

Freedom to Save the Body (of Christ): False Wisdom, True Wisdom, and the Rhetorical Chemotherapy of Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone

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In January 2022, the archbishop of San Francisco, Salvatore Cordileone, participated in the Walk for Life West Coast, a pro-life rally in San Francisco. Cordileone's homily encouraged attendees to continue in their protest of abortion, which, he argued, was motivated by knowledge of the true, heavenly wisdom from above. The rally occurred a few months following a published epistle on abortion in which the archbishop reasons with members of his diocese using casuistry, or practical reasoning. At the rally, however, the archbishop's rhetoric shifts completely. Whereas the epistle exhorts adherents of their public responsibility to oppose abortion, the WLWC homily employs prophetic rhetoric even comparing abortion to the pagan child-sacrifices of the Old Testament. Casuistic and prophetic rhetoric, Cathleen Kaveny argues, are two organic forms of discourse within Catholicism, especially when internal negotiations on moral issues like abortion occur. In this article, I argue that whereas Cordileone's early discourse displays patient casuistic rhetoric with members of his diocese, he, ultimately, transitions to the prophetic voice in his WLWC homily because of Catholic pro-choice adherents with political standing and influence like the then Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Acting in the lineage of the prophets, Cordileone uses a rhetorical chemotherapy to save the body of Christ and uphold the culture of life.

Keywords: *Abortion; Casuistry; Catholicism; Homiletics Prophetic Rhetoric; Rhetorical Criticism*

The 2020 swearing in of President Joe Biden was significant for Roman Catholicism, considering he is the first pro-choice Catholic president in American history. In the first two years of his presidential term, Biden's administration sought to remove the Hyde Amendment¹ and even codify *Roe v. Wade* into federal law. Similarly, in 2021 the third highest political office was also held by a devout Catholic, then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi. When asked about her stance on abortion, she shocked many Catholic leaders with her reply: "Let me just say that I am a big supporter of *Roe v. Wade*."² From these happenings, other Catholic politicians were only emboldened to stand up and speak against the Church's historic stance regarding abortion. For example, when responding to the potential drafting of a document by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on abortion advocacy and Eucharistic Coherency, Ted Lieu, a Democratic Representative of California, responded with a scathing message on Twitter: "Dear @USCCB: I'm Catholic and I support: Con-

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¹ Legislation that bars federal funds from financing abortions.

² LifeSite, "Nancy Pelosi Calls Herself a 'Devout Catholic' before Advocating Tax-Funded Abortion - LifeSite," July 23, 2021, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/nancy-pelosi-calls-herself-a-devout-catholic-before-advocating-tax-funded-abortion/>. para. 11

trapection, A woman's right to choose... *Next time I go to Church, I dare you to deny me Communion.*³ The USCCB's actions were held in contempt by many other Catholic politicians and even considered to be a "weaponization of the Eucharist" by some bishops.⁴ The Catholic Church faces a unique crisis of authority against the "soteriology of freedom"⁵ offered by liberalism.⁶ Does she still maintain freedom to issue her own boundaries of morals and values? Or must the Catholic witness bow to the individualism of its adherents? Such tension is at the heart of the abortion debate within Roman Catholicism. Ted Lieu's tweet reveals an acceptance of individualism to the degree that it rejects the true nature of communion—which is both visible and invisible—to such an extent that it creates what Pope John Paul II called a "culture of death".

On the 49th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, San Francisco archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone presented a homily at the *Walk for Life West Coast* rally which was attended by 15,000 pro-life advocates.⁷ While the mass was held at Saint Mary of the Assumption, Governor Gavin Newsom held a pre-recorded virtual rally sponsored by *Planned Parenthood*.⁸ With *Dobbs v. Jackson* pending, Catholic pro-life supporters hoped that their efforts and prayers would finally succeed; while, at the same time, pro-choice groups anxiously questioned how the landmark decision could be overturned. Unlike several bishops, Archbishop Cordileone has openly confronted influential Catholics in his diocese, like Nancy Pelosi, about their open rebelliousness. Responding to attempts to remove the Hyde amendment, the archbishop writes, "No one can claim to be a devout Catholic and condone the killing of innocent human life, let alone have the government pay for it."⁹ Considering the moment, the archbishop chose his words carefully knowing the passion and zeal of Catholics on both sides. In fact, he had already penned an epistle marked with a didactic and patient tone. Through the letter, he reasons with diocese members by articulating the Church's thorough historic understanding of abortion.¹⁰

Following continued pro-choice public advocacy, the archbishop adopts, the *prophetic epideictic voice* wherein he confronts the scandalous behavior through what Kaveny calls "rhetorical chemotherapy", or discourse that seeks to eradicate "diseased moral reasoning" in hopes of "restoring the possibility of the healthy exercise of practical reasoning."¹¹ The stylistic switch reveals alienation, rather than identification, to be his primary task. In fact, writing weeks earlier for the *Washington Post*, he reveals that no other rhetorical style is more appropriate than the prophetic when dealing with abortion. "Can we pastors speak softly when the blood of 60 million innocent

³ Daniel Villarreal, "Ted Lieu 'Dares' Catholic Church to Deny Him Communion, Citing Beliefs," *Newsweek*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/ted-lieu-dares-catholic-church-deny-him-communion-citing-beliefs-abortion-1602211>.

⁴ Villarreal, "Ted Lieu".

⁵ Soteriology relates to the doctrine of salvation.

