

Death Penalty Debate

Scholars Discuss Pope's Call for Total Ban

BY STEPHEN BEALE
REGISTER CORRESPONDENT

Pope Francis' recent condemnation of the death penalty builds upon rather than breaks with the teaching of his predecessors and bolsters Catholic efforts to repeal capital punishment, according to several theologians.

"The Pope's remarks are likely to reinforce the teaching of John Paul II, which has been strongly resisted by pro-capital punishment Catholics," said Christian Brugger, a theologian who has authored a book on the death penalty and serves as a senior fellow on ethics at the Culture of Life Foundation.

However, other Catholic scholars on the death penalty who hold that Church teaching does not prohibit capital punishment in all cases have expressed a somewhat different view, arguing that Pope Francis' remarks should not be interpreted as definitively ending the debate.

At an Oct. 11 meeting to mark the 25th anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church under Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Francis declared that the death penalty is "contrary to the Gospel" and constitutes "an attack on the inviolability and the dignity of the person."

In light of this, Francis indicated the Catechism should be updated to provide "a more adequate and coherent treatment in the light of these expressed aims."

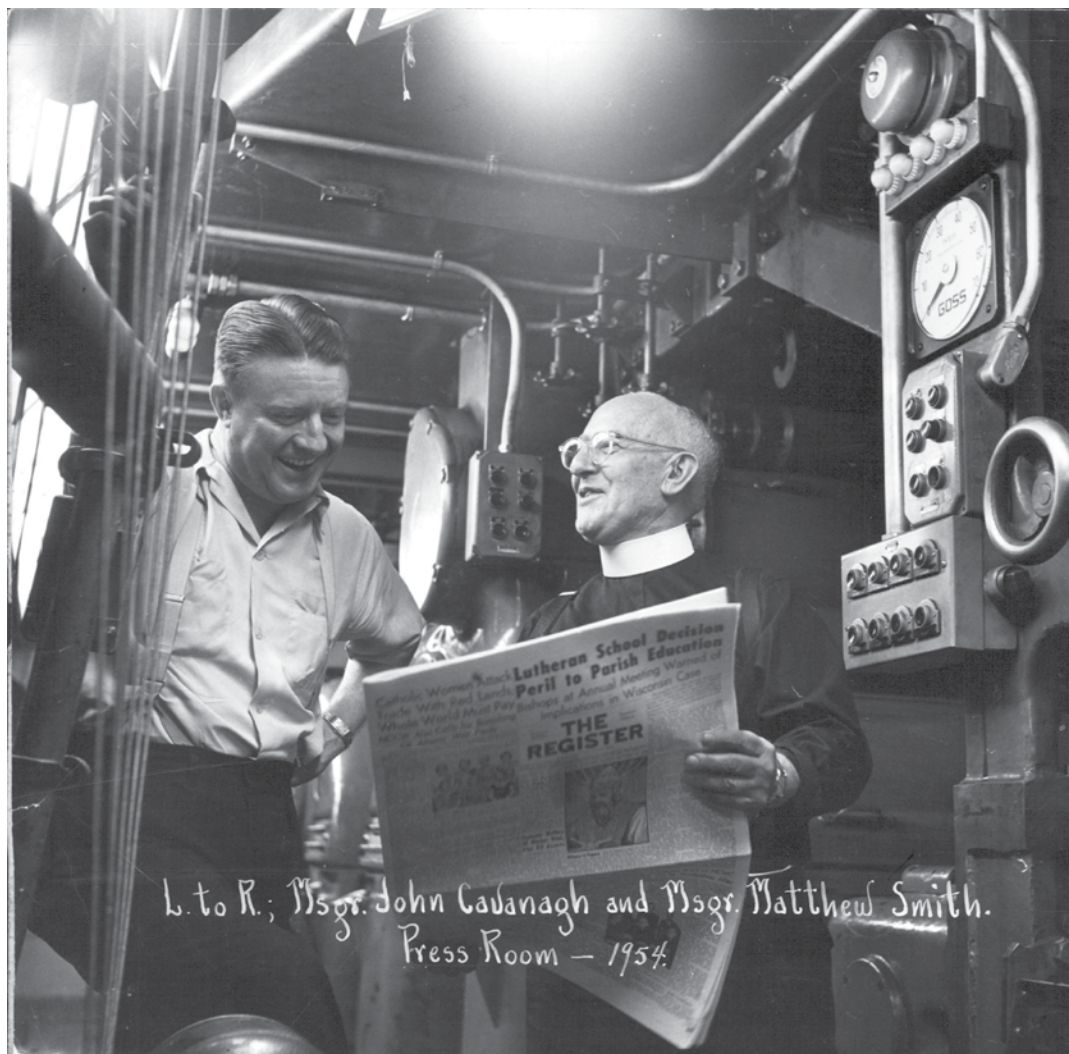
The Pope said that this specific declaration that the death penalty is impermissible in all cases, no matter how serious the crime, is not a contradiction of earlier Church teaching because "the defense of the dignity of human life from the first moment of conception to natural death has been taught by the Church consistently and authoritatively."

