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The Catholic Club: Are you in or out?

by Kate Childs Graham

There are as many ways to live out our Catholic faith as there are Catholics. That's over 1 billion ways, for those of you who are keeping count. Sure, there are practices and beliefs that we hold in common, and, every once in a while, a group forms around one or two or three or four of these commonalities. But, at the end of the day, we are unique individuals. So, it makes perfect sense that we are unique Catholics as well.

Our individual paths don't make us any less Catholic. It could even be argued that living out our faith according to our conscience makes us *more* Catholic.

Somewhere along the way, though, Catholicism forgot the beauty of being a diverse community of believers. Now, Catholics of all stripes -- liberal, conservative or moderate -- are pointing to others, arbitrarily saying (at times, shouting) that they aren't Catholic because of the way they choose to live out their faith. Instead, they brand them Catholics-In-Name-Only, anti-Catholics or Catholycs. It's become a Little Rascals' style club -- McCarthyism's equally evil twin. You're in or you're out.

We've lost our big tent.

Certainly, we shouldn't avoid talking about the tough issues or play down our beliefs and values to join in some kind of love circle. We owe it to ourselves and to each other to dialogue on that which we disagree. We may never come to an agreement. But that's alright, as long as this can all be done within the context of respect and love for one another.

The pace of our society makes it easy to forget about respect. In the lead up to the healthcare vote, tensions rose between liberal and conservative Catholics on Twitter. Here's a sample of some of the back and forth between Thomas Peters of the American Papist blog and Chris Korzen of Catholics United:

americanpapist @USCatholic @catholicdems @catholicsunited @americamag @ncronline all fall under Abp. Chaput's condemnation: <http://tinyurl.com/y9exqmb> #hcr

americanpapist @CatholicNewsSvc good 2 C His Eminence making the same prudential decision I did. confirms my contention that "catholics" are wrong on this.

chriskorzen @americanpapist Since when did Abp. Chaput become an expert in health insurance finance? Is it possible that CHA knows this stuff better?

americanpapist @chriskorzen since when did you become an expert in Catholic social teaching? It's more than probable +Chaput knows more about it than you

chriskorzen @americanpapist This isn't about CST, it's about what's in the healthcare bill. The experts say the bill does not fund abortion.

americanpapist @chriskorzen this *isn't* about CST??!! Then why is @catholicsunited involved? Or do you just mime the democrat priorities? Seriously, Chris?

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americanpapist @chriskorzen the "experts" (Jost) make an argument from omission. Stupak's attempts to make explicit provisions are denied. Why r Ds scared?

chriskorzen @americanpapist You left out a few experts: ABC News, NBC News, and the Catholic Health Association :)

americanpapist @chriskorzen of course I did, they aren't even close to the level of depth and detail that Jost has. Why waste time with lesser arguments?

chriskorzen @americanpapist Let me ask you this: do you believe that health care reform ought uphold current laws regarding federal funding of abortion?

americanpapist @chriskorzen a) i do not think #hcr should be a vehicle for funneling more money into subsidizing abortions and abortion providers.

americanpapist @chriskorzen b) this #hcr bill gives massive new powers to radical pro-aborts (like sebelius at #hhs) who want more abortions (\$\$\$ saving)

chriskorzen @americanpapist it's a simple question. there are precedents here - should we change them or not?

americanpapist @chriskorzen its a simple question back: do you believe more women who want abortions will get \$\$\$ to have them or not? I believe they will.

chriskorzen @americanpapist nice dodge :)

americanpapist @chriskorzen no, a refocusing. but sure I'll take the bait: Hyde precedent should be enshrined in law if dem. leadership truly respects it

americanpapist @chriskorzen now if youll excuse me, I have to go to the Hill and hear again how dem leadership is stonewalling pro-life efforts. kthxbye.

Now, both of these men are antiabortion, but Chris supported the healthcare bill with or without the Stupak Amendment and Thomas did not. For me, this conversation shows what happens when our passions get the best of us and we are unwilling to listen to one another, to see the grey area and to recognize the humanity of those with whom we disagree.

We all have different passions, beliefs and ways of being. It could be detrimental to our relationships to create litmus tests or count someone out because how they choose to be Catholic. I admit that I have been guilty of this on more than one occasion.

The future of the Catholic church depends on the church being a big tent that is welcoming and inclusive of all people. I've spoken with many people who are drawn to Catholicism, but feel they could never join the church because they don't agree with every church teaching. And, of course, there are many more leaving the church because they don't feel like they can walk their individual path within the Catholic community.

My hope is that we learn to love our neighbors, embracing them in how they choose to live their Catholic faith as they embrace us in the same.

Let's lose the club and bring back the big tent.

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