⁶ David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (InterVarsity Press, 2019), 61.

⁷ "2022 - Walk for Life West Coast," *Walk for Life West Coast*, January 24, 2022, <https://www.walkforlifewc.com/history/2022-2/>

⁸ Bay City News, "California, SF Pro and Anti-Abortion Rallies on 49th Anniversary of Roe Vs. Wade," *NBC Bay Area* (blog), January 22, 2022, <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/california-sf-pro-and-anti-abortion-rallies-on-49th-anniversary-of-roe-vs-wade/2785414/>

⁹ LifeSite, "Nancy Pelosi Calls Herself a 'Devout Catholic' before Advocating Tax-Funded Abortion - LifeSite." para. 14

¹⁰ "Lifeissues.Net | 'Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You,'" accessed December 28, 2022, http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/cor/cor_01pastoralonhumanddignity.html.

¹¹ M. Cathleen Kaveny, "Prophecy and Casuistry: Abortion, Torture and Moral Discourse," *Vill. L. Rev.* 51 (2006): 574.

American children cries out for justice?”¹² To do nothing against such evil questions his own legitimacy and only confounds the problem. As he explains in his epistle, *Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You*, inaction on his part as a bishop “can lead Catholics (and others) to assume that the moral teaching of the Catholic Church on the inviolate sanctity of human life is not seriously held.”¹³ In his comments at the *Walk for Life* rally, he argues that many Catholics have tragically yielded to a secular anti-Christian religion mimicking ancient paganism which holds abortion as a sacrament. The true sacrament, however, is only possessed by the Church. “But there is only one Blessed Sacrament; to live as if there were two brings desecration of what is sacred on both fronts: the Bread of Life on the altar and human life in the womb.” Through the prophetic, the archbishop enacts rhetorical chemotherapy which seeks to save the community by disassociating the morally sick and corrupt members.

A Strange New Social Imaginary

In Carl B. Trueman’s *Strange New World*, he seeks to best make sense of how the modern individual has come to intuit morality today differently than previous decades. He emphasizes that, although historic modern figures like Nietzsche, Freud, and others are often explicitly rejected by Christians, the truth is that twenty-first century western culture is a union of their influence and ideas. To crystallize his historical argumentation, he implements Charles Taylor’s *social imaginary*, or the normal mode of thinking about the world in a particular historic context, to make sense of the modern self since the sexual revolution.¹⁴ This framework, unlike other historical attempts, looks at the authentication of social practices, morals, and values that ultimately find validation because they are *imagined* to be held widespread. Using Trueman’s approach to consider changes in moral intuition may provide understanding to the internal controversies in the Catholic Church. Trueman maps the philosophical influence of several thinkers to draw connections to contemporary moral and ethical intuitions, especially in relation to sexual freedom.

He begins with Frederick Nietzsche who challenged the role of religion following the Enlightenment by arguing that morality was a construction of language created by the religious authorities to gain and maintain power. Trueman proposes that this perspective led Nietzsche to conclude that, “the great task facing human beings is to break free of the metaphysical myths that religion weaves and to shatter the moral codes that hinder individuals from being strong.”¹⁵ As a result, Nietzsche transformed traditional moral objectivity by lowering it to *personal preference*. Although Nietzsche’s influence seemingly fell short of altering social morality, Trueman contends that contemporary moral language suggests a deep-seated *Nietzschean influence* even among Christians:

So often we will speak of morality in terms of taste or aesthetics: ‘That remark was hurtful;’ That idea is offensive’. . . Notice that such expressions do not make a state-

¹² “Opinion | Our Duty to Challenge Catholic Politicians Who Support Abortion Rights,” Washington Post, September 5, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/09/05/our-duty-challenge-catholic-politicians-who-support-abortion-rights/>. para. 12.

¹³ “Lifeissues.Net | ‘Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You,’” 13, accessed December 28, 2022, http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/cor/cor_01pastoralonhumanddignity.html

¹⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007).

¹⁵ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2022). 63.

ment about whether the matters in hand are right or wrong. In fact, the underlying assumption is that the offensiveness or hurtfulness of them is identical with the moral content.¹⁶

In other words, modern moral language is no longer tethered to religious traditions which, for much of history, provided ethical reasoning to morality. Rather, it is individualistic.

From Nietzsche, Trueman segues into discussing Sigmund Freud who radically altered society's perspective of sexuality by freeing it from objective morality. He reasoned that any disdain for certain sexual acts was nothing more than a matter of "cultural tastes."¹⁷ Despite his efforts, he viewed religion as important because it maintained control over sexuality through societal mores. It is from these regulations, Trueman argues that our current discussions of sexual repression occur: "The drawback to civilization should be obvious at this point, given that it requires the frustration of natural sexual instincts."¹⁸ Years later, a student of Freud, Wilhelm Reich, railed against his unwillingness to challenge patriarchal societies. Unlike his predecessor, he believed sexuality was so vital to human happiness that all sexual morals must be eliminated through social revolution for citizens to experience authentic freedom. In Reich's famous work, *The Sexual Revolution*, he argues that a social revolt should reform moral regulations on the sexual appetite—or what he calls a "sex-economic morality"—which is either life-affirming or life-negating.¹⁹ To fail in eradicating sexual norms, means freedom is never fully achieved. In *The Sexual State*, Roback Morse argues that Reich's influence created the foundation for the "Liberationist Narrative" which is most alluring because, it promises that "[t]he increase in freedom benefits anyone and everyone with the courage to embrace it."²⁰

