

February 11, 2012

Toby Harnden leads off our picks on Obama's war on religion.

At the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington yesterday, President Barack Obama suggested that his desire to raise taxes on higher-income Americans was rooted in the Bible. 'For me as a Christian, it also coincides with Jesus's teaching that 'for unto to whom much is given, much shall be required', he said.

Which prompted Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah (and a Mormon) to comment acidly: 'Someone needs to remind the President that there was only one person who walked on water and he did not occupy the Oval Office. I think most Americans would agree that the Gospels are concerned with weightier matters than effective tax rates.'

It was just the latest example of Obama's tin ear on matters religious. Remember, this is the man who was a member of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright's church in Chicago, where sermons about 'God Damn America' and the US being responsible for 9/11 were preached but which remained, in Obama's eyes, a place that was not 'actually particularly controversial'.

Far more serious, however, than Obama's crude attempt to state that the rich should pay higher taxes because Jesus wanted them to (in addition to this being, in VP Joe Biden's view, a patriotic obligation) are his recent actions which amount to a declaration of war on the Roman Catholic church.

On January 20th, as much of the American political class was preoccupied with the impending GOP South Carolina primary, Obama's Department of Health and Human Services announced that it was a requirement for contraceptive services to be offered by insurance policies supported under the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare.

While there were exceptions for places of worship, there was no conscience protections for church-run schools, hospitals and social service agencies. These organisations will be required by law to provide free contraception to employees, even though that is in violation of church teachings.

The move has been condemned by figures on both the Left and Right. The liberal Washington Post columnist E.J.Dionne lit into Obama. So too did his colleague Michael Gerson, formerly President George W. Bush's chief speechwriter. ...

Peggy Noonan says the president may have just lost the election.

... But the big political news of the week isn't Mr. Romney's gaffe, or even his victory in Florida. The big story took place in Washington. That's where a bomb went off that not many in the political class heard, or understood.

But President Obama just may have lost the election.

The president signed off on a Health and Human Services ruling that says that under ObamaCare, Catholic institutions—including charities, hospitals and schools—will be required by law, for the first time ever, to provide and pay for insurance coverage that includes contraceptives, abortion-inducing drugs and sterilization procedures. If they do not, they will face ruinous fines in the millions of dollars. Or they can always go out of business.

In other words, the Catholic Church was told this week that its institutions can't be Catholic anymore.

I invite you to imagine the moment we are living in without the church's charities, hospitals and schools. And if you know anything about those organizations, you know it is a fantasy that they can afford millions in fines.

There was no reason to make this ruling—none. Except ideology.

The conscience clause, which keeps the church itself from having to bow to such decisions, has always been assumed to cover the church's institutions.

Now the church is fighting back. ...

One of the congresspersons who voted for ObamaCare recants. [Weekly Standard Blog](#) has the story.

Former Democratic congresswoman Kathy Dahlkemper, a Catholic from Erie, Pennsylvania, cast a crucial vote in favor of Obamacare in 2010. She lost her seat that November in part because of her controversial support of Obamacare. But Dahlkemper said recently that she would have never voted for the health care bill had she known that the Department of Health and Human Services would require all private insurers, including Catholic charities and hospitals, to provide free coverage of contraception, sterilization procedures, and the "week-after" pill "ella" that can induce early abortions.

"I would have never voted for the final version of the bill if I expected the Obama Administration to force Catholic hospitals and Catholic Colleges and Universities to pay for contraception," Dahlkemper said in a press release ...

[Daniel Henninger](#) says the church is complicit because of the acceptance of federal funds.

Fans of Hillsdale College, please note.

... So here we are, with the government demanding that the church hold up its end of a Faustian bargain that was supposed to permit it to perform limitless acts of virtue. Instead, what the government believes the deal is about, more than anything else, is compliance.

Politically bloodless liberals would respond that, net-net, government forcings do much social good despite breaking a few eggs, such as the Catholic Church's First Amendment sensibilities. That is one view. But the depth of anger among Catholics over this suggests they recognize more is at stake here than political results. They are right. The question raised by the Catholic Church's battle with ObamaCare is whether anyone can remain free of a U.S. government determined to do what it wants to do, at whatever cost.

Older Americans have sought for years to drop out of Medicare and contract for their own health insurance. They cannot without forfeiting their Social Security payments. They effectively are locked in. Nor can the poor escape Medicaid, even as the care it gives them degrades. Farmers, ranchers and loggers struggled for years to protect their livelihoods beneath uncompromising interpretations of federal environmental laws. They, too, had to comply. University athletic programs were ground up by the U.S. Education Department's rote, forced gender balancing of every sport offered.

