

FAITH • CULTURE • POLITICS

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Bishop Dismisses FOCA Threat to Hospitals

Deal W. Hudson | Column

2/2/09

A [Catholic News Service \(CNS\) article](#) on January 27 [reported](#) a comment by Bishop Robert Lynch of St. Petersburg, Florida, on the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA). Asked by CNS reporter Nancy Frazier O'Brien about FOCA, Bishop Lynch spoke against it, but then tried to dismiss Catholic concerns about the impact of the bill on Catholic hospitals: "But there is no plan to shut down any hospital if it passes. There's no sense of ominous danger threatening health care institutions."

Sr. Carol Keehan, president of the Catholic Health Association, took the identical position when interviewed by O'Brien. Keehan caused some [controversy](#) weeks ago when she defended President Barack Obama against criticism from pro-lifers and praised his choices of pro-abortion Health and Human Services secretary Tom Daschle and deputy health care director Jeanne Lambrew.

Since the election of President Obama, Catholics have been deeply concerned that the physicians and staff of Catholic hospitals will be required to perform abortions if FOCA becomes law. But according to O'Brien's CNS piece, those fears are only Internet "rumors." Indeed, she begins her article by saying, "Internet rumors to the contrary, no Catholic hospital is in danger of closing because of the Freedom of Choice Act."

It's strange that O'Brien would attribute Catholic fears to "misleading e-mails flying around the Internet," when the USCCB's Office of General Counsel itself released an [analysis](#) of FOCA last August.

The bishops' own legal counsel wrote:

The combined impact of these various provisions is the likely invalidation of a broad range of state laws if challenged under FOCA, including . . . government programs and facilities that pay for, provide, or

insure childbirth or health care services generally, but not abortion; *laws protecting the conscience rights of doctors, nurses and hospitals, if those laws create even minimal delay or inconvenience in obtaining an abortion or treat abortion differently than other medical procedures . . .* (emphasis added).

Both Bishop Lynch and Sister Keehan directly contradict the opinion of the USCCB, while O'Brien attributes the concerns over FOCA articulated by the bishops' own legal counsel to "misleading e-mails."

But that's not all: The Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities released a [statement](#) last September titled, "The Freedom of Choice Act: Most Radical Abortion Legislation in U.S. History." It argued that the impact of FOCA would go "far beyond even *Roe*." Among other things, it stated that "FOCA will bar laws protecting a right of conscientious objection to abortion," which means the consciences of doctors and nurses in Catholic hospitals.

Furthermore, a week before the inauguration, Francis Cardinal George wrote a [letter](#) to Obama laying out the bishops' concerns about life issues. One of the items was Catholic hospitals: "Suggestions that government involvement in health care will be aimed at denying conscience, or excluding Catholic and other health care providers from participation in serving the public good, could threaten much-needed health care reform at the outset."

Finally, the USCCB's own national postcard [campaign](#) to "Fight FOCA" says in its instructional statement, "For the first time, abortion would become an *entitlement* the government must fund and promote." Making abortions an "entitlement" would require Catholic hospitals to offer them.

[All of these public statements on FOCA](#) from Cardinal George and the USCCB make O'Brien's article surprising. Surely CNS is not characterizing the USCCB as a rumor mill; no doubt they fully respect the analysis of the USCCB Office of General Counsel, the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, and Cardinal George himself. Maybe O'Brien was somehow unaware of the range of issues being addressed by the bishops' national postcard campaign?

Unfortunately, Bishop Lynch and Sister Keehan clearly part here with the USCCB and Cardinal George. The statements contained in the CNS article will now be used to undermine the expressions of Catholic concern

about FOCA. The CNS article provides Catholic supporters of FOCA the opportunity to blame the anxiety about the fate of Catholic hospitals on "right-wing bloggers."

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).

Crime, Sin, and Politics

Ronald J. Rychlak | Column

2/3/09

On January 9, the Illinois House deliberated less than 90 minutes before voting 114-1 to impeach Gov. Rod Blagojevich. The case then went to the state senate, where on January 29 he was convicted by a vote of 59-0. Illinois legislators may tolerate some corruption, but they will not stand for the incompetence of being caught red-handed.

Federal authorities had wiretapped Blagojevich talking about selling President Barack Obama's vacant Senate seat to the highest bidder. During one recorded conversation, the former governor reportedly said that he was financially hurting and that he wanted to "make money" for his family. He also weighed the option of appointing himself to the Senate, saying he was "stuck" as governor and might have access to more resources as a senator. He even thought that a Senate seat might help prepare him for a 2016 presidential bid.

Despite this evidence, Blagojevich has been defiant. At a press conference called to address the charges, he explained:

I'm going to continue to fight every step of the way. Let me reassert to all of you once more that I am not guilty of any criminal wrongdoing. That issue will be dealt with on a separate course in an appropriate forum, a federal court. And I'm confident that at the end of the day I will be properly exonerated.

Actually, Blagojevich might be right. As embarrassing and politically damaging as the evidence is, it is not clear that he violated any *criminal* laws.

The former governor may have conspired or attempted to solicit a bribe, but uncompleted or *inchoate* crimes like these are very hard to prove. Prosecutors have to establish some level of activity by the defendant (often termed a "substantial step"). The court needs to see the action in order to be certain that the intent is really there.

Crime is different from sin in that way. It takes both intent (*mens rea*) and action (*actus reus*) for there to be a crime. When it comes to sin, however, the intent alone is wrong. That's what Jimmy Carter meant when he famously said that he had committed adultery in his heart. More directly to the point, the late George Carlin irreverently explained sin as follows:

It's what's in your *mind* that counts! Your *intentions*! That's how we'll judge you -- what you *want to do*! *Mortal sin*: had to be a grievous offense, sufficient reflection, and full consent of the will. You had to *wanna*! In fact, *wanna* was a sin all by itself! "Thou shall not *wanna*!" If you woke up one morning and said, "I'm gonna go down to Seventh Avenue and commit a mortal sin," save your cab fare; you did it, man!

Blagojevich may have contemplated soliciting a bribe; he may even have *wanted* to do so, but he nominated the former Illinois Attorney General Roland Burris to fill the Senate seat. No one has suggested that Burris paid a bribe for the appointment. Nor, for that matter, have any other politicians come forward to say that Blagojevich solicited a bribe from them. As such, it's going to be hard to criminally convict him for attempted solicitation of a bribe.

What about conspiracy – agreement to commit a crime? In this case, the evidence suggests that there might have been a conspiracy to *ask* for a bribe, but there was no agreement to *give and receive* a bribe. In other words, we have a double inchoate crime -- conspiracy to attempt to solicit a bribe. That will be a tough case for the prosecution to make.

The prosecution probably moved too soon in this case. In my law classes, students study several cases involving police stopping criminals too early. In one case, the police stopped a group of men on the sidewalk outside of a bank. They had weapons and

seemed to be intent on pulling off a robbery. Nevertheless, the court dismissed the charges, concluding that the crime -- even the attempted crime - - had not yet taken place because they had not yet entered the bank. The same may be true with Blagojevich.

So why did the authorities arrest Blagojevich when they did, rather than wait until they clearly had the goods on him? U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald explained: "We were in the middle of a corruption crime spree and we wanted to stop it." He also expressed concern about the senatorial appointment and laws that the governor might have signed had the prosecution not intervened. But that's not much of an explanation.

The truth is most likely that Fitzgerald's hand was forced when the *Chicago Tribune* broke the story about the wiretaps. There has been some speculation that the newspaper did this to prevent the investigation from ensnaring favored politicians whom Blagojevich may have been considering for solicitations, but that's far from certain. *Tribune* officials may simply have wanted to expose the wiretaps that revealed Blagojevich trying to get some members of the editorial board fired in exchange for state help in selling the Chicago Cubs (which the paper owns). At his news conference on the matter, Fitzgerald said, "I laid awake at night," worrying about the possible firing of the editors.

Of course, the big question is related to alleged connections between Blagojevich and the Obama administration. Details are forthcoming, but it does not seem likely that the president's people were tied into any nefarious activities that took place in the governor's office. One of Blagojevich's main complaints seems to have been that the Obama people were not offering him anything in exchange for his appointment power. That indicates that they were not in on any alleged conspiracy.