Returning to Trueman's framing of the modern self via the *social imaginary*, one can see the effects of these modern thinkers who challenged the nature of religious morality and its relation to sexual codes in society.²¹ The sexual revolution has clearly transformed the way modern individuals see themselves and the world around them. Even more noteworthy, Trueman contends, is the transformation of *morality as mere aesthetic*. Due to this shift in moral sensibilities, the Catholic church has been met with numerous challenges from within its own walls. In Patricia Miller's *Good Catholics: The Battle Over Abortion in the Catholic Church*, she points to key Catholic figures who in the mid-twentieth century challenged the Church's stance on contraceptives and abortion.²² One such example was Dr. Rosemary Radford Reuther who in the mid-1980s clearly articulated the divide. The division, in her mind, was between the Magisterium's authority and the consensus of the people (*sensus fidei*). When discussing actions of Pope John Paul II, she argues, "They reject, in principle, the possibility of a pluralistic church in which the right to dissent on

¹⁶ Trueman, 64.

¹⁷ Trueman, 76.

¹⁸ Trueman, 78.

¹⁹ Reich Wilhelm., *The Sexual Revolution (1945)* (Orgone Institute Press, 1945), 25, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.507758>

²⁰ Jennifer Roback Morse, *The Sexual State: "How Elite Ideologies Are Destroying Lives and Why the Church Was Right All Along"* (Jennifer Roback Morse, PhD, 2018), https://eds-p-ebSCOhost.com.wmcarey.idm.oclc.org/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzE5NDA5MzJfX0FO0?sid=24564422-2b65-41b8-8f84-c5c3cff5df1a@redis&vid=5&format=EK&lpid=nav_8&rid=29

²¹ Trueman, *Strange New World*.

²² Patricia Miller, *Good Catholics: The Battle Over Abortion in the Catholic Church* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), <http://wmcarey.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=713951&site=eds-live>

important matters of ethics or doctrine is respected. For them ‘truth’ is single, unitary and definable.”²³ Churchill and Siman, similar to Trueman, note a paradigmatic shift especially in how rights language is utilized in the abortion debate. They posit that one’s morals delineate the polis to which one belongs. Yet, the thirst for individual autonomy to the neglect of the community has all but “destroy[ed] the use of rights language in moral disputes.”²⁴ Therefore, they insist the most revealing question is, “To what sort of moral community do we belong?”²⁵

Interestingly, many Catholic leaders assert that the sexual revolution has ultimately created an alternate church. As Mary Eberstadt posits, the rigid advances of secularization in recent decades and even the moral debate over abortion are nothing less than a struggle between religions. There now is a secular church fully equipped with its own rituals, rites, and even missionaries: “In sum, secularist progressivism is less a political movement than a church, and the so-called culture war has not been conducted by people of religious faith and people of no faith. It is instead a contest of *competing faiths*.”²⁶ Archbishop Cordileone similarly questions the inflexibility of the supposed subjective morality, especially regarding abortion. He says, “There are a certain sort of secular doctrines that are being imposed on everyone, and everyone must conform to, and there is no latitude for differences of opinion.”²⁷ From this understanding, two very different moral communities exist vying for moral adherence. This framing is helpful in explaining not only the external social rejection of the church’s historical traditions and authority, but, more importantly, how some “Catholics” no longer view the Church’s teachings as *moral*. Through Churchill and Siman’s frame, one could argue that such competing faiths denote citizenship of differing *poleis*. Pope John Paul II would ultimately formulate these differences as two diverging cultures: Church and society. However, the boundaries are blurred as the influence of secularism rears its head within the Church. As the USCCB argued in the 1998 document called *Living the Gospel of Life*, the Church faces absorption: “Today, Catholics risk cooperating in a false pluralism. . . . American Catholics have long sought to assimilate into U.S. cultural life. But in assimilating, we have too often been digested. We have been *changed* by our culture too much, and we have *changed it not enough*.”²⁸ Bishops even today question how to best confront the opposing *polis* and the various ensuing culture wars. To better understand the current happenings, one must look at the rhetorical tradition within the community.

Spiritual Culture Wars: Rupture, Reform, and Divides

The early-twentieth century introduced a paradigm shift in the Catholic Church via the Second Vatican Council reforms. The planning as well as the council itself was eventful to say the least: “Over a three-year period, more than 2,000 bishops from all over the world, assisted by thousands

²³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Catholics and Abortion: Authority vs. Dissent,” *Christian Century* 3 (1985): 861.

²⁴ Larry R. Churchill and José Jorge Simán, “Abortion and the Rhetoric of Individual Rights,” *The Hastings Center Report* 12, no. 1 (1982): 10, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3560614>

²⁵ Churchill and Simán, 12.

²⁶ Mary Eberstadt, “The Zealous Faith of Secularism,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 279 (January 2018): 7, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2030154158/abstract/8403D46997194FA2PQ/1>

²⁷ “Archbishop Cordileone to Newsmax: Society Rejecting God Will ‘Fail,’” Newsmax, April 8, 2023, <https://www.newsmax.com/newsmax-tv/salvatore-cordileone-religion-easter/2023/04/08/id/1115513/>, para. 5.

