

WHAT HAPPENED TO CATHOLIC GEORGETOWN? – An old Hoya’s Lament

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A few months back, I had an email from a high school classmate who knew that I bled GU blue and gray. He asked “How could Georgetown have acceded to covering up the IHS symbol for Obama’s speech?”

My response surprised him. I informed him that the oldest Catholic college in the country, which should be a bully pulpit for Catholic values, was in fact a poster child for the politically correct agenda.

Georgetown is justifiably proud of its high academic ranking. But, it had that ranking before it changed its character. In an apparent attempt to join the “prestige” secular schools ranked above it, it traded its Catholic integrity for political correctness. It was a mistake of classic proportion. The great competitive advantage Georgetown had over the Ivies and their ilk was that Georgetown stood for values – something not factored in the USN&WR ratings. Georgetown had a valuable alternative to the relativism dominating the leading secular universities. That advantage is gone.

Recent Administrations have sought to cast this change as necessary to academic freedom. Not so; that is not the issue. **Students ought to be able to advocate positions contrary to Catholic values. Where the line should be drawn is plain. Georgetown should not promote and fund anti-Catholic-value advocacy. When it occurs, it should be met with a firm statement of the Catholic position.** That is not happening as the following examples illustrate.

SEX POSITIVE WEEK

I informed my old friend of Georgetown's complicity in "Sex Positive Week", an event sponsored by feminist and homosexual student clubs such as GU Pride, United Feminists and Georgetown Solidarity. It included a talk "Torn about Porn?" which advertised itself as including a discussion about "arguably alternative forms of pornography that are not supposed to be exploitative." The event was scheduled for Ash Wednesday. A Saturday talk followed from a pornographic filmmaker addressing the topic "Relationships Beyond Monogamy." Georgetown funded the activity and offered no counter to the message.

I cited another example: the Vagina Monologues, rejected by 193 Catholic colleges, have been sponsored repeatedly at Georgetown. Here is a report on a performance from the student newspaper, the Voice:

"In one particularly amusing monologue, a tax lawyer who has become a professional female escort lap dances and gropes the front-row members of the audience, then proceeds to perform all the different types of orgasmic female moans she can think of. She ends big with the "Georgetown super-fan moan," which is essentially the fight song"

Georgetown University political science professor Patrick Deneen has made the point that one should not assume that Christian teaching about human sexuality is made known at Georgetown. "It is not."

Noting that the university had established a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning "Resource Center," Professor Deneen said there is no comparable center on campus dedicated to "an expressly Catholic teaching on human sexuality." "So what is the message being sent to today's students? Sex, like everything else, is a matter of preference, choice, personal liberty and utilitarian pleasure. It is largely consequence-free recreation."

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

I spoke with a recent GU grad. He had not heard about Sex Positive week and was not an advocate for it. Yet, his view was that GU Pride, one of the sponsoring groups, was for "tolerance and peace"; that to counter the message would be "divisive"; that funding

came from the general funds and, if Georgetown tried to stop those funds, there would be a backlash and Georgetown would be accused of censorship.

He had no answer to these questions: If peace and tolerance were the goals, why was the event scheduled to conflict with Ash Wednesday? Why is it divisive for the Catholic viewpoint to be expressed but not divisive for those espousing contrary views?

He is, of course, correct that there would be a protests and claims of censorship. But, refusal to promote and fund is not censorship. Would it be difficult to take a stand? Yes. That is why it is called having the **courage** of one's convictions.

PREFERRED SPEECH

For four years now, I have tried to have an article such as this printed in the Alumni Magazine. The submissions have been ignored.

That is not the fate of "politically correct" articles. In the 2008 Spring/Summer issue of Georgetown magazine, 18 pages were devoted to the LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning] program. Not one sentence in the article expressed the Catholic view that that homosexual activity, as opposed to orientation, is wrong.

Indeed, there were only 2 negative references in the entire piece and then, not until the 5th page and that followed by 13 pages of promotion. Here is one sentence:

The catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that same sex acts are contrary to the natural law and under no circumstances can they be approved.

The next sentence:

It [presumably the catechism of the Catholic Church] teaches that, for Catholics, any sexual activity outside the context of marriage cannot be condoned.

