

THE LOCUTORIUM

SALT AND LIGHT

*An interview with Chris Smith by Mario Calabrese, O.P. and
Thomas More Garrett, O.P.*

*Editor's Note: The views expressed in this interview are
Congressman Smith's.*

BIOGRAPHY

United States Congressman Christopher Smith is currently in his sixteenth term representing the Fourth District of New Jersey in the US House of Representatives. Originally a Democrat, Smith became a Republican in 1978 and unsuccessfully ran for Congress against an entrenched incumbent. In a rematch two years later, Smith won in a surprising upset. He has served as a Member of Congress since winning his seat in 1980.

Regarded as a legislative leader on human rights issues, Congressman Smith currently serves on a number of human-rights-related committees. Since 1982 he has co-chaired the bipartisan Congressional Pro-Life Caucus. As of January 2012, the independent watchdog organization *GovTrack* ranks Smith second among all 435 members of the House in the number of laws authored over the last two decades. He is married to his wife of 34 years, Marie Smith, and they have four grown children.

Brs. Mario Calabrese and Thomas More Garrett had the opportunity to sit down with Congressman Smith in his office in Washington and get his thoughts concerning the Church in public life and Catholics in public service. The interview took place on March 22, 2012.



SALT CHAPEL, WIELICZKA SALT MINE

TMG: Congressman Smith, the Catholic hierarchy and others have written much in recent years concerning the participation of Catholics in political life. Both the Vatican and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have published materials intended to offer guidance for a responsible Catholic engagement in public affairs. You, a life-long Catholic, have dedicated almost the entirety of your professional career to public service. What are some of the unique difficulties that a Catholic in public life faces?

Ionce heard an account of Nikita Khrushchev asking a worker on a factory floor if he believed in God and the man replied, “At work, no, at home, yes.” I think that this response is typical for too many Catholics and other people of faith serving in Congress. Many members of Congress are comfortable leaving their convictions

about the sanctity of life and other important issues outside the halls of government. When on the job, so to speak, some other person takes over who votes contrary to the convictions that they purport personally to hold.

It is schizophrenic, and widespread. Approximately two-thirds of the Catholics of the last Congress were pro-abortion. Most of these members also support the LGBT agenda, which is also antithetical to any Biblical sense of morality, Catholic teaching aside. Nonetheless, every year we see Catholic officials who parade into church on prominent holidays. These same people never miss a St. Patrick's Day celebration. Not that their attendance at these sorts of affairs is all that bad, but in light of a voting record contrary to the clear tenets of the Catholic faith, it should cause us to look askance. One of the frustrations then of being a Catholic in Congress is being surrounded by other Catholics who are often unwilling to vote as Catholics.

TMG: Do you think that this problem is unique to Catholics?

I think that the dichotomy between faith and professional life is less prevalent among Evangelicals, for instance. Members that identify themselves as Evangelical tend to be both pro-life and willing to speak out on the issue. Among orthodox Jews, several in Congress are pro-abortion, such as Joe Lieberman (Sen.-CT) and Ben Cardin (Sen.-MD). I understand their faith to hold positions contrary to their voting record, yet it does not appear that authoritative figures within their faiths hold them to account. My greatest frustration, though, has been the Catholics, who truly believe that they are Catholic—and maybe they are—but do not support the teachings of the Church on the fundamental issues of our time.

MC: Yet even the election of pro-life candidates to key positions in government often fails to yield significant legislative change. Some individuals concerned with the dignity of human life and the future

of the traditional family may be frustrated with the lack of success in efforts to repeal Roe v. Wade, or to prevent the erosion of the unique status of traditional marriage at the state and federal level. Frustration can often lead to both anger and apathy. What information about the legislative process would help guard voters from disappointment and discouragement about a perceived lack of progress?