²⁸ “Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics | USCCB,” accessed July 27, 2023, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/living-the-gospel-of-life>, para. 24.

of advisers, issued 16 landmark documents.”²⁹ Beyond the widely known historic change of allowing Mass to be held in various languages beyond Latin, a perception of discontinuity emerged that some researchers contend left the church less united and prone to division. Nevertheless, the church’s attempt at updating, or *aggiornamento*, was a mixed bag among the laymen. To Jablonski, although the bishops maintained the stamp of true believers in their pastoral writings, there were shifts in the years leading up to the reforms, during, and after. She argues that, “The evidence presented here suggests that the Roman Catholic Church has become a more open institution since the Second Vatican Council.”³⁰ In the years following, a growing perspective materialized arguing the reforms were the beginning of the liberalization of the church. Pope Benedict XVI castigated this interpretation of the reforms calling it a “hermeneutic of rupture.” In its stead, he offered a “hermeneutic of reform” which emphasized both the *newness* and the *continuity* of the church’s tradition. Martin Rhonheimer accepts Second Vatican as a consistent reform rather than the creation of a new magisterium.³¹ However, Ramage posits that the wide acceptance of the “hermeneutic of rupture” is part of the societal shift which seeks *freedom from* traditional constraints. Specifically, he underscores how this interpretation of Vatican II gives way to a rejection of the Church’s authority: “... this is precisely the type of attitude we often witness today: the search for spirituality or freedom to the neglect of the hierarchical Church, a search that takes its cue from the supposition that Vatican II is completely new and that it has fundamentally changed the nature of the rigid, pre-conciliar, hierarchical, outdated institutional church.”³²

Tensions arose from these differences recently regarding the liturgical Mass when bishops were instructed to, once again, minimize its availability. The *Tridentine Mass*, or the traditional Latin liturgy, was revived in 2007 by Pope Benedict. His doing so was viewed by many as reinforcing the *hermeneutic of reform* and, as a result, silence the more liberal interpretation of Second Vatican.³³ In 2021, Pope Francis again restricted the Latin Mass in a letter entitled *Traditionis custodes* to curb division and reinforce the reforms of Vatican II. These actions, Francis argued, targeted “restorationism” as well as those unwilling to adhere to the reforms of Vatican II.³⁴ To him, Catholics must accept both: “I don’t see how it is possible to say that one recognizes the validity of the council — though it amazes me that a Catholic might presume not to do so — and at the same time not accept the liturgical reform.”³⁵ Uniquely, these differences underscore the existing divergent hermeneutics even among the papacy. Beyond liturgy, the divide is most evident in American politics, specifically concerning abortion.

²⁹ Sylvia Poggioli, “Vatican II: A Half-Century Later, A Mixed Legacy,” *NPR*, October 11, 2012, sec. Europe, <https://www.npr.org/2012/10/11/162594956/vatican-ii-a-half-century-later-a-mixed-legacy>, paras. 6-8.

³⁰ Carol J. Jablonski, “<i>Aggiornamento</i> and the American Catholic Bishops: A Rhetoric of Institutional Continuity and Change,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75, no. 4 (November 1989): 416–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638909383888>.

³¹ Martin Rhonheimer, “Benedict XVI’s ‘Hermeneutic of Reform’ and Religious Freedom,” *Nova et Vetera* 9, no. 4 (2011): 1029. 1032.

³² Matthew Ramage, “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus and the Substance of Catholic Doctrine: Towards a Realization of Benedict XVI’s ‘Hermeneutic of Reform,’” *Nova et Vetera* 14, no. 1 (2016): 300.

³³ Sylvia Poggioli and Robert Smith, “Pope Benedict Eases Restrictions on Mass,” *NPR*, July 8, 2007, sec. Religion, <https://www.npr.org/2007/07/08/11813687/pope-benedict-eases-restrictions-on-mass>, para. 15.

³⁴ CNA, “Traditional Latin Mass Attendees Waiting to See Impact of New Vatican Restrictions,” Catholic News Agency, accessed April 22, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253706/traditional-latin-mass-attendees-waiting-to-see-impact-of-new-vatican-restrictions>.

³⁵ “Pope Francis Urges Faithful to End Ideological Divide over Old Latin Mass,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 30, 2022, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2022/6/30/23188971/pope-francis-latin-mass-tridentine-rite-catholics-catholicism>, para. 3.

In 1973, *Roe v. Wade* was passed with a 7-2 majority vote by the Supreme Court of the United States.³⁶ Immediately, a response was given by the-then *National Conference of Catholic Bishops* which reinforced the church's historic stance against the practice of abortion. The Pontiff Pope Paul VI similarly exhorted fellow-Catholics to stand against the cultural practice in the *Declaration on Procured Abortion* one year later. In the document, he argued that, "The tradition of the Church has always held that human life must be protected and favored from the beginning, just as at the various stages of its development. Opposing the morals of the Greco Roman world, the Church of the first centuries insisted on the difference that exists on this point between those morals and Christian morals."³⁷ By referencing early Christian texts, albeit non-canonical, the Pope sought to continue the theological and rhetorical tradition by challenging the cultural disposition to perceive pregnancy and child-rearing as burdensome. Of the non-canonical sources, the *Didache* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, both condemn the act of abortion and clearly portray the practice as deplorable despite cultural norms.³⁸ To put it another way, the rhetorical tradition of the Church has consistently opposed abortion through two millennia.