With the transformers, it never stops. In September, the Obama Labor Department proposed rules to govern what work children can do on farms. After an outcry from rural communities over the realities of farm traditions, the department is now reconsidering a "parental exemption." Good luck to the farmers. ...

[Michael Barone](#) thinks the president's isolation leads to bad decisions.

... As in Chicago, Obama seems to live in a cocoon in which Republicans are largely absent, offscreen actors that no one pays any attention to.

His personal interactions are limited to his liberal Democratic staff -- and to the rich liberals he meets at his frequent fundraising events. He has held more of these than George W. Bush, who in turn held more than Bill Clinton.

Two decisions in particular seem tilted toward rich liberals. One was the disapproval of the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada, even after it survived two environmental impact statements.

Obama says he wants more jobs and to reduce American dependence on oil from unfriendly foreign sources. The pipeline would do both, and is endorsed by labor unions. But Robert Redford doesn't like Canadian tar sands oil. Case closed.

The other astonishing decision was the decree requiring Catholic hospitals and charities' health insurance policies to include coverage for abortion and birth control. Here Obama was spitting in the eyes of millions of Americans and threatening the existence of charitable programs that help millions of people of all faiths.

Catholic bishops responded predictably by requiring priests to read letters opposing the policy. Who's on the other side? The designer-clad ladies Obama encounters at every fundraiser. They want to impose their views on abortion on everyone else.

Obama fundraising seems to be lagging behind its \$1 billion goal, and Democrats fear Republicans are closing the fundraising gap. So Obama seems to be concentrating on meeting the demands of rich liberals he spends so much time with.

David Brooks, comments on what he called an "underreported story."

... Brooks made the traditional conservative argument against the administration, suggesting it was a form of "bureaucratic greed".

"When you have the government saying one size fits all ... you are going to do it our way, or not, well, then that insults a lot of people," he continued. "And so I think this is having resonance across the country. It was — statements were issued in a lot of masses, a lot of pulpits this past Sunday. And, you know, I think it's going to have a significant lingering effect for a long time."

This controversy comes concurrent with Obama's speech at the national prayer breakfast where a critic delivered a devastating prequel. **Corner post** fills us in.

If the organizers of the national prayer breakfast ever want a sitting president to attend their event again, they need to expect that any leader in his right mind is going to ask — no, demand — that he be allowed to see a copy of the keynote address that is traditionally given immediately before the president's.

That's how devastating was the speech given by a little known historical biographer named Eric Metaxas, whose clever wit and punchy humor barely disguised a series of heat-seeking missiles that were sent, intentionally or not, in the commander-in-chief's direction.

Although Obama began his address directly after Metaxas by saying, "I'm not going to be as funny as Eric but I'm grateful that he shared his message with us," both his tone and speech itself were flat, and he looked as though he wished he could either crawl into a hole or have a different speech in front of him.

In fact, one could be forgiven for thinking that somehow Metaxas had been given an advance copy of Obama's talk, then tailored his own to rebut the president's.

Metaxas, a Yale grad and humor writer who once wrote for the children's series Veggie Tales, began his speech with several jokes and stole the show early on when he noted that George W. Bush, often accused

by his critics of being incurious, had read Metaxas's weighty tome on the German theologian Bonhoeffer; he then proceeded to hand a copy to the president while intoning: "No pressure."

Obama has been under pressure for some time now to somehow prove his Christian bonafides, for it's no secret that millions of Americans doubt his Christian faith. A Pew Poll taken in 2010 found that only one third of Americans identified him as a Christian, and even among African-Americans, 46 percent said they were unsure of what religion he practiced.

Obama came to the prayer breakfast with a tidy speech that was clearly designed to lay those doubts to rest. He spoke of his daily habit of prayer and Bible reading, his regular conversations with preachers like T. D. Jakes and Joel Hunter, and even told a story of the time he prayed over Billy Graham.

But before the president could utter a word, it was Metaxas who delivered a devastating, albeit apparently unintentional critique of such God-talk, recounting his own religious upbringing which he described as culturally Christian yet simultaneously full of "phony religiosity."

"I thought I was a Christian. I guess I was lost," he matter-of-factly stated.

Standing no more than five feet from Obama whose binder had a speech chock full of quotes from the Good Book, Metaxas said of Jesus:

"When he was tempted in the desert, who was the one throwing Bible verses at him? Satan. That is a perfect picture of dead religion. Using the words of God to do the opposite of what God does. It's grotesque when you think about it. It's demonic."

"Keep in mind that when someone says 'I am a Christian' it may mean absolutely nothing," Metaxas added for good measure, in case anybody missed his point.