I absolutely understand the disappointment because I feel it too, but it must be put into perspective. I have been pro-life caucus chairman for thirty of my thirty-two years here and we look for every opportunity to advance the pro-life cause, domestically and internationally. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, over twenty-five percent of planned abortions do not occur if they are not paid for. When Henry Hyde first heard that, he realized that over one million children were walking the earth because of his amendment that denied funding for abortions. He had a tear in his eye and said, “A million kids?” What we do does matter, and I often argue with those people who are cynical and ask them, “What if we were not here?” A large part of our job is simply stopping abortion from spreading.

When I first got into the pro-life movement the thought among many of us was that abortion in America would change in five years, or it would take generations. It did not change in five years, and we were naïve in thinking that if people just knew the truth, including politicians, good would follow. The great lesson I have learned is first to strive to know the truth, but then be benignly aggressive and do it every day. The culture of death never takes a holiday, and we need to be equally committed. We must go into this battle with nothing but love in our hearts, even for our enemies, and hope, which is done over time.

MC: Do you think that slavery is a good analogy? The fact is the slave trade was not abolished overnight. Does that mean important issues need a long-term strategy?

They do need a long term strategy. One of my heroes is William Wilberforce, who through prayer, fasting, and very brilliant legislative strategy was able to stop the slave trade first. After the slave trade, slavery itself was abolished in England after he died, and this was long before America did it. Every day we are involved, lives are being saved because of that same witness. Yes it is incremental, but to eradicate the culture of death in law and practice is exactly like the abolitionist movement.

MC: Let's turn for a minute to Catholic participation within the contemporary political setting. In Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility, the USCCB encourages Catholic lay women and men to become actively involved in political parties. The same document, however, cautions against an excessive party loyalty that risks the neglect or denial of fundamental moral truths.

You yourself were once a registered Democrat, and even as a Republican holding elected office, you have at times throughout your career had to face retaliation from figures within the Republican Party for refusing to bow to pressure from party leadership on particular issues. Could you speak a little about some of the conflicts that partisanship and party loyalty can present to a Catholic actively involved in politics, whether as a candidate, an elected official, or even as a staff member? What are some of the dangers associated with party identity?

I think our loyalty must first be to core convictions, hopefully well formed, and based on our belief in God, our faith, and the practical experience that helps shape wise insight. It should never be re-election right or wrong, or even our country right or wrong.

For the longest time, for well over twenty years, my district was profoundly pro-abortion. Every opponent I ran against did the same polling and found that to be the case. Also the media made it known all the time to the detriment of everything else I did. I

am glad to be known as a pro-life lawmaker, but I work on many other human rights issues, among which the right to life is the most central and profound. But if they can paint you as a one-issue person the media knows they can harm you. But is it worth being held to account for winning your election on the backs of dead babies and wounded mothers by compromising on the abortion issue?

There are times when you get all that you can get and do a principled compromise because to lose it all would be far worse. That happened with the Hyde Amendment in the Clinton years. We had a hundred and eighty votes to keep the Hyde Amendment with life of the mother only, and we did a strategic defeat to keep from losing the whole thing. We would have lost it all.

TMG: What comes into your mind when you come close to a compromise on a core issue?

Agony. Sheer agony. I pray always that I do no harm, that I would rather not be making this decision. I seek the counsel of godly men and women, starting with my wife and my staff. I speak with the people at the USCCB, [Associate Director of Pro-Life Activities] Richard Doerflinger is a good source, among others. Congressman Joe Pitts [PA-16] comes to mind. The late Henry Hyde was especially a source of guidance for me. We would sit in his office and talk and pray about these tough votes.

I ask for prayer as well. But even after a tough vote, I'm never sure that I did the right thing. This past year we fought so hard to prevent Planned Parenthood from receiving any funding, and in the end we were faced with a bill that while it reduced its funding from prior years, still preserved some. The bill that would zero-out Planned Parenthood funding failed to gain a consensus. If we refused to compromise, we risked the possibility that we will achieve nothing of our goal in the legislation. So, I end up voting for a bill that accomplishes some of my goal by reducing the amount available to Planned Parenthood, but nonetheless still preserves some funding.

