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Karl Denninger  
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# From the Desk of Karl Denninger

January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002

Most Reverend John Ricard  
Pensacola Archdiocese  
Post Office Drawer 17329  
Pensacola, FL 32522

CC: Reverend J. Craig Williams  
Christ Our Redeemer Catholic Church  
1028 White Point Road  
Niceville, FL 32578

Dear Reverend Ricard:

May I open with a prayer:

*Creator God, Life is your gift to me.*

*Through Baptism, you invite me to share the gift of my life in service to others. Be with me as I choose each day to show Your Presence in our world. Give me the courage and generosity to respond to Your love, to Your call.*

*I pray especially for those who serve you in ministry throughout the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee and Christ Our Redeemer Parish. May we bear the "Good News" to those in need. Keep us close to you.*

*Open the minds and hearts of many other men, women and young people that they may accept Your challenge to build the Kingdom in our parish, our community, and our world.*

*For if not us, who?  
If not here, where?  
If not now, when?  
If not for Your Kingdom, why?*

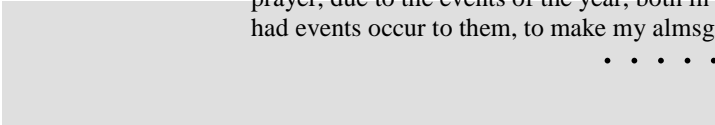
*I make this prayer through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

I'm sure you recognize this prayer. It was distributed in mass as a Lenten prayer.

I write today as an ongoing campaign of concern that I have undertaken during the last few years as a Catholic and as an individual concerned for our future as a people under God – and more generally as a Christian. I also write as a member of the Catholic Community in Northwest Florida, and a member of Christ Our Redeemer. Finally, I write as an individual Catholic who has heard both your request, and that of Father Craig, with regards to the Catholic Sharing Appeal as I prayerfully reflect during the Lenten season on how I intend to allocate my charitable giving for the coming year.

Last year most of my charitable giving was consumed outside of the Catholic Faith. I decided in prayer, due to the events of the year, both in those touched by the world and those who I know who had events occur to them, to make my almsgiving through a different path. This year I am faced with

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the same choices, and wish to reflect with you on the reasons for my decision thus far, as well as what I believe the Catholic Church in Florida, as well as throughout the United States, needs to consider in this year and the years to come.

It is often spoken, and in fact was spoken of in the homily just a few short weeks ago, about the giving of alms and the attention that needs to be given to the poor. Most people draw a vision of Africa, India and the other places where we all know there is tremendous suffering going on among the people. Certainly, efforts to feed and clothe people are made by the Church, along with the spreading of the Gospel, and certainly, many people are indeed helped.

But I would like to look more towards our own land in this letter.

Why?

Because there are millions – in fact, more than 17 million individuals today – all of them under 18 who are harmed directly and indirectly by the policies of our society – policies that the Church tacitly agrees with, ratifies, and in fact supports.

I speak of an odd dichotomy between the Church and the secular world when it comes to marriage and family life. On the one hand we have the public position of the Church – that the traditional family is the root of our future, it has a sacred place within God’s plan for us as human beings, and that man and woman, if they are not to live a celibate life, should live as a communal partnership between one man and one woman, bound for life, in holy matrimony. Through this marital life, under and with God, children are to be brought into the world and raised as God designed all the way back in time to Adam and Eve.

Yet the Catholic Church supports, through its very actions, a very different reality!

Today I call attention to two obvious and glaring examples of what are inconsistencies in the position of the Church in general and the Pensacola Archdiocese in particular.

### **Children And Families**

Catholic Charities, which is partially funded and supported by the Pensacola Archdiocese, strongly supported House Bill 1901 passed in 2000, known more commonly as the “baby abandonment bill.”

This bill allegedly provides that “a parent” may “abandon” a newborn infant at a fire station or hospital in a completely anonymous manner and that such an act shall be demonstrative of intent to relinquish parental rights.

On the surface such a bill would appear to be pro-family and pro-life, as it purports to protect the lives of children that would otherwise be discarded in dumpsters and other inappropriate locations where they are subject to death by exposure or lack of care.

