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House Republicans pass budget that will devastate programs for the poor

Tom Gallagher | Mar. 22, 2013 NCR Today

In a stark contrast to the words and actions of new Pope Francis, Catholic Congressman Paul Ryan and some 50 Catholic House Republicans joined fellow Republicans and passed a federal budget along party lines that will directly hurt the poor.

Paul Krugman [1] -- winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, professor of economics and international affairs at Princeton University, and opinion writer at *The New York Times* -- has done the heavy lifting for the U.S. bishops in calling out Congressman Ryan in detail again and again, and now for perhaps the cruelest budget ever. Here's Krugman's recent blog post on Ryan's new budget [2]:

Flimflam Forever

I took Paul Ryan's measure two and a half years ago [3]. All the Very Serious People were very angry with me -- Ryan was the Serious, Honest Conservative, the guy centrists demonstrated their centrism by praising. But he was an obvious phony. His "plan" was all smoke (I couldn't even find any mirrors), with all the alleged deficit reduction coming from closing tax loopholes he refused to specify plus projected reductions in discretionary spending that he also refused to specify. Meanwhile, he was pursuing radical redistribution away from the needy to the wealthy.

Nothing has changed, except that the plan has gotten even crueler.

So while I may do some analysis later today, the only really interesting question is how the VSPs will react. Have they had enough of the Flimflam Man? Or does hype spring eternal?"

The main letter writers at the U.S. bishops conference, Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, chairman of the USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace, sent yet another missive to Congress [4]:

The bishops also offered three moral criteria to guide budgetary decisions:

? Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
? Every budget proposal should be measured by how it affects "the least of these" (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
? Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

"As pastors, we see every day the human consequences of budget choices. Our Catholic community defends the unborn, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. We help poor families rise above crushing poverty, resettle refugees fleeing conflict and persecution,

and reach out to communities devastated by wars, natural disasters and famines," the bishops wrote.

In his inaugural Mass [5], Pope Francis urged the protection of human dignity. "To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love is to open up a horizon of hope," he said.

It's as clear as day: Ryan and his 50-some fellow Catholic House Republicans give not a whit about what the U.S. bishops have to say about the federal budget and protecting the poor. (Frankly, it's getting uncomfortable and embarrassing to watch the U.S. bishops be entirely and repeatedly ignored by the Catholic House Republicans.)

So now what?

Should the Catholic House Republicans be denied Communion? Should they be denied the right to speak at Catholic organizations? Should they be denied honors given by Catholic organizations? Should U.S. bishops start filing lawsuits, as they have for the so-called threat to religious liberty because of the inclusion of contraception in the new health insurance law?

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