The eerie feeling that Metaxas was answering Obama on a speech he had yet to give continued

Daily Mail, UK

[Barack Obama's reckless and politically foolish war on religion](#)

by Toby Harnden

At the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington yesterday, President Barack Obama suggested that his desire to raise taxes on higher-income Americans was rooted in the Bible. 'For me as a Christian, it also coincides with Jesus's teaching that 'for unto to whom much is given, much shall be required',' he said.

Which prompted Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah (and a Mormon) to comment acidly: 'Someone needs to remind the President that there was only one person who walked on water and he did not occupy the Oval Office. I think most Americans would agree that the Gospels are concerned with weightier matters than effective tax rates.'

It was just the latest example of Obama's tin ear on matters religious. Remember, this is the man who was a member of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright's church in Chicago, where sermons about 'God Damn America' and the US being responsible for 9/11 were preached but which remained, in Obama's eyes, a place that was not 'actually particularly controversial'.

Far more serious, however, than Obama's crude attempt to state that the rich should pay higher taxes because Jesus wanted them to (in addition to this being, in VP Joe Biden's view, a patriotic obligation) are his recent actions which amount to a declaration of war on the Roman Catholic church.

On January 20th, as much of the American political class was preoccupied with the impending GOP South Carolina primary, Obama's Department of Health and Human Services announced that it was a requirement for contraceptive services to be offered by insurance policies supported under the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare.

While there were exceptions for places of worship, there was no conscience protections for church-run schools, hospitals and social service agencies. These organisations will be required by law to provide free contraception to employees, even though that is in violation of church teachings.

The move has been condemned by figures on both the Left and Right. The liberal Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne lit into Obama. So too did his colleague Michael Gerson, formerly President George W. Bush's chief speechwriter.

Obama's decision was that of a doctrinaire secular liberal trying to use government power to rein in religious freedom. It's not about freedom of the individual - contraceptive services are freely available elsewhere. As Melinda Henneberger puts it, it's about 'forcing nuns to dole out free diaphragms in violation of their religious freedom and the Constitution that guarantees it'.

Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, said: 'To force American citizens to choose between violating their consciences and forgoing their healthcare is literally unconscionable.'

Why has Obama done this? Firstly, because at core he is a secular liberal. I always thought that he was in a tough position over Jeremiah Wright because in reality he hadn't gone to church much - and doubtless even when he was there he hadn't paid much attention to the sermons.

The reason he became involved in Wright's church was, in standard political fashion, to help him build a political base and put down roots in Chicago. To run for US President or even for the Senate it's a virtual prerequisite to an observant Christian or Jew - Obama was savvy enough to make sure he was no exception.

Obama knows that political power of religion. He has made lofty speeches about the role of faith in a democracy and his own personal faith. He went to Notre Dame University in 2009, where he cited the need to "honour the conscience of those who disagree with abortion".

The second, almost inescapable, reason for Obama decision, as Dionne puts it, to throw his Catholics allies "under the bus", is politics - or, more specifically, Obama's re-election.

It's about shoring up the Democratic base and energising liberal pro-Choice groups - and accepting that those in the middle on the issue will not vote for him. It's yet another indication that Obama believes that his path to re-election is a very narrow one - he's seeking to consolidate the support he already has rather than extending it.

A senior Democrat told Politico: 'Catholics who don't believe in condoms aren't going to vote for Barack Obama anyway. Let's get real.' You don't get a lot more cynical than that.

The trouble is that Obama beat John McCain by nine points among Catholics in 2008 (largely because of Hispanic backing) but that lead over Republicans is much narrower already. Among white Catholics, Mitt Romney currently holds a 13-point lead and Obama's support among white churchgoers is declining steadily. Catholics make up more than a quarter of the electorate and are an important constituency in battleground states.

White House aides were buoyed today by news that 243,000 new American jobs were added in January and unemployment, dropping steadily for months, is now at 8.3 percent. No doubt Obama strategists calculate that the President's chances of re-election are edging upwards because of the improving economy.

But when Newt Gingrich talks of a 'war on the Catholic Church' and Mitt Romney of an 'assault on religion' they are engaging not in excessive campaign rhetoric but in propagating a message that both resonates and that is based in truth.

Politically, as well as morally and constitutionally, Obama's move seem bone-headed. As Peggy Noonan writes today: 'President Obama just may have lost the election.'

WSJ

A Battle the President Can't Win

His decision on Catholic charities makes Romney's big gaffe look trivial.

by Peggy Noonan

What a faux pas, how inept, how removed from the essential realities of America. Yes, I'm referring to President Obama. But let's do Mitt Romney first.