However, this bill is, on its face, derogatory towards the rights of both children and families generally and specifically, to wit:

1. It permits a mother to abandon an unwanted child, yet does not require her to leave any identifying information about the infant, the father, or even herself. Such a baby is truly a “baby Doe”. Such abandonment may take place at any fire station or hospital in the state, “no questions asked.”
2. This very act is inherently a violation of the rights of the father of that child to the care, custody and comfort both towards that child and in the raising of that child. The right to abandon **unilaterally**, without recourse or consequence, is one that is granted in this case **only**

to mothers on an effective basis, and it does not require the consent of the father. While the **text** of the law is gender-neutral, the implementation and provisions of the law are not.

3. The law further sets limits on the time of abandonment from birth that make it effectively impossible for a father to ever exercise his right to be a parent. In effect, this is a law that permits a mother to abandon a child at birth or shortly thereafter, but precludes a father from ever being able to do so. In this regard the law is blatantly sexist and in direct violation of the Church's view that all persons – both men and women – are endowed with equal rights and responsibilities, and that both genders have a critical and sometimes different, yet equal, role in the creation and raising of children.
4. While the law purports to require a “diligent search” for the other parent, the text of the law makes clear that such a search is impossible. The fact that the parent doing the abandoning is not required to identify themselves, is not required to identify the probable (or known) other parent, and the fact that such an act can be undertaken anywhere in the state makes the opportunity for fraud clear and convincing on its face. Further, this bill effectively exempts only a mother from financial and personal responsibility for an unwanted child. No such accommodation is permitted a father who does not want a child that he sires.
5. Worse than the above, the law makes no allocation for the wishes of the child! Is not the very objection to abortion the fact that we are extinguishing human life? How can the Church support a law which extinguishes family ties – if not on the grounds that it is sexist in implementation, how about on the grounds that *the child was never asked if he or she wanted to be ripped away from either or both of his or her parents!*
6. This law sets explicit time limits on voiding adoptions by parents wronged by this procedure. Specifically, the statute of limitations is set at two years even in the case of fraud, and one year for all other instances. While the **appearance** of these limits is to “protect” fathers and provide “permanence”, the effect of these limits is to make it a trivial undertaking to secret away a child, give that child away at any fire station or hospital in the state, and make it effectively impossible for any man to find out that this has happened should he not be with the woman involved at the time of the child's birth. And, since it is not possible for a man to insure that he is, in fact, involved with a woman after they have sexual relations, the end result of this is to strip men of their right to be a parent to children they sire, and of children to know, love, respect and be nurtured by their fathers.

It is clear that in addition to the intent of stopping abandonment that would be harmful to infants, this bill **also** stops all responsibility of a personal and financial nature for children who are unwanted – but only if you are a woman! What is expressed in this bill is that men are not only second-class parents, but that they **also** have no right to determine the outcome that as a consequence of their sexual activities, while a woman may make that determination **for both parties**.

This is in stark contrast to the claimed position of the Church – that both men and women are responsible for their sexual acts, that men and women should engage in such acts only in the state of holy matrimony, and that the children born as a consequence of **any** act of sexual intercourse (whether the parents were, at the time, sinning or not) are Children of God, deserving of protection, care and nurture by both parents, and have all the rights of a person from the moment of conception.

***Certainly, if a child has all the rights of a person from the moment of conception, those rights must include the right to be raised, comforted, fed, clothed, nurtured and held by both of their parents! If a parent desires to relinquish that responsibility and delegate it to another, so be it, but to presume that one parent can speak for both, without demanding that the second acquiesce, is the worst kind of bigotry and only serves to further threaten children in our society.***

The right to personhood – the view that life begins at conception and that personhood vests at that instant in time as God ordained – must by its very nature include these rights.

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*Yet the Church, through Catholic Charities, partially funded a campaign of public advocacy and lobbying that **intentionally** derogated those rights both for parents and for children! This flies in the face of the Church's stated position of life – and human rights – vesting at the moment of conception.*

I find the position of the Church and the Pensacola Diocese untenable in this regard.

### **Marriage and the Church**

Historically, the Church performed marriages without the involvement or assent of any governmental unit. The procedure for marriage; the “rules” if you will, were set by canon law and not subject to governmental fiat, dictate or rule. It is only in the last 150 years or so that the concept of governmental “licensing” of marriages has come about.