After a vote like that, I'm never sure that I did the right thing. I look for peace, and I sometimes thought in my early years that if I have peace about a decision, I'll know that I'm doing the right thing. But this is only true to a point. When we in Congress are faced with these omnibus bills with conflicting policies in the bill itself, it is a very difficult to discern the right course of action. I pray often: "Please don't let me do any harm."

TMG: So, the question of how to vote is a balancing act that admits of no formula?

It's truly a searching. I haven't mentioned the importance of the 'Our Father' to me in times like these. I love to turn to the first lines of the Our Father. How do we do His will on earth? I try to focus on the Our Father in working through the question of how to vote on legislation that reflects conflicting policies.

TMG: I want to turn now specifically to the role of the Catholic clergy, and specifically the Church's hierarchy, in public life. Historically, American bishops have been active and instrumental in government affairs, particularly in the northeast states. The history of engagement began with America's first bishop, John Carroll, and continued even throughout the twentieth century. The late Cardinal Cushing of Boston, for example, is said to have enjoyed a close relationship with the Kennedy family. Cardinals Krol and Spellman are considered by many historians to have enjoyed a regular and healthy dialogue, and even a degree of influence, with some of the leading public officials in their archdioceses.

Nonetheless, the influence of bishops in the public affairs of their dioceses seems to have faded. How can the bishops adjust to an environment where the relevance of their views on public matters, even among some Catholics, is no longer assumed? What are some of the challenges that the Church hierarchy in the United States must overcome in order to persuade the public that their positions

on specific issues represent the right course for the common good of Americans at large?

I think that there needs to be both an increase in the frequency with which we hear from the bishops on matters of public policy and amplification in the volume of their rhetoric. We are starting to hear the clergy discuss religious liberty from the pulpit, and while that is a welcomed development, each bishop needs to do more in his respective diocese to highlight matters that are of crucial concern for the Church's future.

Bishops and other Church officials need to be prepared to publically renounce the type of politician who will show up at ceremonial gatherings and speak glowingly about the Church or a particular Church service and then turn around and attempt to suffocate the same institution's ability to serve the common good. Perhaps the bishops need to engage in more individual pastoring with an eye toward explaining that they are shepherds and that part of their job entails warning some of these people of the potential consequences of their actions.

TMG: You are referring to individual discussions between bishops and specific public officials?

Yes. But the bishops need to be careful about how their association with a public figure might be used in the future. Cardinal O'Connor told me how Patrick Moynihan always wanted a picture of the two together outside the residence of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Cardinal O'Connor would tell him that he would be happy to meet and talk with him inside the residence at the Senator's convenience, but that he couldn't have the picture because of his position in support of abortion.

The picture is important. Meetings with bishops and other Church officials are often designed to get the right picture for future distribution. The bishops and other Church officials need to exercise greater caution about associations with figures who do not

share their fundamental beliefs. The public circulation of photos with individuals opposed to the Church on fundamental issues can create great confusion in the mind of the public.

Let me give you an example. There have been pictures circulating of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Hillary Clinton. A few years ago, I was meeting with a [non-American] Cardinal. For whatever reason, the topic of upcoming elections arose and this particular Cardinal launched into a defense of Hillary Clinton. He told me that she was pro-life and that Clinton and Mother Teresa had worked together on pro-life issues. I almost fell out of my chair.

Anyway, I informed the Cardinal of Clinton's acceptance of the Margaret Sanger Award from the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and of her unwavering support of pro-abortion policies throughout her career. He later acknowledged his misunderstanding. To this day, I am convinced that it was the pictures of the two of them together that conveyed a sense of civility, friendship, and a shared interest in issues of fundamental importance.

This instance, I think, speaks to the quality of information concerning political affairs that makes its way to people in places of high responsibility in the Church. The bishops and other Church figures need to ensure that they are both more informed concerning political affairs and more cautious about their association with political figures. Church officials do need to develop a healthy dialogue with government officials, especially those that are Catholic, but they need to do it in a way that won't facilitate a politician's efforts to deceive the public, especially through means of a photograph.