We cannot see into the hearts of men, so we do not know about sins that may have been committed. As for other matters, it is likely that Blagojevich's political career is over (the Illinois Senate tried to make certain of that by barring him from ever holding office in the state), but a criminal conviction is far less certain. President Obama will probably avoid any significant political damage. And to the surprise of no one from the north side of Chicago, the Cubs are somehow in the middle of the whole stinking mess.

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The 'Right' to Happiness

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

2/3/09

An amusing citation from Margaret Thatcher reads: "The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money." The socialists, however, were not the only ones who would run out of other people's money. Democracies are quite capable of duplicating this feat.

The question is this: What entitles us to acquire other people's money in the first place? Do other people have any money that is not ours if we "need" it? Taxation, with or without representation, is about this issue. Who decides what we need? Who gets what is taken from us? On what grounds do they deserve it?

C. S. Lewis said that no one has a right to happiness. Our Declaration only says that we have a right to pursue it. Whether we attain it is not something that falls under the perplexing language of "rights." If someone else guarantees my right to be happy, what am I? Surely not a human being, whose happiness, as Aristotle said, includes his own activity, not someone else's.

In a world of rights, no one can give anything to anybody else. Everything is owed to me if I do not already have it. If I am not happy, I am a victim of someone else's negligence. A "rights society" is litigious. If I am unhappy, it has nothing to do with me; my unhappiness is caused by someone else who has violated my rights.

Unhappy people witness the violation of their rights by someone else; their unhappiness does not involve them. Their mode is not, "What can I do for others?" but, "What must they do for me to make me happy?"

In his *Ethics*, Aristotle remarked that, if happiness were a gift of the gods, surely they would give it to us. No Christian can read such a line without pause. Is not the whole essence of our faith that we have no "right" either to existence itself or to a happy existence? Some

things must first be given to us, no doubt -- including our very selves, which we do not cause.

Indeed, the whole essence of revelation is that we do not have a right to the eternal life that God has promised to us. We cannot achieve it by ourselves, because it is not a product of our own making or thinking. God does not violate our "rights" by not giving us either existence or happiness; creation is not an act of justice.

The doctrine of grace opposes the notion that we have a right to happiness. It is not even something that we deserve or can work for. At first sight, this primacy of gift and grace seems to lessen our dignity, which surely ought to include some input on our part.

Christianity says that indeed this "givenness" is the case. We are given what we have no right to receive. This givenness should make us like the Giver, should incite us to something more than our own "rights." Happiness evidently lies beyond rights. We can only speak of a "right" to happiness with many distinctions.

What was the point of Margaret Thatcher's quip about running out of someone else's money? Some do demand someone else's money. From whence does this demand arise? From those who claim that they have a right to happiness. If they do not have what others have, it is a sign, not of one's own failure to embrace the habits and ways to produce what is needed, but of someone unjustly having what I think I need. Thus, I do not have to earn what I need. The mere fact that I do not have it is enough to suggest that someone else is preventing me from enjoying my "right" to be happy.

Much of the world is filled with what I call "gapism." The so-called gap between the rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots, is a sign, not of the

natural order in which some know more and work more, but of a dire conspiracy to deprive me of what is my right. So the purpose of "rights" is to correct the world's "wrongs." A divine mission flashes in the eyes of those who would presume to make us happy by giving us our "rights." People lacking the "right" justify the takers.

So we do not have a right to be happy. The assumption that we do lies behind the utopian turmoil of our times. The attempt to guarantee our right to be happy invariably leads to economic bankruptcy and societal coercion. By misunderstanding happiness and

its gift-response condition, we impose on the political order a mission it cannot fulfill. We undermine that limited temporal happiness we might achieve if we are virtuous, prudent, and sensible in this finite world.

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The First Commandment

Mark P. Shea | Column

2/4/09

The other day, one of my readers sent me a hilarious note:

Hey, Mark, you may get terrific questions as a Catholic author/speaker, but as a Catholic high school teacher, I get terrific answers. My current favorite:

Q: Name the seven capital/deadly sins.

A. (among the others): Sluttony

I have to say I enjoy this brilliant accidental portmanteau word as a sort of idiot-savant moral insight into our culture. It exactly describes countless millions of square miles of what now constitutes "Western values" (i.e., those values being proposed to us by the Manufacturers of Culture as a counter-narrative to the gospel and Christian virtues). But though the accidental insight is wonderful, it remains nonetheless accidental. We may be happy when a bad tennis player flails and accidentally wallops one over the net, but we don't thereby confuse him with a good tennis player. Similarly, this student's poor familiarity with elementary Catholic moral teaching, while luckily insightful, is still the equivalent of throwing her racquet at the ball and accidentally scoring a point.

We need to do better than that in the game of life, and the quickest way to start is to learn something about the Ten Commandments. (Quick! Can you name all ten?)

One quarter of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is devoted to the moral life and is founded on the revelation given in the Ten Commandments. (The other three quarters are occupied by the Creed, the Seven Sacraments, and the Our Father.) Of course, to say that the Ten Commandments are "revealed" already raises a problem, which has been pounced on by polemicists like Christopher Hitchens. He argues that it is silly to say the Commandments are revealed, because it is silly to

say people did not know murder was wrong till Moses told them so on Mt. Sinai. He goes on from there to make the normal red-herring argument that God has nothing to do with our knowledge of right and wrong.

He might have a point, if Scripture itself did not record numerous tales of murder and mayhem long before Mt. Sinai that make clear that the wrongness of murder and similar grave sins was, of course, known since the dawn of time (otherwise the story of Cain and Abel, not to mention Moses' murder of the Egyptian, makes no sense). In other words, it is not news to the authors of Scripture that certain things are knowable by the light of natural law. However, they are not such fools as to instantly conclude that God is therefore dispensable. Only highly advanced people can be that silly.

To get at what I mean, contemplate the well-meaning person who tries to figure out how believers and unbelievers can have a "shared ethic." Such a person is apparently unaware that we **already do**. It works like this: God is just, wise, good, and loving, and He creates us all in His image and likeness. Some people admit this and try to be just, wise, good, and loving out of love for Him; others, out of fear of Him. Some people do *not* know this and try to be just, wise, good, and loving out of some pagan notion that the gods or karma or the Tao ordain it. Some people do not admit this and try to be just, wise, good, and loving out of a muddled notion that they are Just That Sort of Chap, or that Their Chromosomes speaking by the Holy Spirit of Evolution Command It. Some people do not admit this, say, "Screw trying to be just, wise, good, and loving. I don't have to listen to my chromosomes when they determine my hair color, so why should I listen to them when they say to sacrifice for the good of the species?" and do what they want.

It is not the case that an unbeliever must perforce be immoral. Many choose to do what is right, even

though their explanation for how they determine, much less do, what is right is a farrago of nonsense. There is such a thing as *eupepocrisy*, or being better than one's own ugly philosophy of atheistic materialism. That said, it is absolutely the case that a materialist atheist cannot supply a coherent account of *why* he is moral, nor even how he knows what good and evil are without smuggling in transcendent categories that are ultimately stolen from natural law (which is ultimately from God) and/or Judeo-Christian revelation. As the *real* modern atheist, Richard Rorty, pointed out, apart from reliance on God, there *is* no universally valid answer to moral questions such as, "Why not be cruel?" Saith Rorty:

Anybody who thinks that there are well-grounded theoretical answers to this sort of question . . . is still, in his heart, a theologian or a metaphysician. He believes in an order beyond time and change which both determines the point of human existence and establishes a hierarchy of responsibilities.

It is in order to avoid admitting this fact (even to themselves) that atheists concoct claptrap about "selfish genes" and other bilge. All this is nothing other than an effort to paper over the fact that atheist morality basically consists of theft of bits and pieces from what God has revealed through nature and revelation. I have no objection to the theft; it's what keeps atheists in possession of what sanity they have. But theft it remains. A materialist can give absolutely no account of morality, because you cannot derive Ought from Is. Anyone who claims you can is practicing sleight of hand and self-deception.

And that brings us back to why we speak of the Commandments as "revealed." The Church is perfectly aware that (some) of the Commandments encapsulate moral truths knowable by the light of natural reason. But taken as a whole, the effect of the Commandments is to root our moral perceptions in supernatural revelation by showing us clearly the source of the moral law: God.

