

“GUILT BY ASSOCIATION”: CORONAS, CATHOLICS AND *AD HOMINEM* ATTACKS

We are living in an unsettled and tumultuous period, often described as “the calm before the storm.” Dating from as early as **1601**, in which a similar phrase appeared in an English play entitled “The Dumb Knight,” it refers to that **sinking feeling** that something **ominous** is on the horizon for Catholics. Like late spring thunderstorms, our experience has taught us to recognize when the atmosphere is ripe for a major storm. You can feel it in your bones! Be it the impending *Dobbs* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, churches being vandalized, or the complicated and tragic issue of historic residential schools for native Americans, I keep waiting for the **other shoe** to drop. People are angry. Some are looking to assign blame, making the Catholic Church an attractive target. Long-time **New York Times** columnist **Maureen Dowd** is a Pulitzer Prize winner. Her well-documented views on key moral issues couldn’t be more disparate from my own. Nevertheless, there is value in engaging the thoughts of others.

It is much easier to consider only those with whom you agree; I’m **guilty** as charged on that count. But it is neither satisfying, nor is it our calling as witnesses in the world. I am no fan of **echo chambers**! Last week, Dowd wrote a piece about the current composition of the US Supreme Court entitled “**Too Much Church in the State.**” She is outraged that “five or six people in lifelong unaccountable jobs” seek to “impose their personal views” on the country. As she has done before, she references both her own Catholic upbringing and her serious doctrinal disagreements with the Church. No surprise here. However, her May 14 column about Catholicism and the Supreme Court appears to me as a classic example of “guilt by association.” The fallacy of **guilt by association** is best explained using elementary logic. If we start with the premise that “A is a B” then add, “A is also a C” we can easily arrive at a false conclusion– “Therefore, all B’s are C’s.”

Just because “A” falls into a space occupied by both B and C, one may not conclude that the entirety of B and C coincide. For example: A crow is a bird. Crows are black. All birds are black. That is logically fallacious. Noting that the U.S. Supreme Court currently is dominated (six out of the nine) by self-identified or former (Gorsuch) Catholics, Dowd effectively **concludes** that their **jurisprudence** is also **dominated** by their religious views. In her own words: “Still, this Catholic feels an intense disquiet that Catholic doctrine may be shaping (or misshaping) the freedom and the future of millions of women, and men. There is a corona of religious fervor around the court, a churchly ethos that threatens to turn our whole country upside down.” Going out on a limb here folks, but I don’t think Dowd is referring to **crisp pale** Mexican lager!

Here, **corona** refers to the **outer atmosphere** of the Sun or another star. A “corona of religious fervor” sounds eerily akin to the “penumbra” employed 49 years ago by our nation’s highest court. Deriving from the Latin *paene* (almost) and *umbra* (shadow), both the moon and the earth cast shadows into space as they block the sunlight that hits them. The *penumbra* represents the **half-shadow** that occurs when the Moon obscures part of the Sun’s disk. It is the “lighter” shadow just beyond the darker shadow. Justice **Harry Blackmun** used that term in describing the “right of privacy” in his majority opinion in *Roe v. Wade* (22 January 1973). Time will tell how the court evaluates the perceived “right to abortion” after a final decision is rendered. To speak of a corona (Latin for crown) of religious fervor implies an **aura of religiosity** at the **edges** or just beneath the surface. While not overt, it is visible to those **perspicacious** enough to recognize it. In other words, today’s *illuminati* know the score, even if you do not.

Dowd briefly delves into the relationship between Associate Justice **Amy Coney Barret** and the **People of Praise**, an ecumenical charismatic Christian community to which the justice's family belongs. With branches in 14 states, including one here in the Twin Cities, some of our own parishioners belong to POP. The community operates **Trinity School** in Eagan, an outstanding classical school. Dowd is insistent that while the draft opinion is cloaked in "legal casuistry," there is something deeper at the edges going on. Dowd lays it all out, presenting the **usual suspects**: (A) The Church's commitment to women in need is disingenuous given its penchant for keeping women "in subservient roles"; (B) A Church whose clergy sexually abused so many children is now seeking to "control women's sexuality." Such canards are invoked *ad nauseam*, but it is the Church's unwavering commitment to the sanctity of life in the womb that utterly infuriates some.

Yet, every poll confirms that Catholics ceased thinking **monolithically** on moral and political issues long ago. Nowhere does our constitution imply that Americans must check their religious convictions at the doorstep, or that law has nothing to do with morality. Laws are replete with moral underpinnings (e.g. polygamy is illegal); they also delineate the limits of personal societal freedom. Just as our convictions (religious or otherwise) are **fair game** in the public square, so too must our Supreme Court justices interpret the constitution based upon the rule of law. Dowd draws a **fallacious inference** about the justices based on their **Catholicism**, while simultaneously ignoring that seven men "in lifelong unaccountable jobs" reached a very different conclusion in 1973. Did not they "impose their personal views on the rest of the country"? What is the difference here?

- *Quamdiu, Domine?* "How long, Lord?" (Psalm 13:2) How long?! The horrific shootings in **Buffalo, NY** and at the church in CA have left the nation reeling once again. Why?! That an 18-year-old could be fueled by such **racial hatred** towards African Americans is unimaginable. The CA shooting was motivated by hatred for Taiwan. Even if mental illness was a significant contributing factor, it remains **pure evil**, plain and simple. Such tragedies beggar the imagination.
- Archbishop Hebda will celebrate a special **Pentecost Vigil Mass** here on Saturday **June 4 at 7:00 p.m.** during the **Synod Assembly**. It replaces the **5:15 Mass** and includes an **extended number** of readings (five before the Gospel!) and texts that reflect on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.
- I am humbled and grateful for the opportunity to have our Masses broadcast on **Relevant Radio**. This service to the faithful is carried out with joy and accomplished with a relatively small staff. If you have a chance, **thank** Relevant Radio for their partnership with us.
- Congratulations to Detroit Tigers star **Miguel Cabrera**, who joined the coveted 3000 career hit club on April 23. Sporting a career .310 BA, he is just the 7th player in Major League history to compile **500 home runs** and 3,000 hits. That is insane!
- Thank you for your support of the 2022 **Catholic Services Appeal**. We are inching steadily towards our goal but are not quite there. If we exceed our goal, we receive a percentage of any overage for use right here in our parish.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector