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Spain takes a page from the US pro-life playbook

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All Things Catholic

Americans who have spent any time in Catholic circles in Europe have likely been subjected to some clucking about our alleged political myopia. Even the most doctrinally conservative European Catholics often lament what they see as an obsession in America with abortion, and an over-identification of the American church with the political right.

Case in point: Archbishop Reinhard Marx of Munich, an old friend of Benedict XVI who was tapped in 2007 to lead the pontiff's former archdiocese, recently gave an interview to the Italian magazine *30 Giorni* in which he complained that American neo-cons may be strong on the life issues, but they too often end up, in his words, "reducing Christianity to a religious ideology propping up the market economy."

However much truth there may be to such perceptions, it's still hard to digest them without some acid reflux.

That's because when Europeans dole out these judgments, a whole litany of stereotypes often lurks in the background -- about America as a cowboy culture, prone to enthusiasm and extremes, versus the allegedly deeper sophistication and greater balance of the European mind. Conveniently ignored is the fact that the church's political alignment in a given culture often depends on factors beyond its control. In both Europe and the States, one such variable is how open the political left is to pro-life sentiment. To put the point bluntly, if pro-lifers (including Catholics) can't find a home on the left, many of them are obviously going to end up on the right.

On both sides of the Atlantic, recent days have brought intriguing indications that the political plates may be shifting in opposite directions.

The American end of the equation came over the weekend, with passage of an amendment authored by

Rep. Bart Stupak, a pro-life Democrat from Michigan, applying longstanding federal prohibitions on abortion funding to a new public insurance program and to new federal subsidies for private insurance. The amendment met the test the U.S. bishops had established to render health care reform, in their eyes, ?abortion neutral.?

After discussions with the bishops' conference, the Democratic leadership allowed the measure to come up for a vote. That decision outraged pro-choice advocates, who, in a back-handed tribute to the bishops, essentially accused them of dictating the result.

(So much, by the way, for predictions of the political ?irrelevance? of the bishops in the wake of the sex abuse crisis. I've posted a blog entry on this point: [NCRonline.org/the-future-church](https://www.ncronline.org/the-future-church).)

A fair bit of the material for the book was first rolled out in this column, and in countless cases the presentation in the book was sharpened, fleshed out, or revised in light of reactions from ?All Things Catholic? readers. I offer a note of gratitude in the book, but let me repeat it here: Thanks to all of you who put in your two cents. Even if I wasn't able to reply personally, rest assured your thoughts got my attention.

Whatever flaws the book has are my own, of course, but many of its strengths come from you.

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