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To credit the views of casual Catholics as representative of the Church is like crediting Gary Willis as representative of AP
 The President's invitation to dialogue. Talking about abortion won't solve anybody's problems. It's been talked about for decades.
 The issue's political intractability is caused *not* by a lack of dialogue, but by judicial rigidification. It's no wonder that the abortion issue is perennially controversial (where America has perhaps the most liberal abortion laws in the West (much more so than many European countries)), because the lack of regulation is directly attributable to the Supreme Court's de-democratization of the issue. Until the Supreme Court releases the issue to the democratic branches, dialogue is fruitless.

3. *Academic freedom.* I do not find persuasive the argument that the Church should not forbid a Catholic university from inviting persons to speak who hold views gravely contrary to the Church's teaching. First, the Church cannot compel anybody, but it can declare whether a university that calls itself Catholic and that attracts students and donors on the grounds that its operation is consistent with the Church's teachings, remains a Catholic institution. The Church's activity here is if anything a sort of anti-fraud device, to ensure that certain consumers (Catholics) are not bamboozled into purchasing fake goods. Second, academic freedom is an intelligible principle only with respect to government regulation; who cares what private schools do with their professors? If the "silenced" professors really have something interesting to say, and if the educational market is a free one, then they'll find a pulpit.

4. *Where's the surprise?* Those of us who attended Catholic universities (and I attended two) know full well that, for all but a handful (and those in the handful are obscure), these schools are Catholic in name only; or, more accurately, they are Catholic when chatting up donors for money or kids for students, but they are as secular as they come in all other respects. And we learned from last Sunday's speech that Notre Dame's students are like those on almost any other secular college campus: liberal, jejune, cocksure, and impressionable. I was not surprised, and no one else who is familiar with Catholic education in the U.S. should have been.

5. *Abortion as a religious issue.* Although the Church teaches that abortion is a grave evil, it does so on purely rational/moral grounds, not on religious or revealed grounds. Thus, the Church can legitimately argue to a secular government that laws allowing abortion are gravely immoral. It is not a question of imposing one's religious views on anyone (after all, the fact that the Ten Commandments forbid murder and theft does not make civil laws against those acts improper). Hence, the Church's insistence upon pro-life Catholic campuses is fully consistent with the Church's promotion of religious liberty as integral to the human person's dignity.

Posted at 10:02 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

May 20, 2009

Why I do not sleep in the nude

Several of my colleagues have revealed that they are wont to sleep without clothes on. I do not subscribe to this practice, and I feel compelled to offer some justification.

1. Sleeping without clothes, by increasing the contacts between sheet and skin, dirties one's sheets faster.
2. Sleeping without clothes makes one more susceptible to impure thoughts (by occasioning happenstantial glances at one's nether regions).
3. Sleeping without clothes makes one ill-prepared to leave the house of a sudden, say, if the house catches fire.
4. Sleeping without clothes increases the risk of bites from bugs, because more skin is exposed.
5. Sleeping without clothes makes one more susceptible to chills.

For these reasons, I shall stick to my pajamas.

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May 17, 2009

Teaching "gayness" in public schools

The San Francisco Chronicle [reported](#) this week about a controversy in Alameda county schools. Apparently, the school district wants to add a new lesson to its anti-bullying and safe schools program for K-5 students. I have not seen the proposed lesson, but from the article, it seems to teach not only that bullying of homosexuals qua homosexuals is wrong, *but also* that the homosexual lifestyle is a good, and that homosexual families are the moral equivalent of traditional heterosexual families. The Pacific Justice Institute has become involved, and there may be litigation.

What is the remedy here?

I doubt that many folks would question the legitimacy of some form of "manners" and "courtesy" training for young kids, and surely we do not object to the schools' teaching kids not to make racial jokes or to use racial epithets. But we wouldn't object precisely because we, as a secular community, have reached the conclusion that all racism and most forms of racialism are unacceptable in the public square. To be sure, we tolerate racism in some private forms as a function of our respect for the First Amendment, but we see no reason to have that aberrancy recognized as legitimate in our public actions.

Yet there is the rub: as a secular society, even here in California, we are nowhere near a consensus on the moral implications of homosexuality (witness Prop. 8). Thus, how can our schools presume to teach our children principles and beliefs that many of those children's parents do not share, and prefer not to have their children share? Perhaps someone will respond: would you have objected to an anti-racism curriculum being taught in 1950s Arkansas? I guess my answer there would be a qualified yes, that I would have objected, not that I would approve of racism, but that, as a prudential matter, the best way to get people to drop their racist views would *not* be to force the teaching of their children. Until consensus is reached on the moral implications of homosexuality, any attempt on the part of the public schools to take sides on those implications is wrongheaded.

And so, the remedy? Allow parents to opt out of public schools altogether, and let them keep their taxes. Why should folks have to pay for somebody else's education, or for facilities that they themselves do not use? A bitter pill to some, maybe, but the true cure.

Posted at 02:32 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

May 16, 2009

The fallacy of a saying

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." This apothegm is so obviously false in so many circumstances that it's hard to believe that it ever became a saying. I mean, hard drinking makes your liver weaker, not stronger; hard smoking makes your lungs weaker, not stronger; hard living in general makes you weaker, not stronger, even though it doesn't kill you. So I'm left to wonder: how did this saying come about? Was it intended to be ironical? If so, how many purposefully ironic sayings are out there? And shouldn't we warn the more gullible among us to be on the lookout lest they be taken in by one of them?

P.S. Why I am not surprised that the saying comes from [Nietzsche](#)? Of course it needn't make sense to an insane nihilist.

Posted at 05:24 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

May 14, 2009

The courtesy of God

The pope has been traveling in the Holy Land this week. Today he attended vespers at Bethlehem's Church of the Annunciation. In his [homily](#), the pope noted how God effected his salvific plan while observing a remarkable respect for the dignity of man, a dignity of which he himself was the author:

The narrative of the Annunciation illustrates God's extraordinary courtesy (cf. Mother Julian of Norwich, Revelations 77-79). He does not impose himself, he does not simply pre-determine the part that Mary will play in his plan for our salvation: he first seeks her consent. In the original Creation there was clearly no question of God seeking the consent of his creatures, but in this new Creation he does so. Mary stands in the place of all humanity. She speaks for us all when she responds to the angel's invitation. Saint Bernard describes how the whole court of heaven was waiting with eager anticipation for her word of consent that consummated the nuptial union between God and humanity. The attention of all the choirs of angels was riveted on this spot, where a dialogue took place that would launch a new and definitive chapter in world history. Mary said, "Let it be done to me according to your word." And the Word of God became flesh.

St. Francis used to remark that courtesy is the handmaid of charity; and one can easily see the interrelationship between the social respect of persons and place, and the universal injunction to love one's neighbor.

[HT: [New Advent](#)]

Posted at 05:46 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

May 12, 2009

On lying

Most people recognize the virtue of truthfulness, and the importance of not deceiving others about the true state of things. But what of those instances where divulging the truth would cause significant harm to others? For example, let's say you were a German in WWII and you hid Jews in your house. If the Gestapo were to come to your door and ask whether you had any Jews in the house, and you said