittsburgh
9. Bishop Michael [Sheridan](#) of Colorado Springs
10. Archbishop Jose [Gomez](#) of San Antonio
11. Bishop Oscar [Cantu](#), auxiliary of San Antonio
12. Bishop William [Murphy](#) of Rockville
13. Bishop Edward [Slattery](#) of Tulsa
14. Bishop Kevin [Farrell](#) of Dallas
15. Bishop Gregory [Aymond](#) of Austin
16. Sean Cardinal [O'Malley](#) of Boston
17. Bishop Thomas [Wenski](#) of Orlando
18. Archbishop John [Nienstedt](#) of Saint Paul/Minneapolis
19. Francis Cardinal [George](#) of Chicago, President of the USCCB
20. Bishop Robert [Vasa](#) of Baker

21. Bishop Jerome [Listecki](#) of La Crosse
22. Bishop Richard [Lennon](#) of Cleveland
23. Bishop Ralph [Nickless](#) of Sioux City
24. Archbishop George [Niederauer](#) of San Francisco
25. Bishop Glen [Provost](#) of Lake Charles, LA
26. Bishop Nicholas [DiMarzio](#) of Brooklyn
27. Bishop Joseph F. [Martino](#) of Scranton
28. Archbishop Raymond [Burke](#), Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura
29. Bishop Peter J. [Jugis](#), Bishop of Charlotte
30. Bishop Michael F. [Burbidge](#), Bishop of Raleigh
31. Archbishop Joseph [Naumann](#), Archbishop of Kansas City, KS
32. Bishop Robert [Finn](#), Bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph, MI
33. Bishop Robert C. [Morlino](#), Bishop of Madison, WS
34. Bishop Ronald [Gilmore](#), Bishop of Dodge City, KS
35. Bishop Paul [Coakley](#), Bishop of Salina, KS
36. Bishop Michael [Jackels](#), Bishop of Wichita
37. Bishop Gerald M. [Barbarito](#), Bishop of Palm Beach
38. Joint [Statement](#) by the bishops of New York State (22 bishops)

(Please let me know if I have left any bishops off this list.)

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).

The Fall of the Wall

Rev. Dwight Longenecker | Column

10/9/08

I must admit right up front that I am anything but an economist. My fiscal sensibility was formed by the heritage of seven generations of Pennsylvania Mennonite farmers. We live within our means. We don't buy what we can't pay for. We don't have debt and we don't gamble with our money -- either in fabulous Las Vegas or fabulous Wall Street. Not only does this seem like common sense, it also seems simply honest and moral.

As our world economy faces meltdown, it is sobering to remember that for centuries the Catholic Church taught that loaning money for interest was intrinsically immoral. Money lending was considered a kind of incest: Nothing positive was being created, nor was a positive service being rendered for proper gain. Instead, money (which is only a necessary fiction in any case) was being used to breed money.

The present troubles in the world markets illustrate this very problem. Proper restrictions and regulations were lifted and, in a mind-staggering glut of greed and speculation, money was loaned on money that was borrowed on securities that were based on other monies that were insured by companies that had borrowed more money that only existed as computer calculations -- and if that explanation is not exactly correct, neither is the reality any simpler.

To be plain, gamblers played with money that wasn't theirs and that didn't represent real assets -- except those owned by someone somewhere faraway or some huge financial institution, often on the other side of the planet. They played and they lost, and now everybody has to pay and everybody will lose. The people I talk to who do know far more than I do about financial markets say that the big government bailout is only a stalling tactic that has little more than a cosmetic effect. Think of it like putting on a Band-Aid to treat cancer. The crisis will continue. There will be an

economic collapse, and with this collapse will be a collapse of the American system as we know it.

In the midst of all this, it is apposite to remember that Pope John Paul II prophesied just such a collapse. He said that there were two materialistic, atheistic, economic and social systems: communism and secular capitalism. Both were doomed because both were built on a system without God, and therefore without morality, without respect for human rights, without concern for others, and without real concern for either individual human beings or society as a whole.

John Paul II said that both systems would eventually collapse because it was impossible -- given their philosophical presuppositions -- to stand. Pope Benedict XVI has reasserted the same truth by saying that the whole monetary system is a house built on sand. Such a house cannot stand, and the fall of a splendidly, luxurious house built on sand is even more spectacular and tragic to behold.