Another area to which bishops in particular should be attentive is the content of their diocesan newspapers. Some diocesan newspapers are afraid to print ads from pro-life groups, especially their voter guides. These publications often cite as a reason for their refusal the potential for the loss of tax exemption. This excuse is seldom valid; they will not lose their tax exemption.

Furthermore, the bishops need to ensure that the voter guides that are published in the diocesan newspapers are clear and understandable, and that they accurately reflect the weight that the bishops' own documents instruct the faithful to afford to various issues. Sometimes a person with a strong pro-life voting record like Henry Hyde could end with a score equal to indifferently pro-life or even pro-abortion candidates. Oftentimes, it appears to me that the editors' rankings reflect no priority among the issues. Welfare funding is treated as having equal importance to protecting the life of the unborn.

The bishops also ought to consider an adjustment in their rhetoric, especially concerning the contraceptive mandate. The bishops use the term "HHS mandate." This is the "Obama mandate." No less a news source than the *New York Times* reported that Obama personally made the decision to include Catholic hospitals and universities within the mandate. It was Obama who made the call. Yet the Catholic press still calls it the "HHS mandate."

The bishops and other Church officials need to more clearly delineate between those public officials who hold positions consistent with the Church and those that do not. This is especially the case with respect to President Obama. If the bishops fail to make the association of the contraceptive mandate with the President himself, people in the pews won't even associate this disastrous policy with Obama.

The Obama mandate also brings me back to my earlier comments concerning the need for greater political shrewdness on the part of the bishops and their officials. Simultaneous with the Administration's announcement of the latest bogus effort at compromise on this mandate, the White House deployed Sun Tzu's *Art of War*-style tactics to run interference with other interested parties, such as the USCCB, during the news cycle. Shortly after news of the proposed "compromise" broke, the USCCB issued a comment that Obama's latest proposal was a

“first step in the right direction.” That was the comment that the secular press highlighted.

After this comment was brought to my attention, I tried to call several bishops and ask that they arrest the news spin immediately. Later that day, the USCCB released a wonderful statement identifying why the latest modification was insufficient. But by the time of the second statement, Friday afternoon had passed and the bishops were speaking into the weekend news cycle. The quote from Church leadership for the day was “step in the right direction.” The effort to get an early reaction was a trap, and in that instance, the bishops walked right into it.

The USCCB should have better prepared itself for the Administration’s political posturing. The Conference and the bishops need to become more politically astute. Especially in this instance, they should have realized that the pressure to provide a premature statement was part of an effort to extract a misguided comment that could be used against them. The bishops need to do a better job in protecting themselves from being used and manipulated by political figures. Unfortunately, the Church hierarchy, all the way to the Vatican, historically learns all too slowly from instances such as these and is therefore unable to adjust quickly to new threats. This approach does not serve the Church well when it is confronted by a master manipulator. This Administration in particular has a political war room that has the ability to manipulate the news like nothing I have ever seen.

TMG: If you were asked to address a large group of the Church’s clergy on any matter pertaining to the current political environment, what would be some of the highlights of your speech?

I would start off with a quote from Matthew 10:16: “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” Don’t accept the babble that often comes from politicians trying to be all things to all people. The pro-abortion Catholics excel better than anybody at hitting hot

buttons that we all care about while glossing over their differences on issues of life.

It is far too easy to spend more money for social programs, but we have to acknowledge that government spending is not genuine charity. We in Congress have to remember, it is not our money that we are purporting to spend. We as elected officials should not pat ourselves on the back too hard for making available the funds of other people. This is not our money that we spend, it belongs to the taxpayers.

So, in other words, I would encourage the clergy to take the concerns expressed by pro-abortion Catholics concerning efforts to address social problems through increased governmental spending alone with a grain a salt. It is a limited sign of virtue to spend someone else's money. Providing a basic means of support for the needy is nonetheless important, but it can't be done in lieu of protecting, for instance, a whole class of people who are being slaughtered.