That is why the Commandments are ordered the way they are: because the Commandments are not primarily about setting up an ethical arrangement for a functioning civil order. They are, rather, for the purpose of calling Israel (and ultimately the whole human race) into a relationship with the Author of creation and the human person. And so the first commandment speaks to Israel, not in the language of philosophy, but in the language of covenant:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods before me.

Perhaps the most significant word in this verse is "your." Without it, there is no covenant, for it is in God's giving Himself to us (and we to Him) that a covenant happens. For a covenant is a sacred family bond of kinship. "The Lord God" is a remote deity, somewhere up in heaven. He is powerful, to be sure, and the Artificer of the universe, but still remote. But "the Lord your God," though still awesome and powerful and the Maker of All, is something more: a Father who gives Himself to us and who calls us to give ourselves to Him unreservedly and with complete devotion, as He has done.

That will matter in considering all the rest of the Commandments, because the Ten Commandments reveal the moral law to be not the product of Darwinian natural selection, nor of an impersonal Tao, nor of mere human origin, but an expression of the Word of God's love for us: a love that would be fully revealed not on Sinai, but on Golgotha.

For the next nine weeks, we will take a look at the Ten Commandments in light of the fullness of revelation who is Christ. Stay tuned.

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Sublimity Now!

Eve Tushnet | Column

2/5/09

On New Year's Eve, my best friend and I went to a bonfire. We've done this for the past couple of years: You're supposed to throw a note or representation of some unwanted aspect of the old year into the flames.

But this year the wind was up, and the bonfire roared, sweeping toward delightedly shrieking little kids as the wind changed, sending up great trumpets of fire, outsized orchids, fierce and beautiful and dangerous. This year the bonfire felt less tame than usual. It burnt a broad swath in the grass, and sent sparks showering toward the woods at the edge of the field.

This year the bonfire was especially sublime.

Our culture pays too little attention to the beautiful. We prefer to talk in terms of the useful or the efficient; maybe, sometimes, the ethical. Contemporary Catholic culture is famously sentimental and debased, contented with boring hymns and saccharine holy cards. But if we fail to acknowledge our deep hunger for beauty, we are even worse at recognizing and honoring the sublime.

It's just about impossible to talk about the sublime without reference to Edmund Burke's rakish essay, "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful," although we shouldn't end there. Burke says that the beautiful is lovable, smooth, adorable; we might also say harmonious and charming without losing the sense of his argument. Beauty needs us: "Beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty." It is soft and "amiable."

The great virtues turn principally on dangers, punishments, and troubles, and are exercised rather in preventing the worst mischiefs, than in dispensing favours; and are therefore not lovely though highly venerable. The subordinate turn on reliefs, gratifications, and indulgences; and are therefore more lovely, though inferior in dignity.

Those persons who creep into the hearts of most people, who are chosen as the companions of their softer hours, and their reliefs from care and anxiety, are never persons of shining qualities or strong virtues. It is rather the soft green of the soul on which we rest our eyes, that are fatigued with beholding more glaring objects.

Burke's beautiful is not St. Augustine's "Beauty ever ancient, ever new." Beauty, in this understanding, is found in those objects and people we can cherish; and therefore in those we can *master*.

The sublime, by contrast, inheres in what masters us. Harold Bloom titled his chapter on Emily Dickinson in *The Western Canon* "Blanks, Transports, the Dark"; these are words associated with the sublime. Burke writes of the "delightful horror" of the sublime; the "*dread majesty*" of it. The sublime is the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud; it is the biblical wisdom that begins in fear of the Lord. It is the shocking contrast of tempest and silence experienced by Elijah when he heard the "still, small voice" speaking from the heart of the whirlwind.

But it would be a mistake to map the Burkean sublime too quickly onto a Christian sublime. In the Christian worldview, sublimity is like cheap lipstick -- or the ashes of Ash Wednesday: It gets all over *everything*.

In a Fallen creation, every aspect of our world is soaked in the redemptive blood of Christ. In a world where miracles happen, a plain loaf of bread might be about to become a sheaf of roses; or, for that matter, the Body and Blood of Christ. In fact, as promised in the Magnificat, the humblest and lowliest things and people of the world were exalted at the Incarnation. God rode a donkey, and the twisted nails of the Cross

became highly prized relics. Can anything be fluffier, cuter, littler, and less threatening than a lamb? And yet even William Blake's "Little Lamb . . . [in] Softest clothing woolly bright" should, to those who venerate the Lamb of God, have a lot in common with Blake's bright-burning tiger.

Christianity changes our view of beauty, with beauty itself becoming shot through with the sublime, like iron ore in rock. Compare Burke on women's beauty -- which "almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection. Women are very sensible of this; for which reason, they learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness" -- with the Song of Songs' bride, "as terrible as an army with banners."

And Christianity changes the relationship of sublimity and humiliation. Few people are as unthreatening as the humiliated, from a secular point of view. And yet, from a Christian point of view, few people are closer to Jesus' own humiliating Passion and death. In Francis Spufford's fascinating polar-exploration book *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*, he quotes one of Burke's critics, Richard Payne Knight:

If . . . [Burke] had walked up St. James's street without his breeches, it would have occasioned great and universal *astonishment*; and if he had, at the same time, carried a loaded blunderbuss in his hands, the astonishment would have been mixed with no small portion of *terror*: but I do not believe that the united effects of these two powerful passions would have produced any sentiment or sensation approaching the sublime, even in the breasts of those who had the strongest sense of self-preservation, and the quickest sensibility of danger.

From the Burkean point of view, of course the gun-toting underpants man couldn't be sublime. But what if the author of this scene weren't Edmund Burke, but Flannery O'Connor? What if the unclad man was not a deranged Burke wielding a blunderbuss, but an ecstatic Francis enraptured by Christ? We sometimes focus so much on the holiness of our holy fools that we forget how *foolish* they can look; how ridiculous, how humiliated. We forget not only the horror but the absurdity of the Cross. And if our own Christianity never leads to our humiliation, how can we claim to follow the Crucified?

In Peter S. Beagle's fantasy novel *The Last Unicorn*, the unicorn wanders the world unrecognized; men have lost the ability to see her, and when she approaches them, most see only a dusty white mare. We should reawaken ourselves to the sublime for our own sake, because our hearts long to be shaken, even to be broken. We should reawaken ourselves to the sublime because, without sublimity, Christianity degenerates into middle-class morality and worship of the comfortable self.

And we should reawaken ourselves to the sublime because -- and this may be the point most obviously relevant to combating the shallowness of contemporary ethics and culture -- an encounter with the sublime can teach us the white-hot passion of submission. To be awed, astonished, thunderstruck is to prostrate oneself before what is greater than oneself. There is a fierce, ravished joy in submitting to what is sublime; it is rapture in the oldest sense of the word, as well as the contemporary.

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The Inheritance of Loss

Armstrong Williams | Column

2/5/09

No one is ever really ready for the death of a loved one, whether it's an aging parent or a sibling whose life is cut short prematurely. This reality was brought home to me when two of my aunts (Fredrena and Loupenn), my mother's sisters, both died within a few months of each other. While we all have faith that they are going to a better place, a place where we might again see them, we just don't know what will happen to our loved ones -- or ourselves -- after our bodies have died. Only God really knows. The one thing we *can* be sure of is that death is the final retort to the life we know and cherish.

Both of my aunts lived full and complete lives, well into their eighties and nineties, with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. But when my aunt Loupenn died recently, I felt no less pain in knowing that her life had achieved its full and final measure. Perhaps it was the look on my mother's face when I arrived in Marion, South Carolina, to be with family and attend to the details of the funeral. Her face bore a peculiar and unfamiliar look of pain and resignation that told me that she had finally accepted not only the finality of her sister's death, but the imminent approach of her own. My mother's generation has reached its winter season; once the chain of life is broken within a family -- especially in quick succession, as it was with my aunts' passings -- those of her generation can't help but wonder if it's only a matter of time for them.