He's taken heavy fire for his interview with CNN's Soledad O'Brien, in which he said, "I'm not concerned about the very poor."

Every criticism has been true. It was politically inept, playing into stereotypes about Republicans and about his own candidacy. It was Martian-like in its seeming remove from the concerns of everyday citizens. We're in a recession here! It was at odds both with longtime American tradition and with rising conservative concern over the growth and changing nature of what used to be called the underclass.

So: inept.

Advice? Treat the mistake as an opportunity. First, admit the blunder. A political communications expert would add, "And move on." But don't. Use this mistake, and others—"I like being able to fire people"—as the basis for a true, thoughtful and extended statement that will allow people more deeply into the mind of Mitt Romney. Call it "Let me tell you about my gaffes." Use it to deepen people's understanding of your views not only on poverty but on the whole American picture.

Three reasons to do this. First, the networks, in their Romney gaffe reels, will have to use some of the lengthier address for the appearance of fairness. Second, it's good to dwell on this problem now because Democrats want it to go away. That's because they want to bring it back fresh in the fall, when people have forgotten it. The third reason has to do with still-widespread conservative unease with what Mr. Romney really thinks and why he thinks it. He should set himself to giving a fuller picture of his thoughts.

Which leads us to the Republican establishment, and how it feels about Mr. Romney.

That establishment is not what it was decades ago, when it was peopled by seasoned veterans who made decisions and got people in line. That's gone. What has replaced it is a loose confederation of groups and professionals—current and former elected officials and their staffs, activists, the old party machinery, bundlers and contributors, journalists, radio and TV stars, mostly but not exclusively based in Washington.

The great myth of the election year is that they are for Mitt Romney. They are not. They are almost all against Newt Gingrich because they know him, they've worked with him. But they mostly do not love Mr. Romney.

The establishment didn't get its candidate: Mitch Daniels or Jeb Bush, John Thune or Paul Ryan, Haley Barbour or Chris Christie. It is, secretly, as bereft as some of the grass roots.

Why doesn't the establishment like Mr. Romney? Because they fear he won't win, that he'll get clobbered on such issues as Bain, wealth, taxes. Because when they listen to him, they get the impression he's reciting lines his aides came up with in debate prep. Because if he wins, they're not sure he'll have a meaning or mandate.

But mostly because his insides are unknown to them. They don't know what's in there. They fear he hasn't absorbed any philosophy along the way, that he'll be herky-jerky, unanchored, merely tactical as president. And they think that now of all times more is needed. They want to reform the tax system and begin reining in the entitlement spending that is bankrupting us. They don't read him as the guy who can perform those two Herculean jobs, each of which will demand first-rate political talent. And shrewdness. And guts.

Mr. Romney doesn't have the establishment in his pocket. He needs to win it. All the more reason for him to get serious now. If he is serious.

This is the authentic sound of the establishment: At a gathering in Washington last week, I spoke to a grand old man of the party who enjoyed high and historic appointed position. "Where is the Republican Party right now?" I asked.

"Waiting for Jeb," he said. Waiting for rescue.

That's what Mitt Romney's up against, not Newt.

But the big political news of the week isn't Mr. Romney's gaffe, or even his victory in Florida. The big story took place in Washington. That's where a bomb went off that not many in the political class heard, or understood.

But President Obama just may have lost the election.

The president signed off on a Health and Human Services ruling that says that under ObamaCare, Catholic institutions—including charities, hospitals and schools—will be required by law, for the first time ever, to provide and pay for insurance coverage that includes contraceptives, abortion-inducing drugs and sterilization procedures. If they do not, they will face ruinous fines in the millions of dollars. Or they can always go out of business.

In other words, the Catholic Church was told this week that its institutions can't be Catholic anymore.

I invite you to imagine the moment we are living in without the church's charities, hospitals and schools. And if you know anything about those organizations, you know it is a fantasy that they can afford millions in fines.

There was no reason to make this ruling—none. Except ideology.

The conscience clause, which keeps the church itself from having to bow to such decisions, has always been assumed to cover the church's institutions.

Now the church is fighting back. Priests in an estimated 70% of parishes last Sunday came forward to read strongly worded protests from the church's bishops. The ruling asks the church to abandon Catholic

principles and beliefs; it is an abridgment of the First Amendment; it is not acceptable. They say they will not bow to it. They should never bow to it, not only because they are Catholic and cannot be told to take actions that deny their faith, but because they are citizens of the United States.

If they stay strong and fight, they will win. This is in fact a potentially unifying moment for American Catholics, long split left, right and center. Catholic conservatives will immediately and fully oppose the administration's decision. But Catholic liberals, who feel embarrassed and undercut, have also come out in opposition.