While John Paul II is well known for his criticism of Marxism, and indeed, his part in the downfall of the Soviet system, it is easy to overlook his criticisms of unrestrained capitalism. In the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the pontiff stated: "The Church's social doctrine adopts a critical attitude towards both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism." The "all-consuming desire for profit and the thirst for power at any price with the intention of imposing one's will upon others, which are opposed to the will of God and the good of neighbor."

John Paul II was writing in the great Catholic social tradition dating back to *Rerum Novarum*, which constantly stood up for the rights of individuals against economic systems and governments that would trample them. In 1981's *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II

defended the dignity of the worker as opposed to the overwhelming system, and in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* he wrote critically about unrestrained capitalism:

Here we find a new limit on the market: there are collective and qualitative needs which cannot be satisfied by market mechanisms. There are important human needs which escape its logic. There are goods which by their very nature cannot and must not be bought or sold Certainly the mechanisms of the market offer secure advantages . . . but these mechanisms carry the risk of an "idolatry" of the market, an idolatry which ignores the existence of goods which by their nature are not and cannot be mere commodities.

John Paul's criticisms of unrestrained capitalism and the domination of economic forces by the powerful countries of the Northern Hemisphere are present in his encyclicals, his speeches, homilies, and apostolic visits throughout his pontificate. His thought was not simply a matter of telling the rich to give more money to the poor. Instead, a consideration for the individual, the poor, the disenfranchised, and the disadvantaged is itself a simple cure for the excesses of capitalism. It's simple: If the rich had paid more compassionate attention to the poor they would not have been so

greedy, and therefore not have brought on the wanton collapse of their own system.

John Paul II said that communism collapsed on its own because of its own internal foundational weaknesses. If we are witnessing the collapse of modern capitalism, then not only will John Paul II prove to be a prophet, but his analysis for the reason for the collapse of communism will match perfectly the collapse of unrestrained capitalism: "It collapsed on its own because of its own internal weaknesses."

Last week the billionaire Warren Buffet, investing heavily to bail out one of the Wall Street banks, said, "This is like an economic Pearl Harbor." No, it isn't. It's like an economic fall of the Berlin Wall. When that wall fell, communism collapsed. The irony of the coincidence is bitter: The collapse of unrestrained capitalism will be remembered not by the fall of a wall, but the fall of Wall Street.

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Chris Matthews on Metaphysics

David R. Carlin | Column

10/10/08

In my old age I have developed some new vices, the two worst being my bad habit of playing solitaire on my computer and my even worse habit of watching and listening to talking heads on cable TV, like Chris Matthews. Matthews is not the worst of them, and sometimes he's pretty good. When watching him it helps me that I have a good friend who can't sit still long enough to allow anybody to finish a sentence. Having been interrupted by my friend a million times over the years, I've grown used to this kind of thing; hence I can stand it (just barely) when the hyperactive Matthews interrupts all his guests.

Though Matthews is sometimes pretty good, he recently said one of the dumbest things I've ever heard. Despite being a Jesuit-educated Catholic (an alumnus of the College of Holy Cross), Matthews is pro-choice on abortion. Not long ago he was discussing the televised forum in which Rick Warren, pastor of the Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, held back-to-back interviews with Barack Obama and John McCain. Not surprisingly, Warren, an Evangelical, asked the two presidential candidates for their views as to when human life begins. Without hesitation McCain said it begins at the moment of conception. Obama gave what his fans call a more "nuanced" answer: He said the question was "above my pay grade."

Matthews holds that Warren had no business asking such a question of a political candidate, and neither does anybody else, for the question of when human life begins is a "metaphysical" question; and metaphysical questions, according to Matthews, are out of bounds when it comes to American politics. "If a politician, thou shalt not engage in metaphysical judgment; and if a voter, thou shalt not ask metaphysical questions of candidates." What an interesting and curious rule! I wonder who made it up? Matthews himself, I'd guess. For if the rule is valid, then it makes it easier for Chris to reconcile the apparent

contradiction between his Catholicism and his pro-choice-ism.

Matthews didn't offer a definition of metaphysics, but he probably means what most people mean by metaphysics, namely, propositions that refer to realities -- or imagined realities -- that are not susceptible to empirical (or sense-evidence) proof. Thus belief in God is a metaphysical belief; and so is belief in the immortality of the soul; and so, for that matter, is belief in the very existence of a soul -- at least if soul is understood (as, for example, Plato understood it) to be a non-material entity whose existence is not dependent on the body. Matthews, then, would tell us that it is out of bounds for an American to demand that a political candidate answer the question of whether he believes in God or in the existence or the immortality of the soul.