For the living, especially those in the spring and summer of our lives, we often act as if life will go on forever. We are constantly making plans for the future, whether short or long term, but rarely taking into account the eventuality of our deaths. In our society, preparing for our own death is merely an afterthought, a contingency plan made to cover the risks inherent in a life of indeterminate duration. When a loved one dies, however, we often experience excruciating pain and

feelings of loss, even if the death was natural and predictable. As we sit in the pews listening to the preacher's account of the lives of a loved one, reduced to a few words of kindness and grace, we begin to consider our own mortality.

These little deaths, these reductions in certainty, challenge our routines and imprint themselves upon our identities. Every morning in the 25 years since my father died, I have called my mother immediately after waking up and conferenced my brothers in on the call. Over the years, this ritual of gratitude has evolved beyond the bounds of duty and attained the force of habit. As hard as I might try, I cannot fathom a life in which I am not able to hear my mother's voice on the other end of the line. However, even as such a reality challenges my imagination, my rational mind knows that the day will come.

As a person of middle age and (to my knowledge) great health, the passing of my parents' generation holds special significance. It means that, very soon, my siblings and I will attain senior status within our families. All of those who have come along behind us -- sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, grandchildren and great-grandchildren -- will begin to look to us for guidance and wisdom. I am humbled by this daunting reality and am becoming aware of its consequences.

On the one hand, the natural progression of life holds that one generation paves the way and then gives way to the next. This inexorable changing of the guard brings with it its own set of rewards and challenges. As we age, our bodies -- even if well cared for -- eventually break down. This decline often takes years to reach its final stage, where finally the body can no longer function. But with every birth among the

ensuing generations, we are reminded of our younger selves and the miracle of life.

Perhaps the most formidable challenge that death poses to our faith is its seeming finality. In many religious and cultural traditions, the uncertainty over what happens to us when we die is subsumed in various rituals: the funeral pyre, the eulogy, ancestral worship, mummification, and on and on. Without such rituals, the loss would be too shocking and too irredeemable for many of us to go on living.

But while faith can ease our feelings of grief and loss, it rarely grants us the absolute intellectual certitude we crave. There is no way for the living to measure or investigate the world we pray our loved ones may inherit after this one; ours is an inheritance of loss.

"The Armstrong Williams Show" is broadcast daily on XM Satellite Power 169 from 9:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Pay to Pray: The Church's Simony Problem

Jeffrey Tucker | Column

2/6/09

The Catholic Church in the English-speaking world has a serious problem, and it is becoming ever more apparent in the digital age: It maintains a copyright on its ritual texts and charges royalties for printing and distributing them, while admitting only narrow exceptions.

The Catholic Church is alone among major denominations in using this pay-to-pray method of financing. The texts of Episcopal, Lutheran, and Orthodox Churches are in the public domain, and free for anyone to print under any conditions. This encourages publishers to disseminate the texts, composers to use them for setting music, and Web site builders and bloggers to quote them freely in any form.

I've contacted many leaders in these other denominations concerning this practice of maintaining public access to the texts, and, without exception, they found the inquiry to be an odd one. If the mission of the Church is to spread the gospel and evangelize for the faith, what possible rationale could there be for charging for the right to publish the ritual?

That's a question that might be asked of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that authorizes them to hold the copyright to the Missal texts. After all, the Mass text isn't like the latest Harry Potter novel, the product of a single author published by a profit-making book seller. It is a text to an indulged religious activity that is required by the Faith itself. Presumably its "liturgical author" is not a single earthly institution.

Nonetheless, under the formal policies of the Catholic Church in the English-speaking world, if you publish and sell the Mass text, you must pay ICEL. If you record the Mass text, you must pay ICEL. If you put the Mass text on, for example, educational flash cards that are sold through a home-based family business, you must pay ICEL. If your parish choir records a CD and sells

it in the parish to raise money for a new organ, it must pay ICEL.

That's because ICEL claims to own the text, and so it can charge anyone for use. As ICEL says:

Any publication produced for sale which contains ICEL translations is subject to a royalty or flat fee. Publications included are books, booklets, pamphlets, cards, diskettes, CD, and other electronic media used for liturgical celebrations or popular participation. Other publications containing ICEL texts but not for use during liturgical celebrations, such as textbooks, commentaries, religious education books and materials, private prayerbooks, recordings, etc. may be assessed a royalty or flat fee.

Even if you are not selling anything, you might still have to pay ICEL. Let's say a local magazine publisher is a member of the parish and volunteers to print up programs for a Church dedication liturgy. That practice is excluded under ICEL's permissions for free use.

What does ICEL charge? Good question -- its policies do not say. You have to contact ICEL directly and then they assess a fee depending on many factors. It usually involves sending a yearly check based on sales numbers and revenue. For any institution, parish, or family business, this means additional costs associated with accounting and reporting on sales and revenue for the purposes of paying royalties to ICEL.

So you have to write them to ask. Once they get back to you, you are on the radar screen. If you *then* publish without paying, what happens? Presumably you could be hit with litigation and lawyer fees and court costs, and your life is ruined. (I'm unclear how often this has actually happened, but I would like to know.)

As it is, ICEL lists exactly 63 institutions that have been approved to publish ICEL materials and thereby

pay royalties. How plausible is it that in the entire English-speaking world, including the whole of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, only 63 institutions are publishing the approved Mass texts?

I don't believe it -- not in a time when literally *anyone* can be a commercial publisher with a few clicks of the mouse. As a matter of fact, I know several major publishers who use the Mass text that are not listed as paying money to ICEL -- and no, I won't name them, for fear of unleashing the lawyers. It could be that ICEL's policies have spawned a generation of Missal pirates.

Certainly the problem has ended up encouraging massive abuse of Mass texts by musicians who don't want to pay the ICEL tax. The most widely used Mass setting in the United States carefully adjusts the official text so that ICEL doesn't have to be paid. Thus do we sing, "Jesus, Lamb of God," instead of "Lamb of God."

The Catholic Church's problem with charging for ritual texts isn't limited to ICEL. The approved version of Scripture is under copyright, and royalties are due for using that as well, even though that translation (the New American Bible) is widely considered the least elegant and accurate on the market.

A more serious problem came up when the USCCB approved the Revised Grail Psalter for use as the Psalm source for Mass. The [Grail Society](#) in the UK is the source, and its rights are administered by HarperCollins, which is said to charge as much as 10 percent for printing King David's texts.

This has given rise to an entire library of secretly circulated Psalms in the UK, set by Church musicians who can't afford to pay the publishing moguls.

This problem is now emigrating to the United States. The Conception Abbey revised the Grail to conform to new Vatican mandates, but then sold its rights to GIA publishing. GIA is a for-profit mega-publishing powerhouse with no official ties to the Catholic Church.

Nonetheless, it is the worldwide administrator of the rights to the Revised Grail Psalter, and it has so far refused to say how much it will charge other publishers. It won't even tell Conception Abbey or the USCCB of its specific plans. But as a capitalist publisher in a position to deny rights to its competition, it is obvious that there is a conflict of interest here.

Who at the USCCB is aware of this growing problem, one which impedes the spreading of the gospel, taxes musical creativity, and punishes small publishers? Who is concerned that Catholics in the pews across the English-speaking world are shelling out millions and millions merely for the right to have printed copies of the Mass and the Psalms and the Bible made available for sacramental use? I'm not sure the issue is on the radar screen at all. It should be.

It is conceivable that ICEL and GIA and NAB could maintain copyright to the texts and not charge royalties, but of course that would defeat the purpose of the copyright in the first place. The only real solution here is to put all texts for the Mass into the public domain. The USCCB should immediately insist on this, without qualification.

I must now raise the topic of simony. Does this ritual tax really amount to that? The Catholic Encyclopedia defines simony as a serious sin that amounts to "a deliberate intention of buying or selling for a temporal price such things as are spiritual."

Philosopher Gertrude Elizabeth M. Anscombe (1919-2001) addressed the problem as it concerned Africa, where it was discovered that some priests were charging for Mass. She made an interesting distinction: Charging money for the fulfillment of a private intention, she writes, is not simony, because such special intentions are not part of the general right of all Catholics. But the Mass itself does constitute such a right, and hence cannot be withheld pending payment.