Pope John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae* offered a more comprehensive articulation for the Church to stand against pro-choice legislation. Prophetically, he reviles modern society as a *culture of death*. Along with challenges of epistemology, ethics, and great social ills, he endeavors to explain how the value of life continues to be eclipsed in the name of freedom and human rights even calling it a "conspiracy against life."³⁹ Using the story of Cain and Abel, John Paul II argues that "God entrusts us to one another."⁴⁰ Later, he asserts that God "gives everyone freedom, a freedom which possesses an inherently relational dimension...."⁴¹ Underlying the *culture of death*, therefore, is the individualistic desire to possess unrestrained freedom at the cost of all other values. Freedom, however, becomes idolatrous when disconnected from truth and its social orientation. That is, to say that once idolized, freedom enslaves others:

This view of freedom leads to a serious distortion of life in society. If the promotion of the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy, people inevitably reach the point of rejecting one another. Everyone else is considered an enemy from whom one has to defend oneself. Thus society becomes a mass of individuals placed side by side, but without any mutual bonds. ... In this way, any reference to common values and to a truth absolutely binding on everyone is lost, and social life ventures on to the shifting sands of complete relativism. At that point, everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining: even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life.⁴²

³⁶ John Breen, "Priest, Prophet, and King: Abortion, the Vocation of Catholic Politicians, and the Culture of Life," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 6, no. 2 (2009): 353–95.

³⁷ "Declaration on Procured Abortion, 18 November 1974," accessed March 17, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19741118_declaration-abortion_en.html. para. 6.

³⁸ Patrick Gray, "Abortion, Infanticide, and the Social Rhetoric of the Apocalypse of Peter," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 3 (2001): 313–37.

³⁹ John Paul II, "Evangelium Vitae (25 March 1995) | John Paul II," March 1995, para. 12, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

⁴⁰ Paul II, *Evangelium*, para. 19.

⁴¹ Paul II, *Evangelium*, para. 19.

⁴² Paul II, *Evangelium*, para. 19.

This atomization of the individual also results in a diminishment of the sacred, which he posits is twofold in that it creates an “eclipse of the sense of God and man...”⁴³ As a result, the sacred community is no longer bound together but disjointed, stretched, and even torn apart. The culture of life counteracts this movement, he asserts, by being actively self-giving in communion with others through “daily gestures of openness, sacrifice and unselfish care which countless people lovingly make in families, hospitals, orphanages, [and] homes for the elderly...”⁴⁴ His emphasis throughout the encyclical on the need for “mutual bonds” and “binding” also intimates the classical meaning of *re-ligion* to be enacted, which is “to bind up”, even as the culture of death seeks to break down.⁴⁵ Despite the Pope’s prophetic frame—a “dramatic clash between good and evil”—challenges to the church’s authority regarding abortion persist.⁴⁶

One of the most historic occurrences in Catholic political events was a speech by Governor Mario Cuomo, wherein he negotiated his pro-choice stance publicly at Notre Dame in 1984. “As Catholics, my wife and I were enjoined never to use abortion to destroy the life we created, and we never have. ... But not everyone in our society agrees with me and Matilda.”⁴⁷ In other words, despite his family faithfully abiding by the Church’s teaching, he as a civil servant was unable to thrust those religious values onto others. As such, Cuomo emphatically rejected the notion that the Church demands Catholic public servants to work against abortion. Breen argues the Governor’s speech “still represents the most sophisticated attempt to date to provide a cogent defense for those whom claim to be faithful Catholics but who support abortion rights in their capacity as public officials.”⁴⁸ Due to its effectiveness, his rhetorical logic persists. For instance, in John Kerry’s presidential run in 2004, he echoes Governor Cuomo. In an interview, he contrasts his personal faith with public priorities: “I don’t like abortion. I believe life begins at conception. [But] I can’t take my Catholic belief, my article of faith, and legislate it on a Protestant or a Jew or an atheist ... who doesn’t share it. We have separation of church and state in the United States of America.”⁴⁹

Considering the public scandal created by Catholic pro-choice politicians, some bishops have sought to discipline members by revoking access to the Eucharist. For instance, during the 2004 election between Kerry and Bush, Cardinal Ratzinger issued a letter in which he highlighted abuses of Communion and members’ willingness to unworthily partake in the sacrament.⁵⁰ In the letter, he notes the important role of the bishop to withhold or deny communion to those who *obstinately persist in manifest grave sin*. Whereas pro-choice advocacy by Catholic politicians is described as *formal cooperation* in grave sin, differentiation is made concerning those who feel it best to vote for pro-choice politicians. Nevertheless, the letter clearly illustrates the bishop’s role both in instructing and holding accountable members of the diocese. The *USCCB* also met that same year in relation to the election, issuing a Doctrinal Note arguing that Catholic politicians should not advocate for legislation incongruent to the church’s teaching, especially concerning abortion and

⁴³ Paul II, *Evangelium*, para. 21.

⁴⁴ Paul II, *Evangelium*, para. 27.

⁴⁵ Sarah F. Hoyt, “The Etymology of Religion,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 32, no. 2 (1912): 126–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3087765>.

⁴⁶ Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995) | John Paul II.” para. 28

⁴⁷ “Religious Belief and Public Morality,” accessed March 15, 2023, <http://archives.nd.edu/episodes/visitors/cuomo/cuomo.html>. para. 81-83.

⁴⁸ Breen, “Priest, Prophet, and King.” 384.