From other things I've heard Matthews say on TV, I would guess that he'd justify his ban on metaphysical questions by citing the provision in the Constitution according to which there shall be "no religious test" for public office. The expression "religious test" had a very clear meaning for the Founding Fathers. Beginning in the 17th century there were "religious tests" in England -- legal standards that effectively excluded Catholics, Jews, and Protestant Nonconformists from Parliament, from civil and military office, and from Oxford and Cambridge.

That's why Alexander Pope had to earn his living from poetry; as a Catholic he was ineligible for one of the government sinecures that many 18th-century writers were given. That's why Catholics and Nonconformists, though they could serve as privates in the English army and navy, could not become commissioned officers. And that's why the brainy sons of Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and Congregationalists had to attend "dissenting academies." They were not allowed into Oxford or

Cambridge. When the Founding Fathers banned religious tests, it was this kind of thing they had in mind. They were not saying, as Chris seems to imagine, that voters must be barred from asking candidates about their views on God and the soul.

Besides, a religious test is one thing; a metaphysical test would be something else. Matthews, I believe, is a great fan of Thomas Jefferson. I wonder when Chris last read the Declaration of Independence, where Jefferson inserted four (count them, *four*) references to that most metaphysical of metaphysical entities, God.

But it's not just propositions about God and the soul that are metaphysical. If Matthews believes, as no doubt he does, that his wife, his children, and his friends really and truly exist, and are not merely figments of his hallucinatory imagination, then these are metaphysical beliefs; for there is no way, based on sense evidence alone, that we can prove that the persons and things surrounding us exist outside our minds. And if Matthews believes, as he almost certainly does, that there is an unwritten and not-man-made moral law (the kind of thing that was probably called "natural law" when Chris was at the Cross), then this too is a metaphysical belief.

The fact of the matter is that we human beings, for better or worse, are metaphysical animals -- not just in the sense that we have God-created souls, but also in the sense that it is impossible for us to think about the world or to act in it without making metaphysical assumptions.

However, it is true that in the last century or so there have been some people, including some well-known philosophers (such as Auguste Comte, the Vienna Circle, and some British professors) who tried to persuade us that we can and should think and act in a perfectly non-metaphysical way. The pro-abortion movement, I submit, is in some measure a byproduct of this anti-metaphysical campaign. If unborn babies have no metaphysical dimension, then how can it be wrong to kill them? Besides, if there is no metaphysical realm of being, then rightness and wrongness are just matters of opinion or choice (*choice* -- a word pro-abortionists find absolutely delicious) -- aren't they?

David R. Carlin is the author of [Can a Catholic Be a Democrat?](#) (Sophia Institute Press, 2006).

Nostril Muscles and Other Secrets

Marjorie Campbell | Column

10/10/08

"**W**atch this, Mom," my red-haired, eleven-year-old son yelped yesterday, his brown eyes dancing with amusement. He yanked a white tissue from the Kleenex box and blew. Smiling largely, his drippy nose reddened to match his hair.

"Well," I ventured, "very nice job, dear, blowing your nose." As I cocked my head quizzically, he offered, "Mom, I didn't use to do that, you know. My nose always just ran and ran and I couldn't blow it like you told me to."

"Yes?" I prompted. "What changed, honey?"

"I found my nostril muscles, Mom," he crooned, flaring them wide to demonstrate. "It's changed everything," he added, grabbing another tissue and honking happily.

Sometimes, it is just that way. All of a sudden, you find a new place in yourself, opening a small surprise package you did not know was there. Children are best at this: They are willing to be surprised regularly.

I remember my own awe one evening, myself eleven years old. My father sat oddly silent at the head of the family dinner table, my mother and siblings spread around, uneasy. My typically light-hearted father stared ponderously at his plate, his eyes wide and wet, as though something there bewildered him. Quietly, he started crying.

I watched him, my fork hanging in the air, food sitting unchewed in my mouth. This was something I'd never seen before.

Dad looked up. "I'm sorry," he mumbled, cleared his throat, wiped at his tears, and added, "A fellow was badly injured at the plant today. Lost all the skin off his arms. They got caught in a press. And we just couldn't get it turned off. He's hurt so badly." Dad's voice drifted

away as he fell back into a place of compassion that had suddenly opened in his heart.

