



The Shroud of Bernardin

By William A. Borst, Ph.D.

A new controversy, that may have even longer-term consequences for the Catholic Church, has nearly removed the clergy sex abuse scandals from the oily tentacles of the mainstream media. In his groundbreaking article, *Blood on Their Hands* for *Crisis Magazine* in May 2003, Journalist Mark Stricherz identified fifteen Catholic U. S. Senators (thirteen Democrats and two Republicans), who have consistently favored legislation in support of abortion rights. Stricherz talked to these Senators about their faith while in elevators, cafeterias and on the sidewalks, provoking a cascade of *anger, hostility, insincerity, and silence*. The 2004 presidential election has created an unenviable conundrum for the hierarchy because the presumptive Democratic nominee, John Kerry, is one of those fifteen *Catholic Senators*. While his consistent defiance of the Church's teachings on abortion would be an unmitigated disaster for the Church if elected, it has again put the hierarchy back on the front pages of a disbelieving media.

The Seamless Garment

The Kerry nomination has created a media hailstorm that has its roots in the 1970s. The Catholic position draws its problematic underpinnings from the seamless garment of late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin. With illusions to John's Gospel, (19:23), the Cardinal advanced the notion that Catholic politicians should not be judged solely, or even primarily, by their respective positions on abortion. He stressed that there were other life issues that warranted a proper Catholic response. Abortion was merely one strand in a rich and finely woven "seamless garment" of Catholic social teachings in defense of life.

Although social activists had long been using this idiom, the Cardinal's 1976 speech in Dallas was the first to apply it to pro-lifers. It became an important theme in his ministry, which he developed more fully in a 1984 St. Louis talk. His seamless garment placed the heinous evils of abortion and euthanasia on the same moral plane as war, poverty, the death penalty, immigration, tax cuts (anti) the fed-

eral deficit, education, health care, crime and minimum wage. The seamless garment appears as a symbol of unity, designed to underscore the Church's deep concern for human life, from the moment of conception to natural death.

Unintended Consequences

Cynics would say that the seamless garment had been contrived to shroud Catholic politicians under a protective mantle of ecclesiastical approval. Charity dictates that the divisiveness of the seamless garment was just one of a host of unintended consequences that spoiled a pious attempt to recognize the sanctity of all human life.

Whether unintentionally or intentionally, the Cardinal's *garment* has served as a shroud under which several Catholic politicians have been able to hide for over twenty years. The *seamless garment* has trivialized the Church's opposition to abortion, euthanasia, and stem cell research by equating it with civil rights, the death penalty, and the minimum wage. Kenneth L. Woodward illustrated this point in the May 28th, 2004 issue of the *New York Times* when he wrote about pro-choice Catholic politicians who argued that, with the exception of abortion, the Democratic Party was closer to Catholic social teachings than was the Republican Party.

Michael M. Uhlmann, writing in *Crisis Magazine*, concurs with this point when he wrote by effectively *equating the gravity of abortion with other diverse issues of demonstrably lesser import, their teaching authority on abortion has been undermined*. The only conclusion imaginable is that to be a good Catholic in the 1970s one had to be a liberal Democrat.

Scotch Guard For the Shroud

During a speech at Notre Dame University in 1984, New York Governor Mario Cuomo provided Catholic politicians with the protective coating of *I am personally opposed but...* that has served as Scotch Guard for Catholics politicians hiding under the Bernardin shroud. Cuomo's specious reasoning rested on the assumption that

since he was governor of all the people in New York and his state valued its religious pluralism, it would be unconscionable for him to force his Catholic morality on his constituents. While soothing to the ear, Cuomo's aggressive actions in opposition to the death penalty in New York belied his Notre Dame sophistry. The Governor saw no inconsistency in attempting to force his *Catholic morality* on the death penalty, which enjoyed the same legal status in the Empire State as did abortion.

Senator Kerry has dutifully followed in Cuomo's slippery footsteps. He sought out the sage advice of Jesuit priest James English, who told him that his *obligation to his personal conscience was satisfied if he expressed those views forcefully*. Even his most ardent supporters could hardly characterize Kerry's *personal opposition* to abortion as *forceful*. In public, Senator Kerry's opposition to abortion has never risen above a dull whisper. His opposition to abortion is as flimsy and diaphanous as Bernardin's shroud. Kerry's ardent public support of abortion on the campaign trail and in the Senate leaves no doubt about how deeply he values the largesse of the abortion rights lobby.

Shepherd of Their Souls

It is true that in a pluralistic society the Church cannot impose its moral teachings on society as a whole. But the bishops have an ecclesiastical responsibility of following the three-verb job description of their holy office, which is to Teach, Govern and Sanctify their flocks. They have a moral responsibility to demand that the Church's visible members reflect its teachings in the same breath that they proclaim themselves to be *good Catholics*. For the bishops to declare that pro-abortion politicians cannot be in the state of grace because of their obstinacy in face of the Church's teaching and their persistence in scandalizing the rest of the faithful, they are not guilty of excessive vigilance. They are merely performing their magisterial duty in accordance with Canons 915 and 916.

