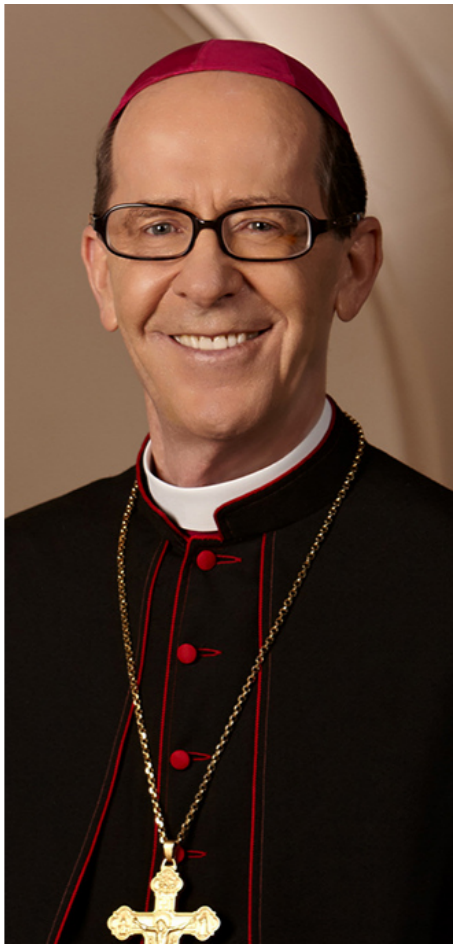
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Ron Watkins, from left, Jim Lamon and Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted (Video screen grab, Gage Skidmore/The Star News Network, and Diocese of Phoenix)



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Ottawa had its trucker demonstrations, New York had its hate crimes, but Arizona may be the angriest and most confused of them all.

Three Arizona men, congressional candidate Ron Watkins, Senate primary candidate Jim Lamon and Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted, are causing a lot of headshaking in the Grand Canyon State and beyond.

Ron Watkins, apparently one of two original "Qs" of QAnon, is running for Congress in Arizona's First district.

Jim Lamon, a retired energy executive now in a Republican Senate Primary race, says he plans to "shoot straight" for Arizonians.

And Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted, one of a few Catholic bishops who hoped to bar President Biden from the Communion rail, is recalling hundreds if not thousands of baptismal certificates because a Colombian-born priest used one different word.

Each is emblematic of a larger issue.

Take Ron Watkins. According to several linguistic analysts, he is a significant driver of QAnon, which in 2017 alleged that Satanists trafficked children from a Washington, D.C.-area pizzeria. Q's far-right theories, many aimed at Democrats, infect the internet.

QAnon attacked just about anything the Democratic Party supported, but by December 2020, after the presidential elections but before the Jan. 6 insurrection, Q went silent. Even so, its theories still echo across social media, and Watkins now presents his theories using Telegram.

In person, Watkins disrupted a Scottsdale school board recently, proclaiming that "Communism is encroaching on our country. Communist school boards are now indoctrinating our children with transexual propaganda and teaching them to be racist against white people by teaching racist [Joe] Biden's critical race theory."

Advertisement

Jim Lamon has his own view of Democrats. The Arizona Republican senatorial candidate reportedly spent up to $30,000 on a local Super Bowl commercial depicting a Western gunfight.

With an old-fashioned Colt .45 pistol, an unmasked Lamon faces the masked "D.C. Gang" of major elected Democratic leaders, including President Joe Biden, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Mark Kelly — identified as "Old Joe," "Crazy Pelosi" and "Shifty Kelly."

"The good people of Arizona have had enough of you," says Lamon, before he draws his weapon and shoots a pistol from Kelly's hand, a knife from Pelosi's hand and a shouldered rifle from the arms of the president of the United States.

The assembled crowd of some 15 men and at least one woman, all in Western costumes, cheers as the senator, the speaker, and the president turn and run out of town.

It is an understatement to call the commercial disgusting.

The short road from conspiracy theories to disrespect for the lives of political leaders is littered with right-wing Twitter commentary, all claiming support of some imagined land of law and order. It is more than dangerous.

And the Catholic Church, at least in Arizona, is not immune to confusion and upset in the name of another sort of "law and order."

Phoenix Bishop Olmsted joined a few other Catholic bishops to argue, in effect, for a national statement on politicians and abortion aimed at denying President Biden Communion, something reserved to the president's own bishop.

More recently, Olmsted bewildered parishioners and canon lawyers alike by declaring that a 2020 ruling from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith invalidated thousands of baptisms performed by Fr. Andrés Arango, who has since resigned his pastorate.

For whatever reason, perhaps since 2005, Arango baptized babies saying, "We baptize" instead of "I baptize." He was not alone in the practice.

Related: Would Jesus care about the Phoenix priest's baptismal mistakes?

In fact, in 2003, the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship wrote that the use of "we" instead of the proper "I" rendered the sacrament illicit but not invalid.

That is, while illegal, the baptism was still a real baptism.

Olmsted is having none of it, and his diocesan website has a downloadable form so Catholics baptized by Arango can arrange to start all over again.

There is something wrong in a church that allows hierarchs to create disquiet and confusion. With or without commercials, politicians spread anger across the land. And, with or without QAnon, political affiliation marks more victims hourly.

Is there an antidote?

It may seem facile to say religion can help, especially since religion is sometimes one of the causes. But if all people can imagine themselves as part of a multi-wheeled Venn diagram with God at its center, then perhaps truth and common sense will prevail.