Years later, I met another man who, I knew, had found a place inside himself that changed everything. A recovering heroin addict, Jake had been in the wrong place at the wrong time and unfairly charged with possession of marijuana. Though not a major predicament itself, the misdemeanor charge jeopardized Jake's parole from earlier days of criminal involvement with hard drugs. He had, as we said in the trade, a long, long back-up time that would destroy the new life he had labored to build. He would spend his foreseeable future in a major penitentiary, far from the successes he had attained both physically and spiritually.

I represented Jake throughout the misdemeanor proceedings. He remained strangely calm in the face of a determined prosecutor unwilling to show mercy or admit police error. Jake was unfazed -- he assured me that the case would end well, and he would not have to return to prison. I was doubtful.

Without a whisper of anger or resentment, Jake counseled me, "Just get as much delay as you can, Marjorie. You never know what's going to happen."

But I think Jake knew exactly what was going to happen. He had found a secret place of calm within his heart that changed everything. From that spot had blossomed a new life devoted to art, moderation, and his wife. I think Jake knew just how precious and fragile was that place -- and he savored each day.

One night, arising in the comfort of the new life he had struggled to build, Jake stumbled into his bathroom and sunk to the floor, dead, from a type of heart attack not uncommon in former addicts. I got the

call in the morning. Jake's case was over; death ends criminal proceedings. He had been right all along.

It's much harder, I thought, watching my son flare his nose proudly, to find these secret wonders in ourselves as we grow older. We stop opening windows and lean hard to close doors we find ajar. We fear what might enter our lives and hold tight to what we know, no matter how unreasonable or suffocating or repetitive.

This is not without cause. Many aspects of aging are, well, alarming. Recently, unaware of my own reflection, I noted the baggy arms of a middle-aged woman in the mirrored wall at a formal affair. Suddenly, I recognized my dress. I quickly turned away. I did not want to see a me I was not prepared to admire.

But this is just what God asks us to do: Don't turn away -- keep open our hearts for sudden discovery. Swinging fiercely in a hammock not long ago, stewing over a wrong done me by my husband's family, I collapsed backward in frustrated exhaustion. My eyes were abruptly drawn upward, into a pool of shimmering sunlight caught and bounced about by the dense new

growth atop the looming trees that held me. A gentle, steady breeze slowly stilled my motion. Like a child, I let down the tears and my nose started running. I took up a prayer to my Lord. I did not turn away.

"Be still," I scolded, disarming my hardened determination to be angry. "Be still," I repeated, lowering my force field of perceived injury. Suddenly, like a ray of sunlight escaping the thick tree canopy, I felt God enter and sooth my soul. I should not have been surprised -- but I was. I smiled gratefully and blew my nose just like my son. It was just as He promised: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). That small package, I reminded myself, lies always within reach -- it's everyone's secret.

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Taking Up Arms

Joseph Susanka | Review

10/4/08

Rebellion has long been a popular theme in film - particularly that which arises out of the struggle between the working classes and the elites. Unfortunately, the specific details of these stories often lead one straight to controversy. Take, for example, the recently acclaimed *Pan's Labyrinth*: Guillermo del Toro's fairytale is overwhelmed by the struggle between the "evil Catholic Franco-lovers" and the "heroic, noble Communist rebels." For those less inclined to side with the Communists than del Toro seems to be, it can be an impediment to appreciating his film's meaning.

This problem of having a message lost in historical details is precisely what Mexican director Francisco Vargas tries to avoid in his debut feature, *El Violin (The Violin)*. Recently released on DVD by Film Movement, and winner of more international awards than any Mexican film in history, *El Violin* sets out to eliminate particular time periods, nationalities, and political parties. When speaking of the script, Vargas recounts how he

worked on it in such a way that all references to any Mexican socio-political event were erased [I]t could be Colombian, Bolivian, Guatemalan, or from any of our Latin American countries that have suffered the same experience of confrontation between a civil society and its government, and of armed uprisings, since memory serves us.

Naturally, no film can completely succeed in eliminating all reference to a specific time and place, and this particular film will probably remind more knowledgeable history buffs of any number of rebellions in Mexico during the 1960s and 1970s. But there is a feeling of detachment here; a lack of specificity that makes it possible for the audience to scrutinize the film's characters without feeling that they are endorsing or rejecting any particular political position. The wonderfully stark black-and-white

photography, the nondescript uniforms and clothing, and the lack of any historically significant names all contribute to this detachment.

