

# Throwing the Sheep to the Wolves

The boys from Covington Catholic did a good thing by going to the [March for Life](#). If what the Catholic Church teaches is true, *Roe v. Wade* marks a death sentence for roughly 1,000,000 innocent human beings every year, year in, year out. As John T. Noonan wrote decades ago, “No plague, no war, has so devastated the land.” The March for Life is a regular reminder that millions of Americans have not reconciled themselves to that unequalled devastation. The students from Covington Catholic did another good thing at the March for Life. *Lifesite News* is [reporting](#) that when the Black Hebrew Israelites, who directed a variety of insults at the students for an hour or so, began taunting a priest, Monsignor Patrick Hambrough, with heightened viciousness, a group of students came over to Msgr. Hambrough and told him, “We’re with you, Father, we support you.” The boys did not know Hambrough: all they knew was that he was a priest and he was being subjected to verbal abuse.

In coming to Msgr. Hambrough’s aid, those students from Covington Catholic were displaying the healthy, normal human instinct to come to the aid of one’s own when under attack by outsiders. To be sure, that instinct can be carried too far, as both Christian morality and Western jurisprudence recognize. But its absence suggests that something is amiss. And when the students from Covington Catholic came under a vicious and sustained media attack not long after they had defended Msgr. Hambrough, several prominent Catholics gave evidence that something might indeed be amiss, as they joined the Twitter mob denouncing the boys without even waiting to hear their side of the story. And no prominent Catholic seemed to place any stock at all in the fact that the students were coreligionists attending a Catholic school, even though

Catholic schools generally provide instruction not just in the content of the Faith but in how to put it into practice and their graduates often give evidence of that in their adult lives. (Indeed, the greatest example of sanctity I have encountered in my life was a teacher at my own all-boys Catholic high school, who inspired hundreds of Catholic high school students to follow Christ in humble service to others).

The students from Covington Catholic were quickly denounced by the Diocese of Covington, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and Archbishop Kurtz of Louisville, as well as such well known Catholics as Robert George of Princeton, James Martin, S. J., and Fr. Martin's frequent ally, Daniel Horan, O. F. M. They would have done well to wait. Evidence soon emerged that the teen who was the central target of the Twitter mob for "smirking" at the man invariably described as a "Native American elder," Nathan Phillips, had done nothing wrong, and even sought to restrain another student who was provoked when Phillips' colleague began swearing at the boys, disparaging them because they were white, and telling them they should go back to Europe. No one from Covington Catholic said anything comparable. Some of the boys may have briefly done the same sort of chant heard every football Saturday at Florida State, but only after Phillips had chosen confrontation by leading his followers into the midst of the Covington Catholic students and by getting into the one teen's face and banging a drum, all without ever explaining what he was doing or why. There is no reason to believe anything would ever have happened if Phillips had not acted as he did.

In addition, Phillips' many and varied descriptions of what happened ranged from the implausible to the incredible. Although Phillips claimed he was trying to defuse tension between the Black Hebrew Israelites—who had been shouting abuse for an hour—and the Covington Catholic boys, no reasonable person believes that walking up to someone and

banging a drum in his face is a sensible way of doing that. And Phillips' claims that the students "were in the process of attacking these four black individuals" and it "looked like they were going to lynch them" were supported by no evidence at all, as was his claim that the student he chose to confront "just blocked my way and wouldn't allow me to retreat." Moreover, Phillips made clear that he agreed with the anti-Catholicism of the Black Hebrew Israelites: "The Black Israelites, they were saying some harsh things, but some of it was true, too. These young, white American kids who were being taught in their Catholic school their doctrine, their truth, and when they found out there's more truth out there than what they were being taught, they were offended, they were insulted, they were scared, and that's how they responded. One thing that I was taught in my Marine Corps training is that a scared man will kill you. And that's what these boys were. They were scared." Phillips underscored his anti-Catholicism the following day, when he and his followers tried to disrupt Mass at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Once more evidence came in, some of the Catholics who had rushed to denounce the Catholic high school students began to apologize. Robert George's apology was quick and straightforward; James Martin's was delayed and grudging. Bishop Foy of Covington apologized for allowing his diocese "to be bullied and pressured into making a statement prematurely." Cowardice was likely a motive for many of those rushing to condemn teenaged boys: they know that the cultural left has the power to end careers over anything, however trivial, they can brand as racist. And Catholics were certainly being pressured by the left to denounce the students from Covington Catholic. Daniel Horan, who has not apologized for branding the Covington students "racist students in MAGA hats taunting Native Americans," retweeted John Gehring's admonition that "If you're a Catholic teacher and principal who stays silent, you're part of the problem."

As troubling as hasty episcopal condemnations born of fear are, they are not as disturbing as clerical denunciations stemming from conviction. Horan and Martin evinced both an infantile romanticizing of “the other” and a disdain for millions of American Catholics. Here is Horan on Nathan Phillips: “Thinking about how the Spirit was clearly present in Nathan Phillips as he stood prayerfully in his tradition and peacefully withstood harassment from young white men.” Martin is similar: “I am as disgusted by the contemptuous laughter of the mass of students as I am by the quiet dignity of the solitary man who continues to chant. Those students could learn much from this elder if they had chosen to. Or if they choose to.” No word from either Horan or Martin, of course, on Phillips’ attempt to disrupt Mass at the National Shrine, or his endorsement of the anti-Catholic ravings of the Black Israelites, or his telling *The Detroit Free Press* that the students were acting like beasts, or his claim that the students were about to lynch blacks, or even his embellishment of his military record. Being a “native American elder” means never having to say you’re sorry.

Ordinary white Catholics, including those who contribute generously to support the likes of Horan and Martin, are not so lucky. Horan branded the March for Life “repulsive” and retweeted the assertion that “you don’t let your kid wear a MAGA hat and then act offended when they get taken for a racist.” Martin, too, has several tweets chastising the teens from Covington Catholic for wearing MAGA hats, and both Horan and Moran retweeted an article by Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky stating, “it astonishes me that any students participating in a pro-life activity on behalf of their school and their Catholic faith” would wear MAGA hats. No doubt it astonishes Bishop Stowe even more that millions of American Catholics voted for Donald Trump and still support him, including, one supposes, the vast majority of his flock: Trump won nearly 63% of the popular vote in Kentucky. The attempt to dismiss the millions of American Catholics who support Trump

as racists and enemies of the Faith is the very opposite of the “dialogue” Stowe and his allies endlessly champion.

A stark reminder of where the political party opposed to Trump stands on abortion came just days after the March for Life, when [Andrew Cuomo signed a bill](#) making abortion legal in New York up until the moment before birth, and celebrated this codification of unlimited abortion on demand by having Manhattan skyscrapers lighted up in pink. James Martin’s tweet on this is worth quoting in full: “I am pro-life. And I have many friends who are pro-choice. I try to understand their experience and reasoning as they try to understand mine. But I cannot imagine anyone wanting to ‘celebrate’ more abortions.”

By contrast, one doubts James Martin has a single friend who supports Trump. He and those who think like him show no inclination to try to understand the experience and reasoning of the millions of American Catholics who do. And this mentality led Martin and his allies to unhesitatingly attack teenaged Catholic boys even as others in the twitter mob were calling for the public disclosure of their identities and fantasizing about feeding them into wood chippers or punching them in the face. You could do better, Reverend Fathers. In fact, it is hard to see how you could do worse.

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