Reinforcement, Not Rupture

While some observers interpreted his remarks as a rupture with past teaching, Brugger says that all Pope Francis is doing is drawing out the implications of John Paul II as reflected in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and his landmark pro-life encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life).

Both documents restrict the death penalty to narrowly defined situations and even then seem to question its necessity. The Catechism states that the punishment is allowable if it is "the only possible way of effectively defending human

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Contraceptive Mandate Relief in Sight

Justice Department Seeks Settlements With Religious Nonprofits

BY BRIAN FRAGA
REGISTER CORRESPONDENT

WASHINGTON — After six years of legal fights that included hundreds of lawsuits and five trips to the U.S. Supreme Court, a positive conclusion is finally in sight for the religious nonprofits and private employers with moral objections to providing contraceptives and abortifacients in their employee health insurance plans.

The Trump administration's decision to expand the religious exemption under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' contraceptive mandate, announced Oct. 6, was welcomed by Church leaders, representatives from religious nonprofits and the attorneys who have been litigating on their behalf since the Obama administration unveiled the first version of the mandate in 2011.

"We're very grateful for this new interim final rule, which I think is a return to common sense that respects the fundamental religious liberties of individuals, and certainly of churches and church ministries," Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore told the Register in a phone interview.

Archbishop Lori, who serves as the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, also described the new interim rules as a "restoration of the balance" between religious liberty and government interests that existed prior to the mandate.

Said Archbishop Lori, "We would be very hopeful that there might be a settlement on the part of the Department of Justice, with all variety of litigants that would have the effect of giving us a more permanent form of relief."

In two separate conference calls with reporters shortly after two companion interim final rules on the mandate were released, attorneys for Alliance Defending Freedom and Becket — two legal groups that represented dozens of litigants who challenged the mandate — said they expect the Department of Justice will be willing to settle lawsuits that are still pending in the federal courts.

"I assume the government's lawyers won't step in the way of the parties getting that relief," said Mark Rienzi, senior counsel for Becket, which represented the Little Sisters of the Poor and other groups that fought the mandate, including

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The Register at 90

Forming and Informing Catholics With 'Snap, Vigor and Courage'

BY PETER JESSERER SMITH
STAFF WRITER

When Soviet tanks rumbled into Lithuania in 1991, a pair of young journalists crossed the border — for the second time — to chronicle the death throes of the Soviet Union for the National Catholic Register.

Soviet dictator Josef Stalin once reputedly scoffed, "The Pope! How many divisions has he got?" when told Pope Pius XI wanted to see signs of encouragement for religion and Catholics in Russia. More than 50 years later, Joop Koopman and Jonathan Luxmoore were on assignment for the Register, crisscrossing in a secondhand *Polonez*, a Polish car with a cast-iron bumper that Luxmoore bought from a Belgian ambassador, sending back their firsthand accounts of watching the empire Stalin built crumble before St. John Paul II's religious revolution.