That's what I find so disturbing about efforts to misconstrue Cardinal Bernadin's *Seamless Garment*, because I do believe that we need a wider view of Catholic social teaching. Absolutely. And to the degree to which we have the money, we should assist where it is necessary. But we can't balance this social need against the cause of promoting life itself. All Catholics need to be more strenuous in the defense of life. Government leaders and clergy alike need to abandon the fear of not being liked by others. Don't apologize for being pro-life. The clergy needs to join the laity in being more tenacious on life issues.

TMG: Would you offer any comments specifically devoted to the recent and more focused attack on religious liberty, as seen through the mandate and the Hosanna-Tabor case, among other events?

I think the bishops understand that the survival of the Church's institutions, Catholic hospitals, charities, etc., is very much at risk. Their ability to operate in a manner consistent with Catholic

principles will be put at serious risk in the environment that Obama is trying to create.

Specifically with respect to the hospitals, I am convinced that the Administration wants to compel these institutions to sell to entities that are not aligned with any faith-based organization. Catholic leadership can't merely threaten the government with the closure of these institutions because that is precisely what our opposition wants to see happen. In the event of a closure of an otherwise viable institution, a non-religious entity will merely purchase the assets and continue the operation in a manner that no longer reflects Catholic values. That's what this Administration wants to see happen.

TMG: So you think that there is a movement of some within government to eliminate Catholic hospitals?

Without a doubt. We can get a sense for this attitude from a speech given in 2009 by the then executive director of the UN Population Fund, Dr. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, where she addressed obstacles to promoting population control worldwide. Dr. Obaid gave a speech where she said that she believes that "religion is the final frontier" in the work to promote the culture of death. Of course she did not use the phrase "culture of death." She spoke in terms of promoting access to abortion and contraception. But the term "culture of death" captures what she, and similar like-minded individuals, include within the sphere of "international human rights." The "final frontier" is religion.

In other words, the approach that she advocates is that those who promote the culture of death must either co-opt religion, make religion partners on their terms—and this is where progressive churches can become part of the problem—or out-manuever and ultimately overrun those faith communities that resist. All of these types of organizations get a nominally religious figure to promote efforts like population control. We see this happen within the Catholic Church, among Evangelicals, within the Muslim faith,

etc. So the “final frontier” to advancing the culture of death agenda is the confrontation with the Church. If they can undermine it and dismantle its ability to respond, they win.

TMG: How should Church officials respond?

Fight back until we win. Resist. Now is not the time to adopt a defeatist mentality where we as Catholics withdraw from the culture at large and get out of the business of health care or terminate other large-scale, public charitable endeavors. Convicted Catholics shouldn’t withdraw from secular affairs. If we sell our hospitals, the ownership will fall into entities that promote abortion, sterilization, ultimately euthanasia, and so forth. The adoption of a defeatist mentality would be a profound mistake. No one has provided better health care than Catholic institutions because our institutions provide not only quality care, but do so, as an institution, with the love of the Gospel in mind. Why give that up? We as Catholics should resist the efforts of government to force us out of health care.

TMG: Resistance though, is ultimately merely a posture. What would be a more specific response? What is one thing that the Church hierarchy could do right now that it is not doing in response to the threat to religious freedom?

First, as I mentioned earlier, stop referring to the contraceptive mandate as the “HHS mandate.” It’s the “Obama mandate.”

My wife Marie and I have also urged the Church in this country to take up a nationwide collection once a year. The money could be used to fund a foundation that might be called “The John Paul II Culture of Life Foundation Fund.” The funds would be managed by the USCCB and would be used for two purposes. One would be to provide small grants to pregnancy care centers for use in the purchase of items such as ultrasound machines, etc. A second purpose of the foundation would be to fund issue-advocacy efforts

to spread the pro-life message. The funds could be used to make targeted ad-buys. These efforts will both save lives and change the hearts and minds of our citizens.