The story revolves around the elderly, one-handed violinist Don Plutarco, his son, Genaro, and his grandson, Lucio. Poor local farmers, they spend most of their time working their small plot of land and supplement their income by singing and playing music at the local tavern. But there is more to their talents than meets the eye; their performances are a risky (but effective) cover for their attempts to run guns for the local rebels.

As the film opens, the government's army descends on their poor farming village, captures all the men, and sends the women and children fleeing into hiding. The guns, so painstakingly gathered by Genaro and his compatriots, are left behind, hidden in Don Plutarco's field.

Don Plutarco, recognizing that his presence is less suspicious than that of his son, returns to the village to determine whether the guns have avoided discovery and, if so, to move them from the safety of his field into the waiting hands of the rebels. On his first visit, accompanied by his trusty violin, he is accosted by the captain of the occupying forces and interrogated.

After discovering that Plutarco is a musician, the captain reveals that he, too, is a great lover of music, and releases the old don. However, he refuses to return the violin; if Don Plutarco wants to play, he says, let him come back the next day, when the captain will have the time and inclination to enjoy another performance. Don Plutarco, who has hit upon the brilliant scheme of concealing the contraband weapons in his violin case, has no choice but to return. An excruciating game of cat-and-mouse ensues, as the

old man tries to keep up the appearances of friendship with his enemy, all the while slipping by with the hoarded weapons -- one violin case at a time.

While clearly portraying the devastating effects of violence and oppression on those who oppose the lawless military, Vargas's story carefully avoids the claim that such resistance is either right or wrong, misguided or heroic. And although the film meanders a bit in the first third, the moment the dueling roles of Don Plutarco and the captain come into focus, Vargas's storytelling becomes much more assured.

A great deal of the credit for this transition must be given to Ángel Tavira, the octogenarian who plays Don Plutarco. Unbelievably, Tavira had never acted before, and his performance here, which won him the Best Actor award at Cannes, was the only film role he ever played. (A talented violinist who lost his hand at 13, yet still went on to live a fruitful life as a teacher and performer, he passed away last June.)

A word of warning: The film's opening sequence, where military interrogators violently assault a group of female prisoners in an effort to make their fellow rebels talk, is hard to stomach, and far more graphic than the remainder of the film. From the story's very beginning, Vargas is trying to impress upon the audience the level of brutality and violence that has caused these simple

farming folk to rebel, and this is undeniably an effective (if disturbing) way of doing so.

Interestingly, Vargas never again allows himself to dwell on the brutality underlying the film's message of resistance in the face of unjust oppression, scrupulously avoiding nearly every opportunity for violence the story presents him. The penultimate scene in the film, in particular, would seem to call out for a resolution consistent in tone with the opening sequence, but Vargas refuses to take that route, choosing instead a more ambiguous (and finally, more thought-provoking) ending.

The audience is clearly meant to sympathize with the rebels and to respond sympathetically to those working-class patriots that spend their lives battling brutal military officers and corrupt government policies. But Vargas is not satisfied with being quite that obvious. While presenting a story that clearly underscores the value (and perhaps even inevitable nature) of armed resistance, he juxtaposes it with the debilitating emotional consequences of that same resistance. The haunting final scene brings both sides together in a single moment that is simultaneously disconcerting and hopeful -- one last complex message in a film filled with many complex, conflicting messages.

Joseph Susanka writes from Lander, Wyoming.

Ridiculous

Matthew Lickona | Review

10/6/08

I don't know if Bill Maher would call himself a comedian these days, but it's fair to say that his roots are in comedy. *Religulous*, his new film, features at least a couple clips from his stand-up days, including one from *The Tonight Show* back in the Carson era. A young Maher is riffing on having a Catholic father and a Jewish mother, and on drawing from both traditions. "I would go to confession, but I'd bring a lawyer with me. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned -- and I believe you know Mr. Cohen here." Funny!

These days, Maher is still funny about religion, but he's also angry. He regards religion as a dangerous mass delusion, one that twists otherwise rational, decent people into believing and doing things that are ridiculous and even evil. Now, comedy and anger are not antithetical -- quite the opposite. A lot of really great comedy fairly seethes with rage. (I remember reading an interview with John Cleese about why Monty Python ended its run. "We woke up one morning, and we weren't angry anymore.") But you know what *is* antithetical to comedy? Earnestness. And that's where *Religulous* betrays itself.