In other words, the catechism [not reason, not history, and certainly not the enlightened Georgetown administration] "teaches" homosexual activity is wrong but, you know what, it says the same thing about heterosexual activity outside of marriage. [The unstated: we know how absurd that is; the implication: there is no difference between

heterosexual and homosexual activity.]

A Hoya graduate from the '90s commented:

"Not only don't they give any space to the teachings of the Church, but the [they have] gone out of their way to promote this nonsense--spearheading committees, discussion groups, hiring additional administrators and staff....it is truly unbelievable! The Pope comes to DC and delivers a major address on Catholic educational identity--it's mentioned in passing in the alumni magazine--but the editors and Alumni association celebrate DeGioia's embrace of this LGBTQ junk... "

THE HISTORY

Sad to say, this is nothing new. Below is a sample of discouraging events during the presidencies of Reverend Timothy Healy, Reverend Leo O'Donovan and John DiGioia.

1. The Homosexual Club

In the mid-80s, a homosexual club was authorized at Georgetown and funded with school monies. The claim was made that a District of Columbia statute required the action. Originally, the school contested the statute in the courts. My recollection is that the school prevailed in the trial court but lost by one vote in the appellate court.

We, the Alumni, were told that the governing board was unanimous in deciding not to appeal. Years later, I found out that, while President Healy's proposed that there be no appeal, the measure was hotly contested and passed by only one vote. He then asked the Board to make it unanimous in order to present a united front to the alumni. Unfortunately, the Board acquiesced.

Thereafter, Senator Armstrong carried legislation to exempt Georgetown from the statute in this instance where religious beliefs were at issue. However, President Healy chose not to take advantage of the legislation and continued the funding and endorsement of the homosexual club, as did his successor, President O'Donovan.

It is inappropriate for Georgetown to endorse and fund a club promoting homosexual lifestyle. The Vatican wrote to another Catholic university stating that such endorsement and funding should be discontinued. It continued at Georgetown while the Knights of Columbus organization was refused funding and the Ignatian Society funding was revoked.

2. Refusal to fight the ABA endorsement of abortion-on-demand

When the ABA went on record favoring abortion-on-demand, a campaign was begun against that decision. Six letters to the Law School and to President O'Donovan seeking Georgetown's support went unanswered before a reply refusing support was received. Georgetown never protested the ABA decision. The ABA pro-abortion resolution was authored by a committee of which Father Drinan of the Law School was an officer.

3. Pro-Abortion Club

In the early 90s, under President O'Donovan, the school authorized and subsidized a pro-abortion club, GU Choice. A fee was paid from school funds to Kate Michelman, then president of the National Abortion Rights Action League [NARAL] who celebrated GU Choice as a most important victory for abortion rights.

One justification offered by President O'Donovan was that free speech required the action. In fact, the decision had nothing to do with freedom of speech or academic freedom. The abortion issue was freely debated long before GU Choice. To subsidize pro-abortion activities and to lend Georgetown's name to them was a far cry from allowing debate on the issue.

The claim also was made that the club was not intended to advance pro-abortion activities (a concept belied by its name) but the evidence showed that the club from its inception did exactly what it was designed to do: push the pro-abortion cause including lobbying congress. This was repeatedly documented with affidavits but President O'Donovan stonewalled and neither the board of directors or the board of regents or the alumni board did anything about it.

Alumni created two groups to fight the decision. One, the Committee for Georgetown Values, included Henry Hyde, the Lauinger family and Cardinal O'Connor, and directed its efforts to enlisting alumni support for decertifying the club. It took a public confrontation at a national alumni meeting to get a letter published in the Alumni magazine describing what had happened.

The other, the Georgetown Ignatian Society, brought suit in the ecclesiastical courts to prevent Georgetown from calling itself a Catholic college.

After a year and a half, pressure from either alumni or the Vatican or both forced withdrawal of University support of the pro-abortion club.