In April of 2004 the Vatican ordered Kerry and other Catholic politicians not to partake in the Eucharist because their public promotion of abortion had created a major scandal that would be morally confusing to other Catholics. Several bishops have heeded the words of John Paul II and locked horns with *culture of death politicians* over their promotion of abortion rights.

In 2003, even before the Vatican acted, Bishop Wieland of Sacramento called upon then Catholic Governor Gray Davis to refrain from taking Holy Communion, advising him that he was living *in grave error*, and he was putting his soul *at risk*. Boston's Archbishop Sean O'Malley and Lincoln, Nebraska, Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz have both served notice on the Catholic politicians in their respective dioceses to choose between the tenets of their faith or the dictates of

their careers.

Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis has been the most vocal in fulfilling his ecclesiastical duty. He has forcefully chastised the *culture of death politicians* for their blatant disregard of Catholic teachings on life. The Archbishop has noted that Roman Catholics have *the right and, indeed, the obligation to inform their consciences and political judgments from the teachings of the Faith, especially in what pertains to the natural moral law, that is the order established by God in creation*. But more than a critic, Archbishop Burke saw himself as *the shepherd of their souls*. While he would deny Senator Kerry if he ever presented himself for Holy Communion in St. Louis, he said he would bless and pray for him.

Like the rest of Catholics, Senator Kerry's public actions must reflect the truth and beauty of the Eucharist, otherwise there will be grave scandal. As St. Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 11: 27 that *whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily, will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*. This will bring a *judgment to himself*.

A Political Sacrament

Bishop Michael J. Sheridan of Colorado Springs pushed the envelope a bit farther. Not only did he say he would deny communion to death politicians, he extended the sacramental ban to any individual voter who supported pro-abortion candidates. Before Bishop Sheridan knew what hit him, he was enveloped in a maelstrom of media appearances, public debates and the disdain of many of his fellow Catholics. A prominent donor to the Colorado Springs Roman Diocese, Ric Kethcart, threatened to revoke his large pledges to the diocese unless Bishop Sheridan recanted his pronouncement. Americans United for Separation of Church and State called for the IRS to investigate Bishop Sheridan's diocese for alleged violations against federal laws for churches.

The media have ironically turned *The Communion Question*, into a political litmus test. They have repeated the notion that since most pro-abortion politicians were Democrats, the Church was saying that for someone to receive Communion he must be a Republican. The media have also employed the same tactic it used so effectively in promoting homosexual marriage among the general public. The media showed that heterosexual marriage was beset by high incidences of divorce, infidelity, and spousal abuse. This implies that marriage, as the public knows it, is finished, so why not let the homosexuals have a chance.

On a similar note, the media are intent on demonstrating that most Catholics are out of step with the Church on many *doctrines* from birth control, the death penalty to obligatory Sunday Mass. They *support* their claim with a *sampling* from a National Opinion

Research survey of 64 million Catholics. This 2004 poll, which held that 90% of Catholics believed in abortion *for some reasons* and 67% favored euthanasia, underlined their contention that Catholic politicians were marching in perfect step with most Catholics. If this poll bears any resemblance to reality, it lends greater credence to Bishop Sheridan's inclusive approach to Holy Communion.

A Church Divided

Unfortunately all the American bishops are not on the same page. The failure of the Council of Catholic Bishops to project a unified stance in line with Vatican pronouncements is a cause for grave concerns. Little has been heard from the prelates in New York or Philadelphia, both of which have large concentrations of Catholics. Los Angeles' John Cardinal Mahoney has directly defied the Pope when he said that Kerry *could receive communion in any of his California parishes*. Cardinal McCarrick, of Washington D. C., who is the chairman of the Bishops' Task Force on Relations with Catholic Politicians and Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson, are in league with Cardinal Mahoney.

In a May letter to Cardinal McCarrick, 48 pro-abortion Catholic Democrat House members insisted *that it would be wrong for a bishop to deny the sacrament of Holy Communion to an individual on the basis of a voting record*. They were outraged that they would be singled out for their alleged moral infractions, when nothing was ever said about Republicans who favored the war in Iraq, the death penalty, and other of the worn threads in the seamless garment. In abject fear of sacramental confrontation or the specter of political partisanship, Cardinal McCarrick straddled the ecclesiastical fence with a deftness that obscured his overt failure to preserve the integrity of the Eucharist.

