

# The Catholic Right And Its Maneuvers

By Tarcisio Beal

The absence of a strong, united voice of authentic Christianity at this moment of national tragedy is truly troubling. More so is the failure of many Catholic hierarchs to exemplify authentic Christianity in their own lives and teachings. Many of them continue to ignore the Second Council of the Vatican and still hang on to canonical positions and directives of the faith as spelled out by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century Council of Trent. What is dreadfully lacking is the prophetic spirit and practices that spell out the example of Jesus in word and practice, especially with regards socio-political realities.



Archbishop José Gómez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (CNS/Bob Roller) was Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio. He saw the archdiocesan Justice & Peace Commission as too controversial. It dissolved in 1991.

Right-wing, conservative clergy hold on to Vatican supremacy, claim God-given supremacy and infallibility, and manipulate the past to justify its leadership, defining true Catholicism as obedience to the Canon, reception of the sacraments, and Sunday attendance of

church and liturgical practices. History shows that centralization of papal supremacy and of episcopal authority divide the Christian world and multiplies the heresies. For example, Pope Leo IX's insistence on the absolute authority of the Bishop of Rome over the entire Christian world caused the **Western Schism** when, in 1054, he excommunicated Michael Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople, permanently separating the Eastern/Orthodox Churches from those of the West.

As a whole, the leadership of the **National Bishops Conference** has refused to lead American Catholics in the direction outlined by Vatican II and being pursued by Pope Francis. As usual, its arguments manipulate the Scriptures, deny the findings of science and the basic rights to health

care, and contradict Pope Francis "Culture of Encounter." Archbishop José Gomez, as Chairman of the NBC, never moved the Conference towards the goals of Vatican II. He had already shown his social arch-conservatism as Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio by viewing the archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission as extremist and too controversial, so he had it renamed "Social Concerns." No wonder that it died in 1991.

Now the NCB is headed by Archbishop **Timothy Broglio** (elected on 11/22/22), an ex-associate of the former, archconservative Vatican Cardinal Angelo Sodano. Sodano was the protector of Father Marcial Maciel Degollado, the infamous pedophile leader of the Legionaries of Christ. Broglio is also a close friend of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganó who, in 2018, called on Pope Francis to resign. Also a staunch critic of the new Church envisaged by Pope Francis is **Thomas Paprocki**, Bishop of Springfield, Illinois. In an essay published on February 26, 2023, he blasted the new San Diego Cardinal Robert McElroy as a heretic and called for his removal from the episcopate for defending the "radical inclusion" of everyone in the Church, of even those whose personal situation may not strictly conform with ecclesiastical, canonical doctrine. **Salvatore Cordeloeone**, Bishop of San Francisco, following the direction of the NBC, totally politicized the Eucharist by denying it to congresswoman Nancy Pelosi. **The NBC failed to include synodality** as an integral part of their June meeting agenda. Neither have most of the bishops joined Popes Benedict's and Francis' green, ecological movement. 195 of them have not even begun to divest their dioceses from fossil fuels,



Salvatore Cordeloeone, Bishop of San Francisco, denied the Eucharist to Congresswoman, Nancy Pelosi.



something that dioceses in England, Wales, Scotland, the Philippines, South Africa, and Nigeria are already doing.

Many American bishops are miserably failing to lead the faithful along with the example of Jesus and of Pope Francis and even play along with the victimizing women and the LGBTQ people. The National Bishops Conference (NBC), in contrast with other Conferences across the world, specifically in Latin America, has been on the side of Tridentine conservatism and clericalism, seeing the Church as an autarchy of divine power, and not as the people of God under the power of the Holy Spirit. Some bishops, following rules and regulations dating back to the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, still insist on absolute papal authority and on the supreme inerrancy of papal decrees and canonical laws. Pope Boniface VIII's bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) thus spelled out traditional clerical self-sufficiency: "We declare, state, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff." Now the NBC even prohibits invited theologians to speak to the news media about what happens in their meetings.

One of the most dreadful positions of the NBC is its **stand against the LGBTQ people**. Its past March 20 note, for example, argues that only sexually-differentiated persons are fully human and that gender-affirming medical treatments are injurious to the flourishing of the human person, so Catholic health care must not perform them. Its "Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body" denies the very right to life and the basic human rights of these persons. In other words, the bishops are stating that only sexually differentiated persons are truly human (cf. Brian Fraga, "US Bishops consider banning transgender care at Catholic Hospitals;" *National Catholic Reporter*, June 23-July 6, 2023, pp. 1 & 12). Thus the bishops are justifying more than 460 anti-LGBTQ bills that have been introduced across the country during the first six months of 2023. In Kansas, a new law determines that transgender identity must be denied on birth certificates. Some bishops even get irritated by the support of transgenders in sports. Joseph Strickland, Bishop of Tyler, TX, planned a procession sponsored by several right-wing media outlets to protest the "Pride Night at Dodger Stadium," which was strongly supported by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. Pittsburgh's Bishop David Zubic, agreeing with the anti-LGBTQ crowd, canceled a Corpus Christi "Pride Mass." David Brooks, columnist of the *New York Times*, criticized the Dodger Stadium demonstration with the odd argument that mixing football/sports with cultural issues incites culture wars. That's essentially the same argument that condemns black football players who protest against prevailing racism by kneeling in prayer instead of standing up for the national anthem.