4. Promotion of President Clinton despite his anti-Catholic agenda.

President O'Donovan used his office to support and promote President Clinton, whose agenda included:

- a. Opposition to school vouchers . Non-partisan studies have proven that Catholic inner-city schools far out-perform their public school counterparts and at less cost. Over the years, Catholic inner-city schools have provided the tools for hundreds of thousands of children from low-income families to achieve productive happy lives. Unfortunately, such schools have been closing because of finances. The voucher plan (allowing parents to send their children to the schools of their choice) would help keep those schools open.
- b. A pledge to sign legislation which would guarantee abortion-on demand and would prevent the states from protecting the unborn child even in the minimal ways permissible under current Supreme Court decisions. Fortunately, the bill [FOCA] failed.
- c. A promise to nominate as judges only individuals who would commit in advance to supporting unlimited abortion rights, which would eliminate a practicing Catholic from consideration for appointment to the federal bench.
- d. Instruction to our embassies to put the United States on record at the Cairo conference to make access to abortion a "fundamental right"
- e. Repeal of the Helms Amendment prohibiting the direct use of United States Population Assistance funds to pay for abortion procedures.
- f. Repeal of the Hyde Amendment preventing federal funding of abortion.
- g. Restoration of funding to the United Nations Population Fund, though that fund remained extensively involved in China's coercive population control program;
- h. Revocation of the Bush Administration regulation allowing political asylum to Chinese women fleeing China's compulsory abortion;
- i. A pledge to cover abortion-on-demand in a proposed Health Care Act despite polls showing a large majority opposed it;
- j. A pledge to veto legislation banning partial birth abortions which he fulfilled twice;

k. A pledge to appoint pro-abortion judges to the Supreme Court which he fulfilled;

l. Cooperation in the effort to ban the Vatican from participation in UN conferences on subjects including abortion.

Clinton campaigned at Notre Dame and told his audience that he would be the first Catholic college graduate to be president, that the Baptists and Catholics were closer on issues than ever before, and that he admired the Catholic work ethic for public service. He omitted his promise regarding judicial appointments, which would prevent any practicing Catholic from public service as a federal judge. He also omitted the fact that the issue bringing the Baptists and Catholics together was the anti-abortion cause which he opposed.

President O'Donovan was asked to issue a statement to correct the erroneous implication that Catholic doctrine allowed a pro-choice position. He refused, claiming, erroneously, that it would be improper under the tax laws. Such a concern did not prevent President O'Donovan from writing Clinton a letter of encouragement during the campaign, which Clinton publicized.

After his election, President Clinton repeatedly was feted and praised at Georgetown.

On the other side of the coin, President Healy, during his tenure, frequently criticized President Reagan. President Reagan was against abortion, supported aid to Catholic schools and was, at the time, considering the nomination of a Georgetown graduate to the Supreme Court. He subsequently did nominate Antonin Scalia, College '57. Request was made of the University to produce any positive comment by President Healy about President Reagan. None could be found.

5. Rewarding a pro-abortion politician

In the 90's, Georgetown grads received a letter from a group called Hoyas for Hartigan giving an address of 3616 Prospect Street, [a street which housed University sites] signed by the then chairman of the Board of Regents. The letter solicited donations to be returned in the "enclosed Hoya envelope" for Neil Hartigan, then candidate for governor of Illinois. The letter's implication was that Hartigan was pro life, claiming his adherence to "the values and training...received at Georgetown" and his "absolute integrity" "put[ting] it on the line".

In fact, Hartigan had been pro-life until he chose to run for governor, at which time he became pro-choice. President O'Donovan refused to issue a statement that the University was not connected to the solicitation or that Georgetown's values and training did not include condoning abortion. He also ignored a request to write at least those receiving the material clarifying that it was not University sponsored and pointing out Hartigan's pro-abortion stance.

Contemporaneously, Hartigan was appointed a member of the Georgetown University Board of Directors.

6. Partial Birth Abortion

President O'Donovan not only stayed silent while President Clinton twice vetoed bans against partial birth abortion, he supported Jesuit Faculty member, Reverend Robert Drinan, who wrote columns supporting Clinton's veto. Drinan later issued a public recantation, apparently at the behest of the Vatican.