⁴⁹ “Kerry’s Astounding Abortion Positions,” accessed March 17, 2023, <https://www.wnd.com/2004/07/25492/>. para. 1-2.

⁵⁰ “Library : Worthiness to Receive Holy Communion — General Principles | Catholic Culture,” accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=6041>. para. 1

euthanasia.⁵¹ The Note insists that both those who perform abortions and those who “cooperate willingly” are “guilty of grave sin” and thus unworthy to partake the Eucharist.”⁵² Hoffstetter et al. surveyed the effect of the Doctrinal Note using Social Judgement Theory which revealed that its strong rhetorical stance against abortion “boomeranged among liberal Catholics.”⁵³ Such an effect reveals the unusual situation for pro-life catholic bishops who seek to speak out strongly against abortion.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in recent years, has also become a figurehead for pro-choice advocates despite her Catholic faith. In September 2021, for example, Pelosi pushed the *Women’s Health Protection Act* through the House by a thin margin. The legislation was a direct response to the Texas 6-week abortion ban prohibiting the procedure following detection of a heartbeat. The WHPA, if passed, sought to codify *Roe* into federal law. However, the court denied halting Texas’ abortion ban, which resulted in an enraged response by Pelosi wherein she argued, “The Supreme Court’s cowardly, dark-of-night decision to uphold a flagrantly unconstitutional assault on women’s rights and health is staggering.”⁵⁴ Due to Pelosi’s continuing aggressive pro-choice advocacy, Salvatore Cordileone, her archbishop in San Francisco, initiated a prayer campaign labelled the “Rose and Rosary for Nancy” to specifically target the mother of three. The campaign invited Catholics to fast and pray for Speaker Pelosi in hopes of her heart being changed. The Catholic News Agency reported that 1,000 roses were delivered to her San Francisco office and within a week’s time, over 10,000 Catholics responded to the archbishop’s call.⁵⁵ She, however, made public her private disagreement with Cordileone during a news conference when arguing, “I believe that God has given us a free will to honor our responsibilities.”⁵⁶ Paul Kengor, professor of political science, criticized Pelosi’s remarks as a grave misuse of freedom, stating “But for Catholics, using freedom in this way is wholly condemned by their Church. *It is an abuse of freedom.*”⁵⁷

More recently, the impasse over abortion was directly connected to a crisis of identity within the Church. According to a 2019 poll performed by the Pew Research Center, most Catholics reject the core belief of transubstantiation for a symbolic meaning.⁵⁸ Even more, the 2020 election illustrated a shift in authority over the matter of abortion via American politics. For the first time in history, Catholics possessed two of the most influential offices in the world. Yet, despite Church teaching, they persist in public defiance regarding abortion. Whereas President Biden is the second

⁵¹ “Catholics in Political Life | USCCB,” accessed June 3, 2023, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/church-teaching/catholics-in-political-life>.

⁵² Catholics | USCCB,” . para. 2

⁵³ C. Richard Hofstetter, John W. Ayers, and Robert Perry, “The Bishops and Their Flock: John Kerry and the Case of Catholic Voters in 2004,” *Politics and Religion* 1, no. 3 (December 2008): 446, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048308000400>.

⁵⁴ Savannah Behrmann, “Pelosi Says House Will Vote on Abortion Access Bill in Response to Supreme Court Decision on Texas Law,” USA TODAY, September 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/09/02/pelosi-house-vote-abortion-bill-after-supreme-court-decision/5697169001/>. para. 5.

⁵⁵ Christine Rousselle, “More than 10,000 Roses and Counting Sent for Pelosi’s Conversion,” Catholic News Agency, October 2021, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/249263/cordileone-prayer-update-10688-roses-and-counting-for-nancy-pelosi>.

⁵⁶ Rousselle. para. 21.

⁵⁷ Paul Kengor, “Nancy Pelosi’s Faulty Theology: Free Will and Abortion,” NCR, September 27, 2021, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/nancy-pelosi-s-faulty-theology-free-will-and-abortion> para. 20

⁵⁸ Gregory A. Smith, “Just One-Third of U.S. Catholics Agree with Their Church That Eucharist Is Body, Blood of Christ,” Pew Research Center, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/>. para. 2.

catholic president in history following John F. Kennedy; he is the first catholic president to advocate publicly for pro-choice legislation. Once elected, the *USCCB* representative Jose Gomez, the archbishop of Los Angeles, articulated in a public letter the possibility for marvelous good with a newly elected Catholic president; while, at the same time, poignantly noting the disagreement with him on abortion.⁵⁹ After the *USCCB*'s letter, a recommendation was given to focus on "eucharistic coherence" in response to the Pew Research Center's findings and Biden's aggressive pro-choice initiatives. Archbishop Cordileone of San Francisco argued prior to the meeting that social issues like abortion and homelessness are all inevitably linked to the eucharistic incoherence evident within the Church. He advocates for a revival in the sacramental imagination which connects one's faithfulness to God with a reverence for the sacredness of life in society: "The two things are intimately connected: reverence for the sacred Eucharist and reverence for human life where it is most vulnerable and defenseless."⁶⁰ Whereas many bishops desired the document on "eucharistic coherence" to explicitly discuss abortion and the role of bishops in revoking access to the sacrament, the final document was tempered by those wanting to steer clear of political partisanship.⁶¹

The recent findings and shifts in American politics denote a crisis of eucharistic incoherence that many bishops seek to confront.