Historically speaking, if you wished to be married in the Church, you posted your banns at the Church and, following a suitable time, the sacrament was performed. The state simply was not involved.

States began issuing “marriage licenses” originally as a means to enforce racial segregation – to prevent what was called “miscegenation”, or intermarriage between Caucasian and Black individuals. It soon expanded to prevent marriage of close relatives. Both prohibitions were premised on genetic grounds; the former without legitimate scientific basis, the latter with some foundation in science.

Originally, the policies of the states and the Church were reasonably aligned. Divorce was a rarity, and was essentially impossible without a serious fault in the marriage. Divorce for convenience, divorce to take children as chattel and hold them hostage, divorce for the purpose of replacing an aged wife or husband with a “younger model” – all were unheard of.

With the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s and 1970s, a disconnect between the Church and State as to what marriage is has occurred and as the law has mutated to follow the sexual mores of the day this schism has become irreconcilable.

The Church requires, as part of the vows exchanged by the parties, that marriage be until the death of one of the parties. Specifically, the vows typically include:

*“In sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, in good times and bad, for better or for worse, forsaking all others until death do us part.”*

And, in fact, Canon Law governs the granting of an annulment – the only means by which a Catholic may take the sacrament of marriage more than once in their lifetime in the Church. The grounds for an annulment require a defect in the **original** marriage, not simply “growing apart”, “irreconcilable differences” or “a desire to find a better (richer, more beautiful, etc) partner.”

But, under the law governing marriage in the State of Florida, as well as everywhere else in the United States, no grounds need be stated **at all** when a marriage is dissolved in the present day!

*So why is it that the Church is willing to execute and perfect a marriage claimed to be “contracted” within a state, when no such contract is ever bound, the rules of the Church regarding marriage are not followed, and the vows are not enforceable? Yet the Pastor of a parish, who is bound, supposedly under Canon law, to perform marriages that conform to Canon Law, in fact signs a marriage certificate evidencing a “marriage” under a set of rules in the state that bear almost **no** resemblance to those of the Church!*

*How can a Pastor place his Church seal on such a document, and how can a Pastor knowingly sign such a document, when he **knows** before doing so that the State refuses to treat marriage as the Church does – and how can the Archdiocese sanction this act?*

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*More to the point, if I stand before the alter and take these vows, I am, I believe, knowingly swearing falsely before God in a sacrament of the Church, in that I have sworn **to the state** that I will be governed by **their** rules regarding the conduct and potential dissolution of their marriage **prior to my bringing that license to the Church for the ceremony!***

Which is it?

Either you have perjured yourself in the County Building when you took the license (in which case it is null and void) or you committed a grave sin in that you have stood before the Alter of our Lord and taken a sacrament of the Church under knowing false pretense.

Worse, the Priesthood has assisted in the perpetration of this act at the direction of the Archdiocese and, indirectly, so has the Vatican!

Since the State has yet to recognize the nullity of any such document on the grounds of perjury, what actually has happened here is rather clear – and of grave concern.

### **Reconciliation**

It is a long-held tenet of rational discourse that complaining about a situation without offering suggestions for constructive change is of no substantive value. With that in mind, I offer the following suggestions for Catholic Policy in the United States generally, and the Pensacola Archdiocese specifically:

1. Mount a campaign to fix the problems with the “Baby Abandonment” law. Specifically the following change needs to be made:
  - Require that mothers abandoning their children must list all potential fathers **and** that failure to provide an accurate list (that is, one of the listed men ends up being a genetic match for the child) operates as conclusive proof of fraud should the father surface. Repeal the 2-year statute of limitations **if** the father is not accurately named (whether individually or via a list.) Provide that the mother must identify herself for the purpose of enforcing this provision, but that at the time of determination of the father of the child the records will be destroyed. Provide that the father has an absolute and irrevocable right of first refusal to take custody of the child, and that if he exercises this right the mother’s relinquishment voids both her parental rights and responsibilities. Provide that a father may abandon his parental responsibilities as may the mother, under the same terms as the mother, with or without physical surrender of the child (that is, the mother also has an absolute right of first refusal to be a parent as does the father.) Require that, to protect all of these rights, that DNA swabs be taken from the putative father, mother and child at the time of all births or identification of said father (such tests are now available in a non-invasive format in the form of cheek swabs.)