7. Service on a Clinton Commission

Georgetown heavily publicized President O'Donovan's appointment by President Clinton to a Presidential commission. When criticism arose, the claim was made that one had a duty to serve the President. If one truly believes that abortion is a form of murder, how can one find a "duty" to serve what at that time was the most pro-abortion Administration in U.S. history [since surpassed by President Obama.] What could any commission accomplish that would justify, excuse, ameliorate or otherwise offset the loss of 1.4 million innocent lives a year?

8. Refusal to repudiate anti-Catholic film

In 1996, the Southern Baptist Convention (the country's largest Protestant church organization), called for a boycott of Disney because of its departure from traditional family values, including promotion of movies degrading religion. Specifically cited was the movie "Priests", in which every Catholic priest in the film was portrayed in a derogatory way.

Many Catholics were gratified that the Baptists took such a forceful and widely publicized stand. Catholics reasonably expected publicized appreciation for this generous and perhaps precedent setting ecumenical gesture.

Rather, President O'Donovan accepted an appointment to Disney's Board of Directors. The Washington Post linked the two events:

"O'Donovan said he wholeheartedly disagreed with this [the Southern Baptist position] assessment of Disney".

9. Politically Correct alterations to the College curriculum

Under President O'Donovan, Georgetown made national news when it removed the requirement that English majors take at least one course on Shakespeare, Chaucer or Milton and allowed politically correct alternatives. The Washington Times reported:

Under the new requirements, students instead may specialize in fresh departmental offerings. One of these, 'Studies in Culture and Performance' is described, with no intent of whimsy evidently, thus: 'Courses will focus on the power exerted on our lives by such cultural and performative [sic] categories as race, class, gender, sexuality and nationality.' Another new item in the Georgetown intellectual deli is 'Unspeakable Lives: Gay/Lesbian Narratives'." Another course offering is "Hermaphrodite Literature".

10. Removal of crucifixes

In 1997, President O' Donovan presided over the removal of crucifixes from the classrooms. After considerable protest, a variety of "crosses" were installed as "historical" symbols.

11. Sheldon Award

In 1998, US News and World Report columnist, John Leo, selected President O'Donovan for the annual "Sheldon Award":

The Sheldon is a statuette that looks something like

the Oscar, except that the Oscar shows a man with no face looking straight ahead, while the Sheldon shows a man with no spine looking the other way.

Georgetown did nothing to punish a residential assistant and students who stole an edition of a conservative student newspaper which ran articles critical of affirmative action. Nor did it take action when the subsidized student newspaper ran an editorial praising the theft. An assistant Dean claimed stealing the newspapers was an appropriate exercise of “free speech.

12. Cardinal Arinze

In 2003, during President DiGioia’s tenure, Cardinal Arinze was the commencement speaker. In the course of his speech stressing the importance of the family, the Cardinal noted that the family “is under siege” and:

...opposed by an anti-life mentality as is seen in contraception, abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. It is scorned and banalized by pornography, desecrated by fornication and adultery, mocked by homosexuality, sabotaged by irregular unions and cut in two by divorce.

One or two faculty members walked off the stage. Seventy Faculty members circulated a letter protesting the Cardinal’s statement. The University prepared a mollifying letter to affirm the place of LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning] and address “the hurt” caused by the Cardinal’s comments. No one had the courage to say the Cardinal’s statement was in accord with Catholic doctrine and an eloquent statement of factors diminishing the family.

CONCLUSION

Georgetown and Catholicism desperately need spokesmen for our principles. The media reflect the bias of its members and constantly advance the self styled “liberal” agenda, contemptuous of moral values, and hostile to religion. The media is particularly hostile to Catholicism because of its stands, among other things, against the promotion of abortion and homosexuality and in favor of family control and school choice.

It is mystifying to me that the battle for our values is being left to us with little help from prominent Catholic educational institutions. It is disheartening that Georgetown enters the fray in the ranks of our adversaries. Georgetown's actions are cited by those adversaries as “evidence” that we are wrong about what Catholic values are.

I wish it were otherwise. My financial contributions now go to Pepperdine University rather than to Georgetown because Pepperdine has the courage to speak out for the values that need to be supported, and Georgetown does not.

I continue to pray for the University and take some comfort in a favorite quote of the late Richard John Neuhaus: "For us it is the trying, the rest is not our business."