The Bishopric, Epideictic Rhetoric, and Style

Despite said challenges, there is a historic value to the role of the bishop in Catholicism which views him as "head of the diocesan household."⁶² Sisk and Reid Jr. point to canonical law confirming that bishops stand in *apostolic succession* and thus charged with two rights—"the right of judging" and "the right of correction"—"to maintain a faithful and orthodox diocese."⁶³ Therefore, the Church's ethos is historically viewed as a home and place of sanctuary where one is "sustained by the sacraments and the Gospel message..."⁶⁴ Plus, the known rhetoric of some of the earliest church leaders like Ignatius reveals numerous rhetorical means to faithfully protect said sanctuary from intruders. Dale Sullivan, a rhetorical scholar, has uncovered numerous rhetorical strategies of early leaders ranging from Paul to Ignatius. Through his research, Sullivan explains how Ignatius's writings function rhetorically to establish boundaries. He does this by creating images of the *ego ideology*, or orthodoxy, and the *alter ideology*, or heterodoxy. More specifically, through *ethos* Ignatius creates a "dwelling place" for the faithful by using metaphorical images that rhetorically build community.

Even prior to Ignatius, rhetorics of orthodoxy and demarcation were at work in the ancient Church. Sullivan and Anible analyze the New Testament letter *Galatians* using the epideictic dimension to discover how the church leader used rhetoric to shape the community. This early church

⁵⁹ "USCCB President's Statement on the Inauguration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., as 46th President of the United States of America | USCCB," accessed May 6, 2023, <https://www.usccb.org/news/2021/usccb-presidents-statement-inauguration-joseph-r-biden-jr-46th-president-united-states>, para. 10.

⁶⁰ Autumn Jones, "Archbishop Cordileone Ties Eucharistic Reverence to Respect for Life," Catholic News Agency, para. 10, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/249452/exclusive-archbishop-cordileone-ties-eucharistic-reverence-to-respect-for-life>.

⁶¹ Michael J. O'Loughlin, "Debate over the Eucharist and Pro-Choice Politicians Ends in a Whimper at Bishops' Meeting," America Magazine, November 17, 2021, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/11/17/usccb-eucharist-document-baltimore-241865>, para. 22.

⁶² Gregory C. Sisk and Charles J. Reid Jr, "Abortion, Bishops, Eucharist, and Politicians: A Question of Communion," *Cath. Law.* 43 (2004): 267.

⁶³ Sisk and Reid Jr, 266.

⁶⁴ Sisk and Reid Jr, 267.

community likewise struggled with heresy. As a result, Paul writes with the goal of drawing boundaries and disassociating those attempting to lead the faithful astray. The authors specifically consider the *epideictic dimension* because it views artifacts as formative epistemic constructions. In other words, the epideictic dimension undergirds all symbolic interactions because it “reflects the values of the community being addressed.”⁶⁵ Such rhetoric arguably contains up to six functions: *establishing legitimacy and authority, invokes communion, instills perspective, inscribes status, enforces exclusion, and, finally, cultivates virtue.*⁶⁶ They argue the apostle is able to regain authority and prescribe sound doctrine by reducing the Law to a mere teacher, or *paidagogos*. He also subverts his opponent’s authority by characterizing them as “children of Hagar.” Communion is then reconstituted with his readers by invoking maternal imagery to create “a sense of intimacy which establishes a common space for Christian communion.”⁶⁷ Boundaries are then clearly demarcated through “binary oppositions” which set up a rhetorical boundary representing the Law and Christ requiring readers to “choose one pole or the other.”⁶⁸ Through this contrast, *recontextualization* occurs regarding the Law by challenging its assumed place of authority thereby creating “unexpected associations with other concepts and making the taken-for-granted associations seem suspect.”⁶⁹ Archbishop Cordileone’s modern boundary drawing reveals how the church has, in many ways, come full circle. However, his invoking of the prophetic style adds a more complex layer to his demarcating rhetoric.

Elsewhere, Sullivan posits that, if praise and blame are the two primary functions of epideictic rhetoric, then the role of prophet must be considered since it is the “voice of confrontation.”⁷⁰ Cathleen Kaveny also has published much on the various moral controversies within Catholicism wherein she argues that many conflicts can best be analyzed by looking at *rhetorical style*.⁷¹ The primary rhetorical styles in Catholicism are *casuistry* and *prophecy*.⁷² Whereas casuistry is viewed as the “normal mode of practical reasoning”, prophecy “is a clarion call to respond appropriately to what the prophet believes to be a moral crisis.”⁷³ To Kaveny, there exists an inherent dialectic between the two rhetorical styles that, when used properly, maintain communal balance. Casuistry, she remarks, is mostly known for its historical abuses which typically describes contexts in which a person “is using their trappings to justify a decision that was reached on other grounds.”⁷⁴

The casuistry surrounding abortion is viewed by many Church leaders as corrupt in that it merely seeks to blur reality through euphemisms and deception. The most significant example of corrupt casuistry, Cordileone argues, is the use of “separation of church and state” in the abortion debate. However, the formulation is a distortion because the understanding of when life begins—conception—is *scientific*. He assesses this falsehood by showing how even the Declaration of Independence situates the right to life in *natural law* rather than religious belief: “The assertion of these unalienable rights in our Declaration of Independence is not a matter of religious doctrine,

⁶⁵ Dale L. Sullivan and Christian Anible, “The Epideictic Dimension of Galatians as Formative Rhetoric: The Inscription of Early Christian Community,” *Rhetorica* 18, no. 2 (2000): 124.