The church is split on many things. But do Catholics in the pews want the government telling their church to contravene its beliefs? A president affronting the leadership of the church, and blithely threatening its great institutions? No, they don't want that. They will unite against that.

The smallest part of this story is political. There are 77.7 million Catholics in the United States. In 2008 they made up 27% of the electorate, about 35 million people. Mr. Obama carried the Catholic vote, 54% to 45%. They helped him win.

They won't this year. And guess where a lot of Catholics live? In the battleground states.

There was no reason to pick this fight. It reflects political incompetence on a scale so great as to make Mitt Romney's gaffes a little bitty thing.

There was nothing for the president to gain, except, perhaps, the pleasure of making a great church bow to him.

Enjoy it while you can. You have awakened a sleeping giant.

Weekly Standard Blog

[Kathy Dahlkemper: I Wouldn't Have Voted for Obamacare If I'd Known About HHS Rule](#)

by John McCormack

Former Democratic congresswoman Kathy Dahlkemper, a Catholic from Erie, Pennsylvania, cast a crucial vote in favor of Obamacare in 2010. She lost her seat that November in part because of her controversial support of Obamacare. But Dahlkemper said recently that she would have never voted for the health care bill had she known that the Department of Health and Human Services would require all private insurers, including Catholic charities and hospitals, to provide free coverage of contraception, sterilization procedures, and the "week-after" pill "ella" that can induce early abortions.

"I would have never voted for the final version of the bill if I expected the Obama Administration to force Catholic hospitals and Catholic Colleges and Universities to pay for contraception," Dahlkemper said in a press release sent out by [Democrats for Life in November](#). "We worked hard to prevent abortion funding in health care and to include clear conscience protections for those with moral objections to abortion and contraceptive devices that cause abortion. I trust that the President will honor the commitment he made to those of us who supported final passage."

Of course, most abortion opponents disagree with Dahlkemper that the HHS regulation is Obamacare's only moral problem. Under Obamacare, each state's federally subsidized health care exchange is required to offer a health insurance plan that covers elective abortions unless the state passes a law opting out of the requirement.

As former Democratic congressman [Bart Stupak said](#) when the Senate passed Obamacare in December of 2009, "A review of the Senate language indicates a dramatic shift in federal policy that would allow the

federal government to subsidize insurance policies with abortion coverage. Further, the segregation of funds to pay for abortion is another departure from current policy prohibiting federal subsidy of abortion coverage."

Stupak, Dahlkemper, and a handful of other Democrats who held back on voting for final passage of Obamacare eventually voted for the exact same language in the Senate bill because the president signed an executive order saying the law wouldn't fund abortions.

[But the executive order signed by President Obama did nothing](#) to prevent the subsidized health care exchanges from covering elective abortions.

WSJ

Transformers

The Catholic church learns the true meaning of Obama's 'transformative' presidency.

by Daniel Henninger

Pope John Paul II, surveying from his seat in the eternal hereafter the battle between the American Catholic Church and the Obama administration over mandated contraception services, must be permitting himself a sad smile. The pope knew more than most about the innate tensions between the state and its citizens.

The Obamaites will object that it is unfair to liken their government to the Communist Party of Poland. That is not the point. What the former Karol Wojtyla knew is that any state will claim benevolence on behalf of doing whatever it thinks it needs to do in pursuit of its goals.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney invoked the good in defense of the Obama law's universal reach: "The administration decided—the president agrees with this decision—that we need to provide these services that have enormous health benefits for American women and that the exemption that we carved out is appropriate."

The American Catholic Church, from left to right, is now being handed a lesson in the hierarchy of raw political authority. One hopes they and their supporters will recognize that they have not been singled out. The federal government's forcings routinely touch other groups in this country—schools, doctors, farmers, businesses. The church's fight is not the whole or the end of it.

Since he appeared, no other word has been invoked more often to describe Barack Obama's purposes than "transformative." Last year, Mr. Obama began to be criticized by some of his supporters for being insufficiently transformative while holding the powers of the presidency—this despite passing the biggest social entitlement since 1965, an \$800 billion stimulus bill, raising federal spending to 24% of GDP and passing the Dodd-Frank restructuring of the U.S. financial industry. Naturally an interviewer this week asked Mr. Obama why he hadn't been more "transformative." The president replied that he deserved a second term, because "we're not done." In term two, it will be Uncle Sam, Transformer.

For many years, Catholic Charities U.S.A. has taken federal money to enlarge its budget. The people who run the Catholic Church, though not everyone in the pews, thought this was a good bargain. Here is the head of Catholic Charities, in 1997, describing the relationship: "We have been partners with government to help government do what it wants to do and what we believe it should do."