The NBC is also failing to take a firm action to fully expose and clear out the **clerical pedophilia** which has victimized tens of thousands of children across the United States.



Pride Night at Dodger Stadium

This past May 23, Illinois' Attorney General reported that a 5-year investigation reveals that, since 1950, more than 450 clergymen had abused 2,000 children, including 125 new cases. In fact, more than 27,000 cases of child abuse by the clergy and of cover-up by the American bishops are still under investigation. Then we have the case of Richard Stika, Bishop of Nashville, TEN, who is accused of failing to protect minors against pedophilia by his own priests not only by obstructing the investigation, but also by intimidating the victims. The argument that clerical pedophilia is mostly due to homosexuality was strongly dismissed as an untenable association by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican's Secretary of State, in the preface of a new book entitled *The Pain of the Catholic Church in the Face of Abuse*.

Since Vatican II (1962-1963), a typical strategy of far-right Catholics who glorify neo-liberal economics and the supremacy of the market is to justify their position by misreading and misinterpreting any theological document, especially recent papal encyclicals. Take, for example, how theologians like Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Novak use Benedict XV's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (July 6, 2009) and John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* (1991). Novak (cf. his *Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry*, 1972) asserts that both popes condemned any form of Socialism as totalitarian Marxism. Truth, however, is that Benedict condemned a Marxist anthropology that preaches the inevitability of class warfare and the legitimacy of a totalitarian state, that is, Stalinism and Maoism. He did not, however, condemn Marxist economics. *Caritas in Veritate* clearly teaches that charity/philanthropy is no substitute for social justice. Benedict also viewed labor unions as vital to a just economy, with the workers sharing in the profits of the corporations. John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) also carries a strong condemnation of contemporary capitalism.

Furthermore, the Catholic Right also fails to mention that Benedict XVI preceded Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*'s emphasis on the preservation of the world's natural habitat. In his homily of April 24, 2005, Benedict lamented the world's ecological crisis as an assault on the sacredness of nature: "Therefore, the earth's treasures no

longer serve to build God's Garden for all to live, but they have made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction." Then, in 2010, he returned to the same issue: "If you want "to cultivate peace, protect Creation;" and in 2011, he placed polluting the environment among seven of the contemporary social sins.

Now, the NBC often plays along with the traditional and conservative Catholic organizations which are well-funded by billionaires: the Catholic Right, fed by big money from Catholic billionaires and their lobbyism; Thomas Monaghan and the *Legatus*; and Timthy Busch and the Napa Institute; the far-right, worldwide media empire of the **Eternal Television Network (ETWN)**; and the "Church Militant" established in Detroit in 2008 and funded by the "Real Catholic TV," which now blames President Joe Biden for what it calls "a Socialist economy."

Finally, today's Supreme Court, with a majority of the Justices chosen by republican Presidents and constantly pressured by the big money of the Federalist Society, is constantly making decisions injurious to the freedom, equality of opportunity, and basic human rights of people. Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito even behave as if the Constitution does not apply to them, taking favors from billionaires who have cases pending in the Court. In 2022, the Court greatly weakened the **Clean Air Act**; then, on May 25, 2023, it denied the Environmental Protection Agency's power to regulate the nation's wetlands under the **Clear Water Act** (West Virginia – Hacket v. EPA). This June 29 it ruled against the Universities of Harvard and North Carolina by striking down **Affirmative Action (AA)** in college admissions as a violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Oddly enough, Asian Americans agreed with the Court's decisions because so far AF has benefitted mostly Blacks and Latinos. On June 30, in Biden v. Nebraska, the Court also voted (6 to 3) against President Biden's **Student Loan Debt Forgiveness** plan aimed at forgiving the unpaid loans of more than



Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote a dissenting opinion on the Court's decision on June 30th to uphold a web designer's right to refuse service to a same-sex couple for their wedding.

43 million college students. Said dissenting Justice Elena Kagan: "The Court, by deciding this case, exercises authority it does not have. It violates the Constitution." The decision was cheered by republican legislators, even by those who greatly benefitted from loans they took during the pandemic. Kentucky's House member Brett Guthrie, for example, had a \$4.4 million loan forgiven.

Worst of all is the Court's decision of June 30, 2023 (303 Creative LLC v.

Elenis), which strengthens the already gross discrimination against the **LGBTQ people**. It okays the refusal of a Christian Webb's designer who, for religious reasons, refuses to provide a website for same-sex weddings. Incidentally, Germany's Catholic bishops have recently approved the Church's blessing for same-sex couples and, across the United States, many Catholic groups and organizations are actively defending the civil and human rights of the trans-genders. Dissenting Justice Sonia Sotomayor pointed out that such decision is a license to discriminate because it bars equality of access to the market place.

All in all, the Supreme Court's majority (6 of 9) appointed by republican Presidents, is playing along and even strengthening the political agenda of the GOP and its MAGA supporters, thus compounding the present national crisis. No wonder that many prominent republican state and federal legislators agree with the decisions of the Supreme Court which legitimizes the horrors of the anti-LGBTQ legislation passed in more than 23 GOP-controlled States, notably Florida and Arkansas. It is more than time to create a judicial system truly independent of the political, partisan maneuvering that threatens the very essence of our democracy.

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