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Tom DeLay & The Varieties of Corruption

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Distinctly Catholic

Former Congressman Tom DeLay was found guilty of money laundering and conspiracy to commit money laundering. He could face life in prison and he should, but not only because he laundered money. He laundered money with the objective of influencing politics, of subverting the democratic processes by which the rule of law is given its legitimacy.

Recently, Congressman Charles Rangel was found guilty of violating House rules and now faces a censure from the whole House. His variety of corruption was the most pervasive, but the least dangerous, to our political culture. He did not play by the rules, failing to report income, and he used his congressional office to raise money for a school that bore his name. In other words, he had the sense that the rules did not apply to him, but he did not seek to frustrate the electoral system nor to make a lot of money by trading on his name or influence.

DeLay's crimes are of an altogether graver quality. He laundered money into campaign accounts, violating prohibitions against illegal campaign giving. He sought to rig the game. His crimes bear a greater resemblance to Nixon's crimes, and they should be punished with all the severity our penal code allows. It is one thing to break the law. That is bad enough. But, when you assault the democratic process, there is a special place reserved in constitutional hell for you. Throw the book at him.

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