This 1997 statement was in response to criticism leveled at Catholic Charities back then by freshman U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, who attacked the organization for its opposition to welfare-reform legislation. Mr. Santorum said welfare hurt rather than helped poor families.

Over decades, this deal with the federal government didn't change, even as Catholic bishops closed churches and parochial schools across the country for lack of funds. Here is Sr. Carol Keehan's statement when the House in 2009 passed the Obama health-care bill with only one Republican aye vote: "The Catholic Health Association applauds the U.S. House of Representatives and President Obama for enacting health care legislation that will bring security and health to millions of American families." Let the record show that the Catholic bishops opposed the legislation, fearing a conflict with the church's beliefs.

So here we are, with the government demanding that the church hold up its end of a Faustian bargain that was supposed to permit it to perform limitless acts of virtue. Instead, what the government believes the deal is about, more than anything else, is compliance.

Politically bloodless liberals would respond that, net-net, government forcings do much social good despite breaking a few eggs, such as the Catholic Church's First Amendment sensibilities. That is one view. But the depth of anger among Catholics over this suggests they recognize more is at stake here than political results. They are right. The question raised by the Catholic Church's battle with ObamaCare is whether anyone can remain free of a U.S. government determined to do what it wants to do, at whatever cost.

Older Americans have sought for years to drop out of Medicare and contract for their own health insurance. They cannot without forfeiting their Social Security payments. They effectively are locked in. Nor can the poor escape Medicaid, even as the care it gives them degrades. Farmers, ranchers and loggers struggled for years to protect their livelihoods beneath uncompromising interpretations of federal environmental laws. They, too, had to comply. University athletic programs were ground up by the U.S. Education Department's rote, forced gender balancing of every sport offered.

With the transformers, it never stops. In September, the Obama Labor Department proposed rules to govern what work children can do on farms. After an outcry from rural communities over the realities of farm traditions, the department is now reconsidering a "parental exemption." Good luck to the farmers.

The Catholic Church has stumbled into the central battle of the 2012 presidential campaign: What are the limits to Barack Obama's transformative presidency? The Catholic left has just learned one answer: When Mr. Obama says, "Everyone plays by the same set of rules," it means *they* conform to *his* rules. What else could it mean?

Anyone who signs up for more of this deal by assuming that it will never force them to fall into line is getting what they deserve.

Washington Examiner

[Obama's isolation leads to skewed decisions](#)

by Michael Barone

It's unusual when a reporter sympathetic to a politician writes a story that makes his subject look bad. But Ryan Lizza of the New Yorker has now done this twice.

The first time was in an article last April on Obama's foreign policy in which he quoted a "top aide" (national security adviser Tom Donilon? It sounds like him) saying that the president was "leading from behind" on Libya. Not what most Americans expect their presidents to do.

Now, in an article based on leaked White House memos marked up by Obama, Lizza has done it again.

Contrarian liberal blogger Mickey Kaus sums it up: "The president's decision-making method--at least as described in this piece--seems to consist of mainly checking boxes on memos his aides have written for him."

A \$60 billion cut in the stimulus package? "OK." Use the reconciliation process to pass the health care bill? A check mark in the box labeled "yes."

Include medical malpractice reform in the health care bill? The man who as an Illinois legislator often voted "present" writes, "We should explore it."

According to Lizza, Obama prefers getting information and making decisions by staying up late and reading memos rather than meeting with people -- a temperament that's a liability because face time with the president is one of his major sources of political capital.

Lizza's reporting undercuts the stated thesis of his article: that Obama sought to bring bipartisan governance to Washington but was foiled by Republicans' partisan intransigence.

Evidence that Obama ever seriously considered Republican approaches is minimal in the New Yorker article. The alternatives Lizza describes Obama as considering are for even more spending and government control, such as a much bigger stimulus package.

He mentions just in passing that "Obama "had decided to pursue health-care reform" as well as the stimulus package -- a choice that inevitably made bipartisanship harder to achieve.

At one point Lizza does quote Obama writing on a memo, "Have we looked at any of the other GOP recommendations (e.g. Paul Ryan's) to see if they make any sense?" Another president might have looked at Ryan's proposals himself or might even have called him on the phone.

George W. Bush, in contrast, worked with Democrats -- and sometimes even talked with them -- on his education plan, his tax cuts and the Iraq war resolution. He even tried, unsuccessfully, to negotiate with them on Social Security.