As applied to the Mass, this might mean that it is perfectly acceptable to charge for hymn books, missalettes, prayer books, and the like. Compositions

can carry a copyright, as can collections of homilies and instruction books. A thriving marketplace for Church goods and publications is a welcome thing. But the ritual text *itself*? This seems to be a clear case of something that must be free.

Every other religion seems to understand this. What has gone wrong in the Catholic Church that this problem has been allowed to fester uncorrected? Who

will stand up and say that this is wrong and demand a change?

With new Missal texts being prepared for distribution, now is the time to say 'no' to simony.

Jeffrey Tucker is the editor of Mises.org and a frequent contributor to InsideCatholic.com.

Forbidden Fruit -- and Sponges

Danielle Bean | Column

2/6/09

A few years ago, my son Ambrose was hospitalized with a lung infection. The two weeks he spent away from home were trying times for our family, but I have one particularly fond memory of his stay.

One day, when I returned to his hospital room after being away for a few hours, he made a startling confession.

"This afternoon, while you were gone, I was flipping through the TV channels and I . . . I . . . saw some *SpongeBob SquarePants*."

I tried not to laugh.

You see, I had a rule back then: I did not allow my kids to watch *SpongeBob*. Some might think it's silly to deny your kids such innocent family-style fun. Others might assume that I was just being a good mom -- thoroughly researching various television programs and carefully choosing what kinds of cultural influences my children would and would not be exposed to.

That's not exactly true, though. At least not about *SpongeBob*.

The truth is, I just didn't like the look of him. I'm prejudiced that way. I had never even watched a single episode of *SpongeBob*, but I outlawed him because I didn't like the way the pictures are drawn. And those briefs he sometimes wears? Well, they looked kind of gross. Vulgar, even. What did I know?

Predictably, my maternal moratorium on *SpongeBob SquarePants* led to some of my children's preoccupation with all things *SpongeBob*. In fact, if you happened to ask four-year-old Stephen back then what his favorite television show was, he would have proudly declared that it was none other than *SpongeBob SquarePants* -- a show he had never seen.

Stephen's fascination was only reinforced one year when his grandfather gave him a special birthday present: *Ants in the SpongeBob SquarePants*, a wildly entertaining kids' game featuring plastic pants, itchy insects, and the famous comic sponge.

When he unwrapped this forbidden fruit, the other kids' eyes grew wide with scandal. Stephen, however, looked deliciously naughty as he pulled it from the box and hugged the plastic pieces to his chest.

"Sponge Bob!" he cried with glee. "My favorite!"

Dan shot me a look over the boy's head that said, "What on earth could my father have been thinking?"

I don't know. Maybe Grandpa asked Stephen what his favorite TV show was.

But that was years ago. This is now. And that is why, a couple of months ago, when my oldest daughter stood before me, television remote in hand, and asked, "Can't we watch just one show?" I said yes.

That's right. I said yes to the sponge.

And the children were smitten -- positively smitten with the eager-eyed, brief-wearing, pineapple-dwelling sponge.

"What happened?" I thought to myself one recent day, as even two-year-old Daniel sang along to the theme song. "I used to have standards."

But I still do. They are just different ones now. Ones that suit the new family we are growing up to be. It has nothing to do with a cartoon sponge who may or may not have taught my three-year-old son to wiggle his bottom in a way that makes a mother cringe. It has

everything to do with my growing realization of the imperfection and limitations of parenthood.

It sometimes seems we parents are doomed to wind up with unending questions and self doubt. If we outlaw *SpongeBob*, does that only make him all the more appealing? Will our children grow up to skip classes and binge on cartoons during their college years? Will they flunk out, as my husband so often threatens them, and wind up living in a box under the freeway?

Of course, there is no easy answer. There never has been a pre-set outline to follow in order to achieve parental perfection.

It's trial -- and a whole lot of error. It's communicating and explaining not just the rules but the reasons behind them. It's convincing our kids that we really have their ultimate happiness in mind when we restrict them. It's teaching them not only to obey God,

but to know God and to love Him, too. It's picking our battles. It's being uncertain. It's second-guessing and messing up and starting over and trying again.

And finally, it's finding yourself thinking that parenthood is the hardest thing, the most wonderful thing, and the most daunting thing you have ever done. And recognizing that's how you know you are doing it right.

Danielle Bean, a mother of eight, is senior editor of [Faith & Family](#) magazine and author of [My Cup of Tea: Musings of a Catholic Mom](#) (Pauline 2005) and [Mom to Mom, Day to Day: Advice and Support for Catholic Living](#) (Pauline 2007). Visit her blog at www.daniellebean.com.

The God of Rock

Mark Judge | Review

2/2/09

U2's Achtung Baby: Meditations on Love in the Shadow of the Fall
Stephen Catanzarite, Continuum, 107 pages, \$10.95

He gets it.

Stephen Catanzarite has written arguably the most important book about rock music of the young 21st century. *U2's Achtung Baby: Meditations on Love in the Shadow of the Fall* is a small volume -- more like a thick pamphlet than a book -- but each line is a mini-dissertation on the truth about pop music, or at least much of pop music. For years, individual Christians (including your scribe) have argued that much of rock music is an eloquent celebration of the unity and joy that man once experienced in paradise, as well as an elemental protest against the fallen world. Rock music always cries for the love that transcends pain and physical barriers -- the love that brings us back to God. It rejects the hypocrisy of the world. It is, in a word, theological. Just listen to U2.

Making this point has not been easy. A while back I wrote a piece for "On Faith," the *Washington Post's* religion Web site, about the Catholicism of the Beatles. The vicious comments that followed my essay (none of which actually addressed my point) were charged with the kinds of hysteria one finds among the jihadists. The Beatles, Christian? Fool! Idiot! It was left to one commentator to note the irony of this army of open-minded hipsters declaring that rock and roll could be absolutely anything -- except for what I think it is. So much for the imagination, not to mention the freedom of interpretation.

Catanzarite -- a Catholic, and the managing director of the Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center outside of Pittsburgh -- has, in 100 pages, made my argument with an intelligence and poetic dash that lifts the soul as it engages the mind. The book is a part of Continuum publishing's "33 1/3" series, small volumes that allow a writer to critique a single seminal pop music album.

Others in the series have taken on Radiohead, the Kinks, and Neil Young, among others, but subject and writer have not been matched as brilliantly as they are in *Achtung Baby*, Catanzarite's take on the U2 album of the same name.

We know we're not in *Rolling Stone* land -- that is, that Paleozoic rock-critic preserve where every rock song is about antinomianism, sex, and (yawn) drugs -- when we open the first page and are met with a quote from John Henry Cardinal Newman. Then he hits us with this: In *Achtung Baby*, he observes,

It is all there: our infinite potential for dreaming, discovering, and building, and the trouble we cause by confusing our liberty with license; our wanderings through streets both named and unnamed in search of peace or escape, enlightenment or forgetfulness, love or domination; the longing in our hearts for unity between and among God and man, man and woman, brother and sister, parent and child, and the restlessness, pride, larceny and fear in our heads that disturbs even the happiest of homes; our reveling in the fact that we truly are "fearfully and wonderfully made," and the sad acceptance of our brokenness; the excellence of fidelity; and the appeal of seduction; the glamour of evil, and the disaster of sin; the paradox of being rooted in time but destined for eternity; the God shaped hole at the center of our being, and our vain attempts to fill it with something, everything, *anything* other than God.

After that paragraph, it should be hard to listen to rock music -- or read rock criticism -- the same again. Catanzarite isn't shoehorning Christ into rock music in order to legitimize his fandom; to the contrary, after

reading his book, it becomes obvious that it is the *secular* rock community that makes what is a spiritual popular art form into a never-ending vehicle for revolution and rebellion.

But even the simplest reading of the music won't back this up. Catanzarite juxtaposes the melancholy elegy of the song *One* with St. Paul's writings about the nature of love -- and it doesn't just seem to fit, it seems obvious. *Until the End of the World* shows Jesus going to hell to confront Judas, and yet showing mercy at the end. T. S. Eliot, Chesterton, Yeats, and Fulton Sheen are cited in the exploration of other songs, and the connection is seamless. Catanzarite's prose is assured, clear, and at times pithy: "Free love is neither," he declares at the opening of a chapter on the disasters of the sexual revolution.