Were the hierarchy to remember the Church's history during the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, it would find that what bishops Burke and Sheridan are doing is not unprecedented. Democratic politicians would have undoubtedly applauded New Orleans' Archbishop Joseph Rummel's 1962 excommunication of Leander Perez, a judge and a Democratic Party political boss, for his staunch opposition to the desegregation of the Louisiana schools. Perez stated that he was *just following his conscience and the will of his constituents*. This bears an amazing simulacrum to what Senator Kerry has been saying. Perez later repented and was granted a Catholic burial in 1969.

Durbin's Report Card

Democratic Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois released a report in early June of 2004 that analyzed the votes of 24 Catholic U.S. Senators on a variety of issues of great interest to the United States

Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) during the 108th Congress (2003-2004). Durbin's unscientific survey contained twenty-two issues from abortion and euthanasia to a just war and the minimum wage. The issues were divided into three areas: Domestic, International, and Pro-Life.

There was no sliding scale. Each category was morally equal. The death of an unborn baby carried as much value as a 50-cent raise in the minimum wage. This underscores the liberal approach to societal problems and religious integrity. Not surprisingly, Senators John Kerry, Durbin, and Edward Kennedy all earned scores of just over 60% in accordance with the issues promulgated by the USCCB. Republican Senators Peter Fitzgerald and Sam Brownback, who have consistently voted against abortion, scored just over 50%.

Footsteps in the Snow

There was a time when ecclesiastical condemnations had a greater moral impact. The classic example is that of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) who rebuked the policy of churchmen buying holy offices from the throne. According to author H. W. Crocker III's book Triumph, when French King Henry IV rebelled at this papal reform he was condemned, excommunicated and forced to beg the Pope's forgiveness by *trudging barefoot in the snow*, many miles to see the Pope at his castle in Canossa. Can anyone imagine such an act of public penance in 2004's political climate?

Another stark contrast to modern Catholic politicians is the story of St. Thomas More who defied his king for the love of the Church in the 16th century. Sir Thomas More, the patron saint of lawyers and politicians, refused to approve the Act of Supremacy of King Henry VIII, whereby the King declared himself to be the Head of the Church. More and Henry had been long time friends but the King's defiance of Rome, because of his celebrated divorce from his first Queen, Catherine of Aragon, in order to marry his pregnant mistress Ann Boleyn, painted More into a deadly corner. Before his beheading in the Tower of London in 1535, More humbly proclaimed *I am the king's good servant but God's first*. If Catholic politicians could only adopt his attitude toward the unmitigated evils of abortion, euthanasia, and embryonic stem cell research, the Church would not be at war with itself over the dreaded culture of death.

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2 TIMOTHY 4:18

"May the Lord rescue us from every evil threat and bring us safe to his heavenly kingdom."

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News & Notes

LOUISVILLE, KY— July 16, 17 were the days for the 20th annual "Church Teaches Forum" held in Louisville with an attendance of 600 enthusiastic and attentive people from infants upward to His Em. Edouard Cardinal Gagnon at 86 years of age who either presided or was present for every session of the entire Program! He was a blessing for all of us.

The opening occurred on Friday evening with the national/worldwide expert on abortion, Reverend Frank A. Pavone, National Director of "Priests for Life". His talk was dynamic, interesting and full of hope for the decline of abortion. Also, he emphasized the importance for all Catholics and pro-lifers to vote in the national Presidential election November 2, 2004, for pro-life candidates. It is an urgency! It is a duty and a privilege to VOTE for proper candidates who support LIFE.

Spiritual Director Most Rev. Archbishop Raymond L. Burke of St. Louis spoke eloquently on The Marian Catechist, of which he is National Director & the Conversion of the Modern World. Also, he gave time to the marvels of Our Lady of Guadalupe's appearances in 1541 in America and to the LaCrosse Guadalupe Shrine which is rapidly developing into a national pilgrimage center.

Spiritual Director Rev. Edmund F. McCaffrey has faithfully led the Forum for twenty years with lots of wit and wisdom. He gave a splendid tribute to the founder of the Forum, the late William J. Smith, a remarkably capable, humble, and holy gentleman.

Rev. Roger Arnsparger is an accomplished speaker who revisited the dramatic *Humanae Vitae* encyclical with emphasis on Mankind's Responsibility Before God. Since 1999 he has been pastor of St. Barnabas Church, Arden, NC, bringing many persons to conversion and also into the priesthood.

Msgr. Charles H. Mangan currently is in Rome at the Congregation on Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. He has a Canon Law degree from the Gregorian University and is completing a doctorate in Mariology. His topic was Homosexual Marriage and Catholics in the Political Life: Looking to Rome for Help.

The Sacrifice of the Mass was concelebrated by 12 priests; the 35 Catholic exhibits featured lots of books, sacramentals for homes and families with pro-life and home school materials.

May God bless all for the spiritually uplifting, educationally fulfilling Conference, and the chance to form lasting friendships with persons of like-minded concerns and goals.