This would be a real step forward in insuring that all children are born into loving homes, without derogating the rights of either parent. It would also preferentially place children for adoption where **neither** parent wants to raise the child on their own, it would remove many children as pawns in adult games of money and vindictiveness (among the unmarried at least) and it would provide a clean adoptive slate for those children who Catholic Charities – and other agencies – place for adoption.

Unfortunately it does not address the right of the child to have two parents, but as I’m sure you are aware it is not possible to force a parent to love a child, and attempting to do so frequently leads to disaster in the form of child abuse and neglect. To solve that particularly

problem we will need more than policy – we will need prayer, and lots of it. You can rest assured that I offer my prayers for this cause on a daily basis, and I urge you to do so as well.

2. Change the Church's position on marriage. Specifically:
  - a. The Church should refuse to become involved in the state marriage process so long as the present situation with State marriage licenses exist. It is inconceivable that the Church could sanction either civil perjury or false swearing in a Sacrament; the only way out of this problem is to withdraw the Church's support for such acts. The Church should, however, offer marriage as a Church Sacrament, disjoint from the state's "marriage", as it has for nearly 2,000 years. That is, if a Catholic wishes to marry, he or she should be able to do so under the auspices of the **Church** without the dispensation of the State – and without its interference. I am aware of no legal reason that the Church can not practice its sacrament of marriage without a requirement for a "state license" – this requirement is artificial, not based on canon law, and should be revoked.
  - b. Parties who wish to contract a STATE marriage can still do so, but such an act would be outside of the Church and done without its approval or disapproval, except for the Church potentially verifying that the two marriage(s) are not inconsistent with each other (that is, the Church might make inquiry to insure that the applicant for a Church marriage is not married under the laws of a state to someone else, and should provide that as a matter of sacrament only a civil marriage to the same person whom you married in the Church is considered acceptable.)
  - c. The Church should lobby and press for a modification of State marriage codes to provide that:
    - i. The parties to a State marriage should be required to file with the license a copy of a binding contractual agreement setting forth:
      1. The grounds for dissolution of the union, if any are permitted, and its procedure (e.g. the Church could require that to get a dissolution of marriage an annulment must be approved by the Church, and that absent same a legal separation may be granted, but not a "divorce".)
      2. What constitutes "fault" and under what standard of proof. (e.g. The Church could provide that only the Canons regarding defective marriages would constitute "fault", it could adopt a view that proven adultery constitutes "fault", etc.) This policy would, I suspect, require formal development under Canon law by the Vatican.
      3. How property will be divided in the event of dissolution, including the impact of any proven fault on that division.
      4. How custody of any children will be handled in the event of dissolution, including the impact of any proven fault.

The State should provide a default set of terms for the marriage, but it must accept any revisions made by the couple, provided that they are entered into in good faith and without force or fraud. Further, these terms must be enforceable as with any other contract between individuals, including full faith and credit provisions between states.
    - ii. A Church, whether Catholic or otherwise, may require specific contractual terms to be inserted in marriage licenses which they will approve. Parties to a marriage who disagree with the various requirements of a given religious

organization may always contract their marriage outside of the Church. This respects the separation of Church and State and further conforms with the Establishment Clause, as it does not require that any Church accept any particular set of terms nor does it force a couple to use any particular Church, or any Church at all, to contract a marriage. With regards to Catholic marriages, the Church could require that children be protected in their right to be raised by both parents, as an example, and that custody, absent proof of a parent's unfitness, could not be litigated in a separation action. While the Church could not force a couple to adopt such a provision in their civil marriage agreement, it certainly could refuse to sign off on and perform a ceremony in which the parties are unwilling to adhere to the Church's teachings and standards!

These changes and policies, if adopted by the Catholic Church, would serve to do more to strengthen families and protect children than the Catholic Church has done over the last one hundred years. It would, specifically:

1. Send a strong message that the "divorce culture" we currently live in is unacceptable to the Church, and that the Church will not participate in any further expansion of that Culture.
2. Align the Church's statements with its actions regarding marriage, family, and the sanctity of life. The Church preaches that all three are critical positions for Catholics – and society generally. However, the Church's active participation in the passage of the "dumpster baby" law, its explicit sanctioning of a claimed 'marriage' that does not comport with the Church's view on that sacrament, and the specific harm done to children by the "throw away" nature of today's marriages, have significantly diluted the credibility of the Church with myself and, I suspect, with many other Catholics.