I recently contacted Catanzarite about his book; he knew some of my work, which, like his, has dealt with the Christian themes found in rock music. "Things are looking up," he quipped. "Now there's two of us." Christian organizations in the West have an opportunity to recognize that, for the last 40 years, young people -- and now not-so-young people -- have been getting their spiritual direction from rock bands, and this is not

necessarily a bad thing. We are in desperate need of a clearinghouse for the music -- a magazine, organization, or simple Web site where faithful scholars can interpret the tunes, praising the good and condemning the bad. It would not be the silly "devil's music" spittle of preachers in the past, nor the supine anything-goes lassitude of the "religious but cool" parent. It would be a place that appreciates the ardent passion of rock and roll, as well as how that passion can turn demonic, often from one track to the next.

We can either acknowledge the powerful post-Fall longing for Christ in these sounds, or let them keep taking cues from *Rolling Stone* and MTV. In that case, we will let the kids keep thinking they're rebelling against God, when they are actually crying for Him.

Mark Judge has authored several books, the latest of which, [A Tremor of Bliss: Reclaiming Sexual Virtue From the Pagan Left](#), will be released on April 14. You can also find him at his frequently updated [YouTube Channel](#).

Outside Narnia: Children's Fantasy and Christianity

Eve Tushnet | Classic

1/30/09

A witch helped me become a Christian. OK, the biographical blurbs on Tamora Pierce's book jackets don't actually call her a witch, but they do say that she's taught witchcraft; close enough. Pierce is the author of several children's fantasy series, of which the most famous is probably the Alanna series: *Alanna: The First Adventure*, *In the Hand of the Goddess*, *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, and *Lioness Rampant*. The titles should make the plotline no surprise: Girl dresses as boy in order to become knight in sexist but goddess-worshipping, pagan, vaguely medieval society. The books are saved from feminist cliché by Pierce's talent for characterization -- her prose is workaday, but her characters are complex, realistic, and easy to love.

The Alanna books are not exactly the kind of thing you'd give as first communion presents. Magic in these books is treated like science: Witchcraft is intrinsically neither good nor bad; it all depends on who's using it and why. There's a pantheon of gods, including the Crooked God of lawbreaking. Premarital sex is a nonissue (although it isn't shown in the books, just alluded to). There's even a scene in which Alanna gets a magical contraceptive charm.

But look closer. Pierce's books also teach children a chivalric code that is radically countercultural in the insta-gratification, MTV world of contemporary childhood. Alanna adheres to a difficult and deeply Christian knightly code of protecting the weak, treating women gracefully, respecting her elders, hard work, self-sacrifice, courage, and honor. How often do kids hear the word "honor" today? How often do they believe it?

Much of contemporary culture rests on assumptions that would make Christianity, and Christ's death on the cross, not so much false as irrelevant. If suffering is only a nuisance to be avoided, if love is a negotiation between two egoistic sets of wants, if honor

and chivalry are nothing but cloaks for misogyny and violence, if duty is Puritanism and the natural world is an accidental effusion of molecules, then what is Christ?

All unwittingly, non-Christian and even anti-Christian authors may provide their readers with an antidote to these cultural poisons. This fact may become clearer by contrast with those authors whose Christianity clearly informs their work. I've noticed three different approaches.

The first is submerged Christian allegory or parable. This is the most familiar approach -- the one taken by C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Christianity is not explicit (I had no clue that the Chronicles of Narnia books were supposed to be Christian until I was an adult), but it breathes in every word and event in the story. A child raised Christian might find these books reinforcement for his or her faith; a child raised outside Christianity, as I was, might not even notice the Christian themes.

The second approach is life embedded in a Christian culture. In these books, Christianity is taken for granted as the truth about the world and the major force shaping the characters' society. John Bellairs and Margot Benary-Isbert are two strikingly different examples. Bellairs wrote spooky Gothic mysteries featuring anxiety-ridden Catholic kids trying to unravel the demonic workings of evil spirits; Benary-Isbert wrote *The Wicked Enchantment*, a sweet, common-sensical confection about the need for love and forgiveness. Bellairs used many Catholic trappings -- the Urim and the Thummim feature in one book, the Litany of Loreto in another -- but more importantly, Catholicism is simply assumed. That makes the books' spiritual world more than a little iffy. All those assumptions leave little room for deeply felt faith; Bellairs succumbs to the temptation often cited by evangelical Protestants, in which "Catholic culture" crowds out Jesus. Bellairs's books probably would not

pass the stringent purity tests that some Catholic parents would apply to their children's reading. Benary-Isbert, too, focuses on the culture (life lived with the sound of the cathedral bells always in the background) and not the faith that sustains it. But her story, which takes place during Holy Week, has a very Christian "message" and nothing to offend parents. (It also has a great message about localism and freedom, by the way.) These books were clearly not meant to be didactic; the authors wrote about a Catholic world because that's what they knew.

Ottfried Preussler's *The Satanic Mill* is the only representative of the third approach: clearly, almost brazenly Christian from start to finish. *The Satanic Mill* ought to be a classic. It follows a young man who becomes entangled in true wickedness (there are eerie echoes of the Holocaust in the image of a mill that grinds human bones into meal) and is saved through the love of a Christian woman. The fact that I loved this book while I despised Christianity should make it clear that Preussler is a master craftsman.

Non-Christian fantasies often show surprising similarities to books in the first and third categories -- perhaps because Christianity has so deeply soaked into our literary culture that even non-Christian works often echo Christian truths. The non-Christian fantasies are in some ways the opposite of Bellairs's books: The trappings may be vaguely Wiccan (as in the Alanna books) or even anti-Catholic (as in the barely veiled anti-Church allusions of Ann Downer's Spellkey trilogy), but the underlying lessons are often countercultural in many of the same places that Christianity is. The work these fantasies do is "pre-evangelization," to be sure -- but everyone needs pre-evangelization, even Christian children. Many Christians are tempted, at different points in their lives, to find Christianity irrelevant or wrong. At that point it can help a great deal when even the early reading we did that was not Christian imbued us with convictions that make Christianity more obviously true.

What about anti-Christian novels? There are some children's fantasies that are simply and directly opposed to Christian belief. Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials series is the most famous example; Pullman has stated in interview after interview that he wishes to be the anti-Lewis, drawing children away from Christ by presenting God as a tyrant and a liar. I haven't read Pullman's books, so I can't comment on his work. Parents might want to check out Daniel P. Moloney's review essay in the May 2001 *First Things*: Moloney claims that Pullman may have tried to discredit Christianity, but the spine of his story remains surprisingly Christian. (For an opposing view of Pullman's work, see [Cynthia Grenier's article](#) in the October 2001 issue of *Crisis*.)

There's no such unintentional, submerged Christianity in the Ghost series by Susan Price. I have no idea whether she intended her books to discredit or reject Christian belief; for all I know, Price herself is Christian. But we know authors best through their works, not their interviews, and *Ghost Drum*, *Ghost Song*, and *Ghost Dance: The Czar's Black Angel* are among the grimmest fairy tales ever written. The trilogy's conclusion, in which an entire people troops off into the land of the dead to live as shadows forever, is the most nihilistic moment I can think of in children's literature. Price's world is without hope and mostly without love.

Should parents buy some of these books if their children ask for them? Maybe, for several reasons; let's start with the most utilitarian. Price is a lush, gorgeous prose stylist. Her imagery, if cruel, is vivid and compelling. Kids who read Price will want to read more, much more. If your kids ask for Price, give 'em Preussler next; by the time they finish her trilogy, they will be addicted to reading, and that addiction will serve them well.

The very beauty of Price's prose also helps children see the meanings of things in the natural world. Like all great poetry, Price's writing is vividly incarnational in its sensibility: The things in the world have a meaning; matter matters; and the world and the objects in it are

gifts, not accidents. Her prose and her plots counteract one another.

But the most important reason that children who want Price should read her is this: Children know nihilism. Children, too, have their dark nights of the soul. Children can apprehend some of the terrible possibilities of the world -- that there is no protecting God, there are no "everlasting arms"; that there is no reward for the just, no punishment for the wicked. Much in our contemporary culture supplements these beliefs, yet sneaks them in with sugarcoating. Allan Bloom called it "nihilism, American-style" -- sunny-side up. Price's books rip off the happy face and show the skull beneath the skin. That's a harsh lesson, but some kids really do need it -- and they need to know that Christians can answer Price's worldview. Children who think their religion is based on ignoring the unpleasant aspects of reality will not be Christian for long; Price's books show a nihilistic world in an undiluted form, and therefore make it easier to discern, understand, and reject.