And on Obama's failure to reach a "go big" budget agreement with House Speaker John Boehner last summer, Lizza presents only the White House talking point: "conservative colleagues rebelled, and Boehner withdrew." He doesn't mention Republican claims that Obama upped the ante, demanding more tax increases.

Lizza's White House sources apparently didn't leak any memos about some of Obama's more recent actions, but his article provides a jumping-off place for understanding them.

As in Chicago, Obama seems to live in a cocoon in which Republicans are largely absent, offscreen actors that no one pays any attention to.

His personal interactions are limited to his liberal Democratic staff -- and to the rich liberals he meets at his frequent fundraising events. He has held more of these than George W. Bush, who in turn held more than Bill Clinton.

Two decisions in particular seem tilted toward rich liberals. One was the disapproval of the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada, even after it survived two environmental impact statements.

Obama says he wants more jobs and to reduce American dependence on oil from unfriendly foreign sources. The pipeline would do both, and is endorsed by labor unions. But Robert Redford doesn't like Canadian tar sands oil. Case closed.

The other astonishing decision was the decree requiring Catholic hospitals and charities' health insurance policies to include coverage for abortion and birth control. Here Obama was spitting in the eyes of millions of Americans and threatening the existence of charitable programs that help millions of people of all faiths.

Catholic bishops responded predictably by requiring priests to read letters opposing the policy. Who's on the other side? The designer-clad ladies Obama encounters at every fundraiser. They want to impose their views on abortion on everyone else.

Obama fundraising seems to be lagging behind its \$1 billion goal, and Democrats fear Republicans are closing the fundraising gap. So Obama seems to be concentrating on meeting the demands of rich liberals he spends so much time with.

Daily Caller

[Obama's anti-Catholic mandate will help Romney overcome evangelical problem](#)

President Barack Obama's "[senseless war on Catholics](#)" is causing him to draw fire [from both the political right](#) and [left](#).

Even the so-called voices of moderation are scratching their heads over [the Obama administration's decision](#) requiring the Catholic Church and other religious groups "to buy contraception-related health insurance for employees at their hospitals, universities and charity groups, or pay heavy fines," said New York Times [columnist David Brooks](#).

During Friday's PBS "NewsHour," Brooks called the decision by the administration "under-reported," warning it would have the effect of uniting Catholics and evangelicals with former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, even [with Romney's so-called "Mormon problem"](#).

"I think that [the implication] is enormous ... because you have Catholics who are upset. You have evangelicals who are really upset. And whatever problem they had with Mitt Romney that has now healed. They have now united with Mitt Romney because they are so upset about this story. And a lot of people think we are a diverse country, we have a lot of different values, that government should get involved — it gives money to a lot of these associations — but it should give different people with different values the ability to operate in a way they see fit."

Brooks made the traditional conservative argument against the administration, suggesting it was a form of "bureaucratic greed".

"When you have the government saying one size fits all ... you are going to do it our way, or not, well, then that insults a lot of people," he continued. "And so I think this is having resonance across the country. It was — statements were issued in a lot of masses, a lot of pulpits this past Sunday. And, you know, I think it's going to have a significant lingering effect for a long time."

The Corner

[The President & The Propher: Obama's Unusual Encounter with Eric Metaxas](#)

by Mark Joseph

If the organizers of the national prayer breakfast ever want a [sitting president](#) to attend their event again, they need to expect that any leader in his right mind is going to ask — no, demand — that he be allowed to see a copy of the keynote address that is traditionally given immediately before the president's.

That's how devastating was the speech given by a little known historical biographer named Eric Metaxas, whose clever wit and punchy humor barely disguised a series of heat-seeking missiles that were sent, intentionally or not, in the commander-in-chief's direction.

Although Obama began his address directly after Metaxas by saying, "I'm not going to be as funny as Eric but I'm grateful that he shared his message with us," both his tone and speech itself were flat, and he looked as though he wished he could either crawl into a hole or have a different speech in front of him.

In fact, one could be forgiven for thinking that somehow Metaxas had been given an advance copy of Obama's talk, then tailored his own to rebut the president's.

Metaxas, a Yale grad and humor writer who once wrote for the children's series *Veggie Tales*, began his speech with several jokes and stole the show early on when he noted that George W. Bush, often accused by his critics of being incurious, had read Metaxas's weighty tome on the German theologian Bonhoeffer; he then proceeded to hand a copy to the president while intoning: "No pressure."

Obama has been under pressure for some time now to somehow prove his Christian bonafides, for it's no secret that millions of Americans doubt his Christian faith. A Pew Poll taken in 2010 found that only one third of Americans identified him as a Christian, and even among African-Americans, 46 percent said they were unsure of what religion he practiced.

