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Olmsted: Shoot the Messenger

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Distinctly Catholic

Bishop Olmsted of Phoenix was upset about the results of a survey, conducted by one of the most respected researchers in the business, former CUA professor Bill D'Antonio, that indicated most Catholics in the diocese of Phoenix thought Olmsted's on-going fight with St. Joseph Hospital was misguided. The local paper reports: "During a news conference Friday afternoon in Scottsdale, Olmsted, who serves on the board of Catholic University of America, dismissed the survey findings, saying the surveyor no longer works for the university.

He also said those who participated in the survey were probably influenced by the secular press' coverage of the matter and don't 'know the situation' of the case."

Read that again. "Dismissed the survey findings." Not sure about you, but this conjured an image of King Canute ordering the waves to recede. "The surveyor no longer works for the university." Shoot the messenger. "Those who participated in the survey were probably influenced by the secular press' coverage of the matter." Well, yes, the people in the pews are literate, Bishop, and they do consult the media, much of which is secular, and it is your job as a bishop to take cognizance of that fact and find ways to explain your position in ways that your people will understand.

There is something puerile in all this denial. And, the funny thing is that the most astounding result of the survey to my mind was the finding that 71 percent of respondents agreed that the bishop had the authority to revoke the Catholic status of the hospital, even while most of them disagreed with his use of that authority in this situation.

In other words, the people do not resent bishops, they do not deny them the special role they play in the life of the Church, they recognize their authority, but they are not afraid to disagree with them.

Maybe they have been watching "The Borgias" too much. I think a more likely interpretation is that the Catholic lay faithful are faithful but they are not dumb. I think we can also conclude that Bishop Olmsted's dismissive, defensiveness is precisely why so many find the Church unattractive and leave. And those who stay are literate, informed men and women, they are not bobble-heads. And, Bishop Olmsted doesn't need a survey to demonstrate that fact, he just needs to get out of his chancery and talk to people.

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