One of the historical strengths of the Church has been its consistency of values, ethics and morals. The last hundred years, and particularly the last few years, have seen an amazing erosion in those positions, all driven by expediency. But expediency and hypocrisy are common bedfellows, and in this case the strength of the Church's arguments, particularly with young people who are our next generation and those upon whom the Church can have the greatest impact, is significantly diluted.

3. Protect children from being ripped away from a parent by an unscrupulous party in an adoption fomented under fraud or deceit. At the same time, strengthen the odds that a child will have one or both parents who truly want that child; no longer would a parent be forced to care for a child they do not want. This should dramatically reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect in this country.

I have found it increasingly difficult to contribute to the Church and its development with what I believe are these serious differences between what the Church preaches and what it practices.

[[[[ Edited to remove personal identifying information not pertinent to public discourse ]]]]

I make this call to the Church because in 15 years or so my daughter will be of an age where she may contemplate marriage herself.

I would like her to be able to contemplate one of life's biggest decisions with the full support of the Catholic Community and with a view towards the standards that the Catholic Church provides. Standards that I believe in, that I am committed to raising her within, and that I believe must be consistent not only in words but in deeds.

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I want to be able to, with the pride of a father, walk her down the aisle on her wedding day in the Church – knowing that the sacrament that she enters into will not be sullied by signing a piece of paper from a state that does not reflect the values of her faith, and that she will not stand before God and parish that day taking an oath that she has, just a few days prior, sworn to the state was false.

I want her to contract a marriage with the security that comes from knowing that both her, and her future husband, will be **bound** to raise any children that they may have as a **family** – and that both will have strong disincentives to “sow their wild oats” and break their commitment to their children, to the Church and to the Community.

I want her to grow in the Church and to understand that if, per chance, she or her husband should sin either in the creation of life out of wedlock or if her sacramental marriage should fail, that the Church will not only expect her not to sully the children, but that the Church has a set of policies and social expectations that will support and help her, and her children, in doing the right thing.

I want her years of Catholic teaching of the doctrine of the Church, which she has now started and which will continue through her youth, to comport with the truth of what the Church **does**.

*I do not want her to see the same kind of hypocrisy in the Church of today that drove me from the Church of yesterday!*

I want her to have what I never did - what I could not have due to the changes in our society and the lack of backbone in the Church to stand up and say in a loud voice “You will not dilute and damage families, children and marriage with our help. We will, through our voices, through our activism, and through our support, work to strengthen – not destroy – the institution of marriage, family and the health and welfare of children.”

I want, in short, for the Church to live up to its promise.

To its teaching.

To the values, ethics and morals it claims to hold.

To what **Christ** put forth as guiding principles for our lives.

I want the Church to provide a solid foundational component for the families to come – especially those of my daughter, whom I am raising as a Catholic – a member of the next Catholic Generation

Could the changes I outline here remove all of the 17 million American Children from the “harmed” list?

No.

But such a set of changes would have a dramatic effect. It would be a statement of principle and belief that would touch all of America. It would reduce the number of children born out of wedlock. It would dramatically reduce the number of children who have their lives torn to bits by divorce, at least for Catholics. It might even start a revolution among the Christian faiths of the United States, resulting in virtually all Christian faiths insisting on similar changes.

*It just might, to borrow from Scripture, be the tiny mustard seed that falls into fertile earth and sprouts a mighty change in the social fabric of our nation – and ultimately the world.*

I hope that the Archdiocese, and Christ Our Redeemer, will understand that I, as a Catholic, as a Christian, as a parent and as a man of faith must decide where the alms that I give each year will be distributed. I further hope that the Archdiocese will understand that alms come in many forms, and that I am guided and driven to contribute my efforts and funds in what I believe is the most effective

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manner such that they are expended only by organizations, institutions, and in efforts that comport with the views I believe that we all, as Catholics, should hold near and dear to our hearts..

Your friend in Christ,

Karl Denninger