



Serving the San Francisco
Archdiocese since 1999

News

Front Page

Briefs

Archive

Datebook

Editorials

Commentary

Information

About Us

Advertise

Subscribe

Staff Directory

Contact Us

Archdiocese

Home Page

What's New

Attack on Jesuits out of place

(Ed. note: Following is a letter to the Archdiocese of Denver in regard to a column by George Weigel carried in the Feb. 20 Denver Catholic Register. Written by University of San Francisco President Jesuit Father Stephen A. Privett, the letter was forwarded to Catholic San Francisco in anticipation of the newspaper carrying the Weigel column on this page.)

I write in response to George Weigel's column attacking the Society of Jesus and to register my disappointment that the Archdiocese of Denver saw fit to publish this piece [Feb. 20] and offer it for syndication.

It is difficult for me to understand how the Church is well served by such a mean - spirited assault on a religious order that has served the Church, not perfectly but well, for almost 500 years. The blood of Jesuit martyrs seeded Christianity in the Americas and Asia and more recently witnessed to the Church's preferential love for the poor in El Salvador. We Jesuits have been the subject of malicious attacks for our entire history, but rarely in an official archdiocesan newspaper. We deserve better.

Let me address some specific concerns I have regarding the accuracy of this column. Mr. Weigel falsely claims that Father James Keenan, SJ testified in 2003 before the Massachusetts Legislature's Joint Commission on the Judiciary that Catholic social thought "demanded" gay marriage. He did not do so. Father Keenan testified against unjust discrimination against gay couples. He did not testify in support of gay marriage or approve homosexual activity. Mr. Weigel is free to argue with Father Keenan's position, but he is not free to put false words in his mouth.

Mr. Weigel's stunningly sweeping statement that Jesuit Father Robert Drinan "did more than anyone else to convince Catholic legislators" on the issue of abortion lacks any supporting evidence. Further, attacks on Father Drinan, who has been out of Congress for more than 25 years and dead for two, strike me as singularly unfair, much like similar attacks on Pope Pius XII or Father Marcel Maciel, neither of whom are alive to defend themselves. Judgments on such complicated persons and situations are best left to qualified historians and only after a thorough review of all relevant archival materials, not to 700 - word columns by opinionated pundits. The Church would be better served if we all followed the Catholic adage, *dic nihil nisi bonum de mortuis* (of the dead speak kindly or not at all) .

On a more philosophical point, I disagree with Mr. Weigel's reduction of abortion to a "civil rights" issue. It is that, but only by extension and secondarily. The right to life is not simply a "civil right" conferred by the 13th or 14th amendments to our Constitution or by any civil authority; it is a God - given right constitutive of the dignity of every human being at every stage of life. Mr. Weigel would seem to minimize the importance of abortion by mischaracterizing it as "the great civil rights struggle" rather than "the pivotal moral issue" of our time.

Mr. Weigel's reference to Jesuit novices in "gay drag" refers to a photo taken at a Halloween party seven years ago at the novitiate. The novices were in costumes that Mr. Weigel chose to characterize as "gay drag" while disingenuously implying some sort of sybaritic happening. (I hope no one unearths the fifth grade photo of me dressed as a nun in the 1952 All Saints Day parade at St. Mary Magdalen Grammar School in Los Angeles!) The photo in question of two novices was never "featured" by the California Province website; it was mistakenly put on - line and immediately taken off for fear it would be malevolently misinterpreted by the likes of Mr. Weigel.

"Will Father Nicolas demand that Jesuits observe their vows of chastity. " This is a classic "When did you stop beating your spouse?" question. I am not a literalist, but

I saw no evidence whatsoever from Weigel that Jesuits do not observe their vow of chastity. Mr. Weigel has apparently not read the document on chastity published in 1995 by General Congregation 34 which thoroughly discusses the significance of the vow of Chastity in Jesuit life. Mr. Weigel asks, "Are there no consequences for those who violate those vows?" without producing a shred of evidence that Jesuit superiors do not hold members accountable for fidelity to their vows. They do.

To refer to Catholicism as "vestigial at best" on Catholic college campuses indicates an animosity toward and ignorance of Catholic universities. Just one example: USF has a Catholic Studies program; a Catholic focused - curriculum in the Theology and Religious Studies Department; a Master's Program in Catholic Theology for which those who teach in Catholic schools receive a 50 percent tuition reduction; the Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought; a Catholic theology emphasis; an endowed faculty chair in Catholic thought; the McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good; a graduate Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership that has prepared countless Catholic school administrators across the country; a residential student learning community, the St. Ignatius Institute, whose common curriculum is comprised of classic texts from Augustine and Aquinas to John Paul II; a partnership with the Archdiocese of San Francisco to support Catholic grammar schools in the Mission; USF has honored Cardinal Levada and Archbishop Niederauer with honorary doctoral degrees and both archbishops have lectured on campus and met with University trustees; USF has a flourishing university ministry program with retreats, liturgies, lectures and prayer groups; USF students participate in international papal youth day.

Pope Benedict XVI expressed his feelings for the Society of Jesus in an address (the entire talk is worth reading) to members of the current General Congregation when he said to the assembled Jesuits, "The Church needs you, counts on you, and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach." The pope asked that Jesuits "make the face of the Lord known to so many for whom it remains

hidden or unrecognizable."

Mr. Weigel began his column by citing Father General Nicolas' chiding of those who "create rifts and an artificial tension" between the pope and the Society of Jesus. It appears that Mr. Weigel himself has authored a "not so helpful" piece that appears to question Pope Benedict's confidence in the Society of Jesus. The readership of Catholic diocesan newspapers deserve more civil, balanced and professional fare than that served - up and passed around by the Denver Catholic Register. One cannot build - up the Body of Christ by tearing down its members.

[\[Front Page\]](#) [\[Briefs\]](#) [\[Archive\]](#) [\[Datebook\]](#) [\[Editorials\]](#) [\[Commentary\]](#)
[\[Marriage\]](#) [\[Senior Living\]](#) [\[Education\]](#) [\[Vocations\]](#)
[\[About Us\]](#) [\[Advertise\]](#) [\[Subscribe\]](#) [\[Staff Directory\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#) [\[Archdiocese\]](#)