Finally, I should deal with one argument against many fantasy books that I take very seriously: If children read about attractive witchcraft, they'll begin to practice it. As a child, I read all kinds of how-to guides for casting spells. I read the simplistic, fake history *The Magic Cauldron* (imagine if John Cornwell wrote elementary-level books about goddess worship and witch trials). I also read a lot of fantasy books with

witches good, witches bad, and witches every which way. The first two types of books were by far the more spiritually damaging. In fantasy, witches aren't real, so there's little attraction to trying out their practices. (Preussler himself has a charming book called *The Little Witch*; her witchery is funny, but it's hard to imagine a kid wanting to try it at home.) In fantasy, witchcraft is a plot device, not an attractive reality. I'd be genuinely worried if my child were reading *The Magic Cauldron* or Daniel Cohen's *Curses, Hexes, and Spells* -- those books make witchcraft look rebellious, real, and attractive.

In the end, the most effective way to help your child draw out the best in reading and reject the worst elements is to be a model of Christian faith. And it's a cliché, but it's true that talking about what your children are reading will help them make sense of it. They're probably not finding the same things in the book that adults would find. What they notice and remember won't necessarily be what parents notice. And there's so much richness in children's fantasy -- in both storytelling ability and moral lessons -- that it would be a shame to keep children from that treasure trove.

Eve Tushnet is a freelance writer in Washington, D.C. This article originally appeared in the July/August 2002 issue of Crisis Magazine.

How Birth Control Changed America for the Worst

Kathryn Jean Lopez | Classic

2/4/09

Amanda, age 30 -- I've changed her name and those of other women I interviewed for this story in order to protect their privacy -- is a daughter of the sexual revolution. Her mother taught her that "sex was free, and successful motherhood could be accomplished through good intentions," she says. Sexual freedom and successful motherhood, Amanda learned, meant one thing: birth control. The message she received, she says, not only from her mother but from her teachers, her friends, and the entire culture around her was, "Sex means fun, and the consequences of sex have passed."

At age 16, Amanda was fitted for a diaphragm, and for the next nine years, she had sexual encounter after sexual encounter because "I was desperate for love and attention." She marched in Washington for reproductive rights. "Gee, this is so right," she thought at the time. "No one should be able to tell a woman what to do with her body. All women should have access to health care, birth control, and abortions. Anyone who can't see this is surely a misogynist."

Amanda, still single -- although she did have a child out of wedlock about ten years ago -- says she is now paying for the I-can-do-whatever-I-want lifestyle that sexual freedom had promised her. "Countless broken hearts and an unwanted pregnancy at 21 showed me several things that I wish that my mother and the feminists that I looked up to had told me: Modesty is important. Marriage is a sacrament. All life is sacred. And there are consequences to selfish and destructive behavior."

She sees magazines such as *Seventeen* on newsstands promoting carefree but "responsible" sex with the help of birth control to the newest generation of teenagers, and she wishes she could tell every reader that there is no "safe sex" outside of marriage. "There are also tremendous consequences to the continuous

broken hearts that frequently result from shallow relationships," she says.

Amanda, born in 1970, is a walking example of the tremendous -- and in many ways unexpected and unhappy -- changes that widespread contraceptive use has wrought in the American way of life. As late as the mid-1960s, many states still banned the sale of birth control devices, which no Christian denomination had officially approved until 1930, when Anglican bishops voted to authorize their use by married couples. In 1965, five years before Amanda was born, birth control became a constitutional right for married Americans, thanks to a Supreme Court ruling (*Griswold v. Connecticut*), and a few years later, the high court (in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*) extended the right to the unmarried as well. The court rulings coincided with the invention of the birth control pill in the early 1960s, the first efficient and relatively easy-to-use form of mass-market contraception.

Breaking the Links

As political scientist Francis Fukuyama pointed out in his 1999 book, *The Great Disruption*, the pill, by breaking the link between sex and reproduction, also broke the link between sex and marriage in the minds of many young Americans, including Amanda's mother and, later, Amanda herself. The sexual revolution was officially on.

And because -- again thanks to the pill and other new contraceptives -- early marriage and childbearing were no longer automatic givens in the lives of most women, so was another massive social change of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the feminist revolution, "propelling millions of women into the workplace and undermining the traditional understandings on which the family has been based," as Fukuyama wrote. (Technological changes that transformed America's

economy from industrial to information-based also encouraged the influx of women into the job force, Fukuyama noted.)

And then in 1973, when Amanda was two years old, the Supreme Court, invoking the same constitutional "right to privacy" that underlay its earlier decisions striking down prohibitions on the sale of contraceptive devices, allowed women nearly unlimited access to abortion in *Roe vs. Wade*. This effectively removed unexpected pregnancy as an incentive for marriage, an unprecedented development in the history of human social arrangements.

Melissa, now age 43 but an adolescent during the social sea change that Fukuyama describes, says birth control "had a huge impact" on her life. "I graduated from high school in 1976. As my social circle expanded after graduation, and we discovered that we could get into certain bars and drink with fake IDs, I learned very quickly that as long as I was careful to take my birth control pills and showed a bit of discretion when choosing sex partners, I was free to dabble in a new and exciting field."

Not surprisingly, the possibilities seemingly open to young women by their ability to control their fertility have made deciding not to have sex before marriage look like an eccentric choice to most. Take the case of Sarah, 23, single and currently in her first sexual relationship, except for one brief experimental encounter. She says that ever since her doctor put her on birth control pills to relieve menstrual cramps, the lure of seemingly consequence-free sex changed her attitude toward sleeping with the man she was dating. In an earlier long-term relationship, Sarah, who considers herself somewhat religious, had resisted the temptation to have sex with her boyfriend. But now, thanks to her knowledge that the pill is her safeguard against unwanted pregnancy, she has accepted the sexual dimension to relationships with men that she had earlier resisted.

Martha, 32, was raised Catholic, and she remembers that "the widespread acceptance and availability of contraceptives influenced some of my

friends who were also Catholic to sleep with their boyfriends prior to marriage. I can remember at age 20 hearing that one friend had started taking the pill, and another was trying to find condoms large enough to accommodate her well-endowed boyfriend. I blush to recount these conversations now and wish I had had the moral fortitude to challenge my friends at the time. Both of these friends were fortunate enough to marry the men that they were sleeping with in college, but I know others are not so lucky."

The greatest change that the pill wrought, however -- as Fukuyama also pointed out -- was not in female but in male behavior. Incentives for men to either get married or stay married simply faded with the sudden mass availability of birth control. The divorce rate in the United States skyrocketed starting in the late 1960s, to the point that one out of every two marriages ended in dissolution. Only recently has it begun to drift slightly lower. Illegitimate births have soared, too, as men have increasingly viewed unwanted pregnancy as their female partner's responsibility and accordingly declined to enter "shotgun" marriages.

Since men's ties to family life are precarious without strong external incentives to marry -- at least in the view of Fukuyama and others -- a variety of other social ills, from crime to many fathers' financial abandonment of their offspring, have flourished over the past three decades. The high abortion rate nowadays -- 1.3 million annually -- probably has much to do with men's desire to avoid responsibility for the children they conceive.

University of Chicago professors Leon and Amy Kass, in *Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar*, a 1999 collection of essays about marriage and courtship, describe what their students told them the first day of an undergraduate seminar they teach: "The students were asked what they thought was the most important decision that they would ever have to make in their lives. Nearly all the students answered in terms related to self-fulfillment: 'Deciding which career to pursue,' 'Figuring out which graduate or professional school to attend,' 'Choosing where I should live.' Only one

student answered differently, 'Deciding who should be the mother of my children.' For his eccentric opinion, and especially for this quaint way of putting it, he was promptly attacked by nearly every other member of the class, men and women alike."