"We were at the cutting-edge of political reform and change," recalled Koopman, who went on to serve as the newspaper's editor during the 1990s.

These and other stories of the past 90 years rest in the Register's archives. But the fading pages of print also tell the story of a long line of men and women who served as custodians of a great mission to form, inform and challenge generations of Catholic readers to engage the world through the global lens of the Catholic faith.

From its very beginnings Nov. 8, 1927, up to its present day as a news service of the EWTN Global Catholic Network, the Register has left its mark on both its readers and the journalists who aspired to bring the best professional writing to its pages.

Denver Origins

The National Catholic Register was born out of the *Denver Catholic Register*, which began as an effort in 1905 to set the record straight for Colorado's Catholics and had been overseen by Msgr. Matthew Smith since 1913. Msgr. Smith took over leadership of the Denver newspaper as a lay jour-

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"The Easiest Paper in the World to Read"

For years, leaders in many parts of the nation have asked the publishers of this paper to put out a national edition. Their reason was because The Register has always believed in large headlines and the use of every decent trick to attract readers. It has also never been afraid to take a definite stand on stirring questions.

This is the first edition as a national paper. It starts with a large circulation, which we believe is destined to grow by leaps and bounds.

If you like a Catholic paper with snap, vigor, courage, here it is. If you like one that is easy to read, here it is. If you like one that will always be loyal to the Church and that has no selfish axe to grind, here it is.

Like all other human agencies, we may make mistakes every now and then; we may not always attain the goals we set for ourselves; but we are going to give the nation a live-wire journal, conducted by thoroughly-trained newspapermen, who will use all the devices of their profession to drive home the power of the Catholic religion.

The Diocese of Denver, in order to encourage our plan, has backed us in procuring what is probably the finest printing plant used by an American Catholic paper. We have all the equipment of a metropolitan daily, with the single exception that we do not require as many linotypes as they do. But our press room, our composing room, and our other departments are fitted up for the production of a big league newspaper.

THEN AND NOW. Above left, Msgr. Matthew Smith discusses a new issue of the National Catholic Register with Msgr. John Cavanaugh in the press room in Denver. Archdiocese of Denver. Above right, current Register publisher Michael Warsaw reads an issue of the Register under the watchful gaze of EWTN foundress Mother Angelica. Anthony Bratina/EWTN

Anniversary Coverage Inside

- [Mother Teresa, The Register And Me, Page 3](#)
- [The Register Through The Years, Pages 3, 4 And 5](#)
- [You Had To Be There, Page 4](#)
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IN BRIEF

Quote of the Week

"The Register ... became a crucial voice in the Church throughout the United States."

— George Weigel, page-one story on the Register

The Aid of Hospice

How Catholics have been helped by end-of-life care. Culture of Life, page B1

Compassionate Saints

The holy example of Sts. Teresa of Calcutta, John Paul II, Benedict Joseph Labre and Thérèse. Culture of Life, page B1

Towering Saint

Lebanon now has a soaring monument of St. Charbel. Travel, page B5

Martin Luther's Unintended Reformation Today

Scholar Brad Gregory Addresses the 500-Year Split



the Conflicts That Continue to Shape Our World (HarperCollins, 2017). Gregory has also presented a series on the Reformation

era for The Great Courses Co.

Register correspondent Stephanie A. Mann interviewed Gregory in the midst of a busy month of conferences and presentations commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reforma-

tion, asking him, via email, about the themes of his Reformation scholarship.

What are we really celebrating or commemorating this year? The beginning of the Protestant Reformation or Martin Luther's posting of the "95 Theses"?

By convention — and not without reason — Luther's "95 Theses" are also considered the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. They initiated an unexpected

series of events that led to Luther's defiance of and condemnation by Pope Leo X in early 1521.

The really important "posting" of the "95 Theses," incidentally, wasn't Luther's affixing them to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, an event not mentioned until decades later, and that didn't attain iconic-moment status until the 19th century, and which might not even have happened. The important posting was that,

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