Consider the work of the Vitae Foundation supported by Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas. This foundation provides funds for excellent ads and other educational outreach efforts to educate the public on the harms of abortion. I would like for the bishops to try something like this on the national level just once to see the success that it could have. I think that we would save so many lives and change people's opinions on abortion and concerning the Church in general, and that would show up in the polls.

Furthermore, the clergy needs to be cautious of ingratiating politicians. Some of these politicians are experts at false flattery designed to cause you to be less robust in your response to the defense of Church teaching.

Don't trust people who have proved themselves to be untrustworthy, especially on this issue of the Obama contraceptive mandate. Obama will continue this dialogue with the Church until November, and he might even offer another trivial accommodation. But recognize that all of these exceptions and accommodations can be revoked by the Administration once the President wins a second term. The Administrative rules can be changed without an act of Congress. Don't give some of these folks the benefit of the doubt once they have proven undeserving. Certainly love them and have no animosity toward them, but call them to account for the veracity of their statements.

To the pastors in parishes, I would urge them to make a special effort to develop a relationship with elected officials in their parish. Question them on their beliefs. Make yourself more aware of the difficult issues that they are facing in their public professional lives. The USCCB, the National Right to Life, and state right-to-life organizations keep comprehensive records that can serve as a useful resource for parish priests who need to educate themselves on important areas of concern. They should turn to these resources.

TMG: Let me ask you about another topic that has received a great deal of attention from public officials and Church figures alike: same-sex marriage. In his book, Render Unto Caesar, Archbishop Chaput quotes the late Archbishop John Ireland as stating that “if great things are not done by Catholics in America, the fault lies surely with themselves—not with the republic.” Same-sex marriage legislation is enjoying increasing success in state legislatures around the country. The governors of both New York, which has adopted same-sex marriage legislation, and Maryland, which is currently considering a similar law, are Catholic. Both support same-sex marriage legislation, as do many of the Catholic representatives that make up the legislative bodies in the states that have enacted these laws.

Is the conclusion that Catholic legislators are responsible for the recent adoption of same-sex marriage legislation in various states unavoidable? Does the approval of same-sex marriage in states where Catholics hold a number of elected offices paradoxically suggest that Catholics should be wary of voting for other Catholics for public office? Could you speculate a little on why the success of same-sex marriage legislation seems to have turned largely on the support of Catholic elected officials?

I think that people should vote on an individual's record, not on a candidate's religion. However, the support that you see stems largely from the aggressive attempt to marry the cause of same-sex marriage to racial civil rights. Advocates of same-sex marriage have acted strenuously in their efforts to co-opt the civil rights movement and extend it to their issue. But same-sex marriage is not part of the civil rights movement.

Catholic politicians who support same-sex marriage have not, by and large, been held to account for their voting record. They are probably steeped in poor catechesis and just overall poorly educated on why the Church opposes same-sex marriage. We live in an age where the governing creed holds that ‘as long as I want it, it's okay so long as no one appears to get hurt.’ But there are real

victims from same-sex marriage. With same-sex marriage, the victims will be the family.

I think that many people are not fully aware of what the approval of same-sex marriage means for education. Where same-sex marriage receives official state commendation, children are sent the message that same-sex marriage is the moral equivalent of traditional marriage. State approval of same-sex marriage will affect our school sex-education programs. Ultimately, our schools will be teaching children that anything that we do with our bodies of a sexual nature, provided the parties consent, is something to be affirmed and embraced. From kindergarten on, public education will reflect this notion of moral equivalency among all consensual sex acts, even if the message is delivered in an ‘age-appropriate’ manner in the early years. This approach will encourage sexual experimentation and cause unnecessary trauma for children at early ages.

It will also contribute to an increase in gender-identity confusion. If the manner in which we treat our body is untethered from a sense of morality, any healthy respect for our body becomes difficult to sustain. If someone no longer ‘feels’ like his or her sex, any reason for not pretending to be another sex disappears. This opens one up to the possibility of radical, disfiguring surgeries. Separated from nature and the nature law, sexuality becomes entirely subjective.