But first, more on the comedy. Almost the entire film is given over to Maher's hunt for absurdity within religion -- sort of a feature-length *Believers Say the Darnedest Things*. He's not seeking to understand and engage; he's looking for (and often finding) entertaining exchanges. So when he wants to ask how you can have something like the Trinity in a monotheistic religion like Christianity, he doesn't sit down with some hoary theologian to discuss the procession of persons. He talks to a guy who plays Jesus at Holyland USA -- a guy who thinks he's scoring points by making an analogy between the Trinity and water, which may, after all, be either solid, liquid, or gas. Maher just keeps his deadpan, and the moment works.

That's one of the highbrow scenes. There's plenty of lowbrow, too -- some more successful than others. I

laughed out loud when a Muslim got annoyed at Maher's presence within the Dome of the Rock, and the film did a little mock translating: "I don't think this Jew is funny, and I know comedy. I've seen his show; it sucks." And Maher is quick with a quip: Interviewing a Christian minister who came out of Islam but still gets his custom-made suits at a special price from a Muslim tailor, Maher comments, "So you left Islam, became a Christian, and you shop like a Jew." But someone in the editing room should have told Maher to go easy on the clips from old Bible movies -- after the first dozen or so, they seem like padding. And there are plenty of places where the comedy feels mean: Interviewing a man who claims that Jesus' bloodline progressed through Europe and eventually wound up in Puerto Rico, Maher cuts from an antique map of the Old World to a shot of three Puerto Rican hootchie mamas letting it all hang out for the camera. And this is relevant *how*?

I don't begrudge Maher his anti-pilgrimage, and I don't think you should, either. Yes, he's attacking beliefs that people hold dear, but it's not like he's desecrating the Eucharist. (Though there is one religiously themed quasi-softcore scene he could have done without.) For the unbeliever, the manifold forms of religious expression offer plenty of raw comedic material, even surrounding things I happen to believe. (I confess to chuckling when the off-camera voice pitched Christianity as a Hollywood movie involving a space god, a virgin birth that results in a son who's also him, and a suicide mission.) Mostly, it's an entertaining run, with Maher coming off as a reasonable, good-natured skeptic who thinks people should be a little more thoughtful about the beliefs that shape their lives. It ain't Moliere, but neither is it Dane Cook complaining about the Mass. Earnest anger may be the engine that drives Maher's quest, but you'd never know it to look at him. In comedy, that's a good thing.

And then comes the end of the film, the great, thudding hammer-stroke of earnestness that undoes so much of what has come before. Maher *had* an ending. He was standing before the Rude Man in England, marveling at the local tradition of maintaining the image of an erect giant -- Maybe a fertility symbol? Maybe an alien carving? -- on a hillside. "And they don't really know why," he observed. "They just do it because they've always done it. Isn't that religion for you? Sometimes you kneel, sometimes you fast, and sometimes you go up on the hill and you cut the grass around the giant space penis." Heavy-handed, but hey, it's your exit line -- go for the gusto.

But no. Suddenly, we're back where the film began: Meggido, supposed site of Armageddon. And now Maher is talking about the end of the world, and how, thanks to nuclear weapons, religious extremists may now be in a position to bring it about. (In a nasty sleight of hand, he ropes the Christians into this group by talking to folks who are looking forward to the end of the world and the second coming of Christ -- which is a long way from wanting to actually launch the missiles.)

And then comes **The Speech**, abridged here out of sympathy to the reader:

The fact is, religion must die for mankind to live. The hour is getting very late to be able to indulge having key decisions being made by religious people, by irrationalists, by those who would steer

the ship of state not by knowledge, but by the equivalent of reading the entrails of a chicken. . . . Faith means making a virtue out of not thinking. It's nothing to brag about, and those who preach faith . . . are our intellectual slaveholders, keeping mankind in a bondage to fantasy and nonsense. . . . Religion is dangerous because it allows human beings who don't have all the answers to think that they do. . . . If anyone tells you they know, they just *know*, what happens when you die, I promise you, you don't. How can I be so certain? Because *I* don't know, and you do not possess mental powers that I do not. . . . Grow up or die.

Now it's my turn to deadpan.

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(Content alert: *Religulous* contains sexual references and bawdy language, and is, it should go without saying, deeply irreverent.)