Obama came to the prayer breakfast with a tidy speech that was clearly designed to lay those doubts to rest. He spoke of his daily habit of prayer and Bible reading, his regular conversations with preachers like T. D. Jakes and Joel Hunter, and even told a story of the time he prayed over Billy Graham.

But before the president could utter a word, it was Metaxas who delivered a devastating, albeit apparently unintentional critique of such God-talk, recounting his own religious upbringing which he described as culturally Christian yet simultaneously full of "phony religiosity."

"I thought I was a Christian. I guess I was lost," he matter-of-factly stated.

Standing no more than five feet from Obama whose binder had a speech chock full of quotes from the Good Book, Metaxas said of Jesus:

"When he was tempted in the desert, who was the one throwing Bible verses at him? Satan. That is a perfect picture of dead religion. Using the words of God to do the opposite of what God does. It's grotesque when you think about it. It's demonic."

"Keep in mind that when someone says 'I am a Christian' it may mean absolutely nothing," Metaxas added for good measure, in case anybody missed his point.

The eerie feeling that Metaxas was answering Obama on a speech he had yet to give continued, as he spoke about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the Christian religion. Moments after Metaxas finished his speech and sat down, Obama took great pains to describe the other great religions of the world as mirroring his own Christian faith.

"I believe in God's command to 'love thy neighbor as thyself,'" Obama noted. "I know the version of that Golden Rule is found in every major religion and every set of beliefs — from Hinduism to Islam to Judaism to the writings of Plato."

Translation: Christianity is great and so are the other major religions, which essentially teach the same stuff.

"But for me as a Christian, it also coincides with Jesus's teaching that 'for unto whom much is given, much shall be required,'" he added. "It mirrors the Islamic belief that those who've been blessed have an obligation to use those blessings to help others, or the Jewish doctrine of moderation and consideration for others."

Metaxas, speaking minutes earlier had a radically different take on the centrality of both his Deity and his faith, and although he never put down other faiths, he methodically recounted the story of what motivated the actions of the abolitionist William Wilberforce, noting:

“The reason Wilberforce fought so hard was because around the time of his 25th birthday he encountered Jesus.” He continued, “The idea to care for the poor or that slavery is wrong — these ideas are not normal human ideas, they are Biblical ideas.”

But Metaxas’s most blistering attack, albeit sheathed carefully in good humor and rapier wit, was still to come, for next on his agenda was his careful but dogged determination to link previous attitudes among churchgoers toward slavery and Nazism with those of some present day churchgoers toward abortion. Surrounded by three of the most powerful supporters of the right to choose, Obama, Vice President Biden, and former speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi — two Catholics and a Protestant — Metaxas said:

“Wilberforce suddenly took the Bible seriously that all of us are created in the image of God, to care for the least of these.”

After carefully describing the inhumane treatment of both Jews and Africans by those claiming to be Christians, he asked then answered a question:

“You think you’re better than the Germans of that era? You’re not,” adding: “Whom do we say is not fully human today?”

Promising to come back to that question later, Metaxas then attempted to link his two main points: that Jesus was unique and distinct from all other religions or teachers and that a correct understanding of his role would lead to a correct view on what Metaxas considered to be the defining issues of today as well as eras gone by:

“I would say the same thing about the unborn. Apart from God we cannot see that they are persons. So those of us who know the unborn to be human beings are commanded by God to love those who do not yet see. We need to know that apart from God we would be on the other side of that divide, fighting for what we believe is right.”

By the time he wrapped up his speech with a rendition of Amazing Grace, one got the feeling that this was a modern-day, and perhaps more humorous version, of what Old Testament prophets regularly did to Kings of Israel: deliver brutally honest messages from Yahweh with little regard for their personal safety. Only this time, there were no beheadings, only the difficult-to-watch spectacle of seeing a president forced to uncomfortably read a speech which had just been shredded to pieces by a man who couldn’t possibly have known what was coming. And as he did so, the audience in that room likely left with Metaxas’s four-word condemnation, intentional or not, of the 44th president of the U. S. ringing in their ears:

“God is not fooled.”

Still, throughout his speech, Metaxas seemed to dangle a carrot in front of the president, seeming to beg him to reconsider his stands on various issues by coming to a different view, Metaxas’s own, of the centrality and uniqueness of the man whom Christians like Metaxas regularly sing about in church as having the “name above all names.”

“How did they see what they saw?” Metaxas asked of those who bucked the religion of their times and took strong stands against slavery and Nazism. “There’s just one word that will answer that. It’s Jesus. He opens our eyes to his ideas which are different from our own.”

Mark Joseph is a producer, author and publisher of Bulypulpit.com.