I was speaking recently with a man who opposes abortion but supports same-sex marriage. He told me that he knew a lesbian couple who adopted a little boy. While he supports the couple’s relationship, he did admit that he was taken back when he visited their home recently and the boy, a young child, met him at the door wearing a dress. The confusion and pain that a child like this will experience is underappreciated.

TMG: As an elected official, you work under the intense scrutiny of the press. Whether fairly or unfairly, the media’s interest in the life of a public official is not limited to the execution of his or her duties, but extends into all areas of life. The decisions of American bishops

have not historically endured a similar level of scrutiny by the secular press. This, of course, has changed somewhat in the last several years, particularly since the unfolding of the sexual abuse scandal. Once-routine matters such as the renovation or location of the bishop's residence now receive media attention. What advice would you offer bishops and other Church officials who now face an increased level of scrutiny over their affairs, even those that they might consider internal or private?

There are some things that ought to stay personal, but the media doesn't always respect individual space. However, one of the more positive things about being in politics that is a little paradoxical is that by living in a glass house, you do think as someone living in glass house. We all know that our Lord knows all things, but when the public has access to more and more things about you through the media, it makes you realize the consequences of bad decisions, and even the perception of bad choices.

TMG: Is it fair to say then that you draw a positive element from the heightened degree of accountability that the media's attention forces upon you?

That is true—your language “heightened degree of accountability” is well placed. However, as a public figure, I have to respond to the media in kind. When a particular press outlet runs a story that includes incorrect or misleading facts, I have to be sure to try to hold them accountable and have them correct the record.

In the early years some of the reporters had their stories written before they would even talk to me; even recently my staff and I got into big fight with *PolitiFact*, a group that holds itself out as the arbiter of truth among political figures. A *PolitiFact* story accused me of exaggerating a particular piece of data. I had to expend the effort necessary to persuade them to correct their distortion. Public figures need to expend the extra effort to challenge

misleading news accounts and persuade these press outlets to get the story correct.

TMG: Applying this to the Church then, are you suggesting that the bishops be more aggressive in efforts to combat media accounts that misrepresent a Church official's comment or Church teaching itself?

Yes, that's it exactly. And it might require hiring good legal counsel that is politically savvy and has a sense for the media. Transparency goes a long way, but we need to be realistic. Many in the media always suspect a cover-up, even in the absence of any reason to do so. Church officials might need to go on the offensive from time to time in order to help the press stay committed to its obligation to report the news.

This is related to something that I think that the bishops need to do right now. The bishops need an anti-defamation unit at the USCCB. The unit should be comprised of top-flight attorneys who will take no prisoners in their use of our defamation laws, journalists, and communications staff experienced in controlling and driving the news. For a model, the bishops might look to forming something similar to the B'nai B'rith-founded Anti-Defamation League.

A unit like this will, if nothing else, have a chilling effect on attacks on the Church. If martyrdom comes our way, let it be that we have tried every way to combat evil, and give up only when bound in chains. Let's not accept martyrdom before it's time.

There are other reasons that the bishops ought to defend the Church more vigorously. I think that we lose church-goers when the Church is maliciously maligned and Church officials offer no defense or response. People give up, fallen-away Catholics give up. Let's be a fighting Church. Let's fight with all the tools at our disposal, with no animosity and no violence.

TMG: What advice would you offer to younger Catholics, such as college students or recent college graduates, who are considering the possibility of one day seeking elected office?

Iwould refer them to instructions offered by Paul VI and John Paul II: If you want peace, work for justice. And if you want justice, defend the unborn. Countless opportunities to advance justice and peace present themselves in elected office.

It is always a challenge to avoid discouragement. But we need people striving to be the salt of the earth in gatekeeper positions, or evil, like a disease, will spread.

Mario Calabrese entered the Order of Preachers in 2007. Thomas More Garrett entered in 2008.