Birth control's promise of years of *Friends*-style swinging singlehood for young adults of both sexes, and its (at least theoretical) guarantee against unwanted pregnancy for young women on career tracks, have led to delayed marriage and childbearing. The age of women giving birth in the United States keeps rising. In 2000, Massachusetts officially became the first state in which there were more babies born to women age 30 and older than to those under 30. Twenty years ago, there were nearly three times as many new mothers under the age of 30 than over 30. In Colorado, nearly 37 percent of the babies born in 1999 were to mothers 30 and older.

Fertility Crisis

This trend has led to a fertility crisis in industrialized nations, to the point that the overpopulation-bomb warnings of the 1970s have given way to underpopulation concerns. The media have taken notice, in particular, of Italy, where the large family seems to have faded into history. A year 2000 wrap-up in the worldly *Economist* magazine noted, "As long as women enjoy earning their own money and men hate changing nappies, the long-run trend will surely be for people to have rather fewer children on average than the replacement of the human race requires. As a result, the 21st century will probably see for the first time in modern days, human numbers stop rising and begin to decline."

Many women, however, are still having children -- although they're having them in unusual ways. Madonna did it by conceiving two children out of wedlock when she was between husbands and unsure that she would have a permanent man in her life. Former model Cheryl Tiegs did it via a donor's eggs and a surrogate mother's rented womb. Playwright Wendy

Wasserstein did it via numerous embryos implanted in her own womb, one of which finally "took." College-age women now read advertisements in their school newspapers offering \$75,000-\$100,000 for their "donated" eggs -- the extraction of which is a procedure that, some studies have shown, may be the cause of their own infertility down the line. The mistreatment of human embryos in the course of many of these high-tech reproductive strategies is typically shocking, resulting in dozens of discards.

In many ways, racy water-cooler television shows like *Ally McBeal* and *Sex in the City* are way behind the culture. In an article in the January 2001 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* on the endless reproductive options that science now offers women, Juergen Eisermann, director of the South Florida Institute for Reproductive Medicine, commented, "I like to joke that the perfect gift for the female college student will be to have some of her eggs frozen and kept available for whenever she wants a family." It's no joke, though. Ally can forget about finding her elusive Mr. Right. Who needs love and marriage, when technology can take care of the production of babies?

Not only has birth control torn apart traditional notions of family life, but it has taken a personal toll on young women like Amanda, who learn the hard way that when sex is readily available, people have a hard time making romantic commitments. The philosopher Allan Bloom noted this phenomenon more than a decade ago in his book *Love and Friendship*. "There is an appalling matter-of-factness in public speech about sex today," he wrote. "On television schoolchildren tell us about how they will now use condoms in their contacts -- I was about to say adventures, but that would be overstating their significance." Bloom also decried the use of the passionless word "relationship" that most people nowadays use to describe their pairings. He wondered what had happened to the word "lover," with its connotations of erotic intensity.

Even Katha Pollitt, a columnist for the ultraliberal opinion magazine *The Nation*, recently bemoaned the fact that the promised post-pill paradise has yet to become a reality. "The Pill has changed a lot, but if you

look back at what it was supposed to do -- let women have guilt-free, carefree sex like men -- it hasn't happened," she wrote recently. "It's not even working at the level of contraception. Look at the abortion rate in this country."

Resignation

Despite the consensus that many of the consequences of birth control have been untoward and even tragic, the prevailing social attitude isn't revisionism but resignation: Heartaches and family disruption are the price to be paid for lifting traditional sexual restraints. Melissa, for example, now divorced and with three children ages 23, 20, and 15, says she has no regrets about buying into the contraceptive revolution of the 1970s. "The availability of birth control gave many of us a feeling that we had been given a new freedom, new territory to explore. Whether that's a good thing or not for anyone else isn't my place to say."

In fact, most Americans, even religious Americans, even Catholics, now consider birth control to be a right to which employers and the government should subsidize access. When former Missouri Republican senator John Ashcroft was being considered by the Senate for confirmation as attorney general earlier this year, the religious-freedom group People for the American Way (whose president, Ralph Neas, was raised Catholic and attended the University of Notre Dame) blasted Ashcroft for his presumably outside-of-the-mainstream positions, including his Senate vote to prohibit public funding of birth control for federal workers.

Says a Christian husband whose wife routinely uses contraception: "I think that God intends us to behave in ways that are relevant to our time. We no longer need twelve babies because half of them won't survive and the other six are needed to see us through our old age. I also hope that we have progressed past the image of women as childbearing vessels and think of them as people, too. My wife would be a lot less interesting if

her life revolved around pumping out kids -- if one could call that a life."

In a recent Internet discussion group for Christian married couples, Susan expressed similar sentiment: "I don't think using some type of 'family planning' or birth control means one can't also be trusting God to provide. I think God gave us brains and that he hoped we'd use them. I have a very hard time managing the two kids I have right now."

Neither are Catholic parents immune from this kind of thinking. When Laura, 32, suffered a miscarriage last year, another mother approached her at a play at their children's Catholic elementary school and expressed her empathy -- as far as it could go. After "I'm sorry about your miscarriage," Laura reports her friend, a Sunday Mass regular, saying. Then, Laura recalls, she added, "You do know you can stop after three, don't you? I had my tubes tied. You should consider it."

This brave new world of fertility control is full of sad ironies. Deborah, 30, a mother of two, had her fallopian tubes tied during her first marriage; her then-husband had threatened to divorce her if she were to become pregnant again. The couple divorced anyway, and now she is married to a man who wants children as much as she wants more children. But they have to wait until they save enough to pay for a reversal of the tubal ligation that could eventually result in the birth of the new baby they yearn for -- and Deborah knows that her biological time clock is ticking in the meantime.

Kathy Raviele, a Catholic physician practicing in Atlanta, points out that fertility problems are only the tip of the iceberg for many women who have bought into the contraceptive revolution. "In 1960, when the pill was first invented, the incidence of breast cancer was one in 25 women; today it is one in eight women," she says. A study published last fall in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* supports Raviele's supposition that there is a definite link between pill use and breast cancer. And according to the *Physician's Desk Reference*, women who took the pill as teenagers

are at higher risk of developing breast cancer when in their 30s than women in the population as a whole.

Furthermore, partly because easy access to contraception has reduced women's fear of pregnancy, once the single greatest deterrent to promiscuity, the United States now has the highest incidence of sexually transmitted diseases in the Western world. Nor do contraceptives necessarily forestall all unwanted pregnancies as its users hope.

Pope Paul VI's Predictions

Nearly all of these social and even medical consequences of the contraceptive revolution were foreseen with astonishing accuracy by Pope Paul VI in his anti-birth control encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, issued in 1968, as the revolution was just beginning. Paul wrote that widespread use of contraceptives would lead to "conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality," and that many a man would lose respect for the woman in his life and "no longer [care] for her physical and psychological equilibrium" to the point that he would consider her "as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion." Paul also prophesied that mass acceptance of birth control would place a "dangerous weapon...in the hands of those public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies." And it would mislead people into thinking that they had total control over their bodies. Hardly any of these predictions -- from promiscuity, to avoidance of male reproductive responsibilities, to the destruction of human embryos as women who delay childbearing too long try desperately to get pregnant -- have failed to come true.

In their book *Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar*, the Kasses take a pessimistic stance, contending that the consequences of the massive changes in sexual and marital mores that accompanied the contraceptive revolution are here to stay. They argue that "the causes of our present state of affairs are multiple, powerful, and very likely largely irreversible." In *The Great Disruption*, Francis Fukuyama is more hopeful, anticipating that a "reconstitution of the social order" will eventually take place because people long to live in a society with standards for moral behavior.

If that reconstitution does occur, it will be partly because individual couples across the country will decide to opt out of the contraceptive revolution and to recover that linked triad of sex, marriage, and childbearing that is the essence of the sacred nature of human reproductive and family life. The linked triad whose rupture Pope Paul VI so accurately predicted in 1968 would also rupture the social fabric.

That would entail a radical shift in the attitudes toward sex, fertility, and childbearing, a counterrevolution. But some women may be ready for it. Amanda, who lived through the supposed post-pill paradise and found herself more harmed than helped, now says: "It seems as if our grandmothers didn't seem to suffer terribly from the lack of birth control in their lives. Why should the use of birth control be so sacred to us now? Have we really gained anything?"

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