⁶⁶ Sullivan and Anible, Epideictic Dimension, 124.

⁶⁷ Sullivan and Anible, Epideictic Dimension, 137.

⁶⁸ Sullivan and Anible, Epideictic Dimension, 140.

⁶⁹ Sullivan and Anible, Epideictic Dimension, 125.

⁷⁰ Dale Sullivan, “The Prophetic Voice in Jeremy Rifkin’s Algeny,” *Rhetoric Review* 9, no. 1 (1990): 140, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/465427>.

⁷¹ Kaveny, “Prophecy and Casuistry,” 501.

⁷² For more information on the history of casuistry, see Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin’s *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Univ of California Press, 1988)

⁷³ Kaveny, “Prophecy and Casuistry,” 511.

⁷⁴ Kaveny, “Prophecy and Casuistry,” 499.

but rather it flows from the same natural law basis as the answers to other moral questions upon which our laws are based... The right to life itself is the foundation of all other rights.”⁷⁵ Thus, Cuomo’s original articulation and the ensuing hermeneutical rhetoric that persists is deceptive. From this perspective, Breen concludes that the prophetic style may be the only recourse left among Catholics to correct and reconstitute the community. She posits, “...Catholic politicians have not been very rigorous casuists. They have instead attempted to mislead the public into thinking that all opposition to abortion is inherently religious and so presumptively illegitimate as a matter of public policy.”⁷⁶

When casuistry becomes corrupted, Kaveny argues prophecy is the only cure to restore proper moral reasoning to the community and thus re-establish harmony. She brilliantly describes the utilization of prophetic rhetoric as moral chemotherapy:

If severe enough, these distorted assumptions and skewed perceptions plague moral reasoning like a cancer, causing it to develop and unfold in deeply distorted ways. Prophetic rhetoric aims its destructive force at the moral cancer, with the ultimate goal of restoring the possibility of the healthy exercise of practical reasoning. How does it function? By destroying the diseased moral reasoning and promoting healthy re-growth, based upon a secure connection with fundamental religious and moral truths, which alone can serve as the basis for sound practical reasoning.⁷⁷

She continues by noting how the Jewish prophets used various sins to pinpoint the manifestation of deeper corruption usually in the form of idolatry. In his epistle, Cordileone views abortion as emblematic of idolatry because, unlike other matters of discernment, it is an unmistakable evil: “It is not an attitude that can manifest itself in more serious and less serious ways, nor a matter of prudential judgment in which one decides the best path toward achieving the good. Indeed, when one looks directly at what actually happens in an abortion, it is hard to imagine anything more heinously evil.”⁷⁸ Therefore, the archbishop’s transition to the prophetic is apt as he attempts to save the body by dissociating, or removing, cancerous cells that threaten to corrupt the whole.⁷⁹

An Analysis of the Prophetic Epideictic Rhetoric of Cordileone’s Homily

In what follows, I analyze archbishop Salvatore Cordileone’s homily prior to the 2022 Walk for Life West Coast in which he exposes the modern idolatry within the Church.⁸⁰ The analysis will give particular attention to the epideictic dimension as well as the choice of prophetic style.

⁷⁵ “Lifeissues.Net | ‘Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You,’” 4.

⁷⁶ Breen, “Priest, Prophet, and King,” 393.

⁷⁷ Kaveny, “Prophecy and Casuistry,” 574.

⁷⁸ “Lifeissues.Net | ‘Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You,’” 15.

⁷⁹ LifeSite, “US Bishops Tell Catholic Voters Abortion Is ‘Preeminent Issue’ in 2020 Election - LifeSite,” September 25, 2020, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/us-bishops-tell-catholic-voters-abortion-is-preeminent-issue-in-2020-election/>.

⁸⁰ “Archbishop Cordileone: ‘The Solution to Building a Culture of Life Is Being True Christians,’” NCR, January 24, 2022, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/archbishop-cordileone-the-solution-to-building-a-culture-of-life-is-being-true-christians>.

“Wisdom” as *polis*

Cordileone first challenges the epistemic context through the Church’s authoritative teachings. Because opponents question his authority, he must regain legitimization while also delegitimizing critics. He does so by blending his own ethos with that of the institution. The archbishop, in fact, downplays his own image to focus on the Church’s *doxa* and how it is being questioned externally and transformed internally. He frames the homily using James’ two paths of wisdom. Through this strategy, the archbishop hopes to *instill perspective*, or “create common hermeneutic categories that produce expected interpretations of events and texts.”⁸¹ As the homily develops, wisdom manifests in diverging cultures, or *poleis*, which act as sacred spaces that cultivate, produce, and reinforce a *doxa*, or way of viewing the world. Whereas the Church is reconfigured as the true wisdom from above, secular society is shown to embody the false wisdom from below. From this perspective, Cordileone re-interprets the current crisis over abortion as a continuation of Church history in which the *culture of life* seeks to confront the *culture of death*. Thus, Cordileone’s prophetic act can be seen as an imitation of Moses where he stood before the Israelites warning them not to be lured away by the false gods of Canaan. “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.”⁸²

The History and Product of the “False Wisdom”

He begins by identifying the *false wisdom* and its pervasive tradition. False wisdom is revealed to be demonic deception pursued as if it is truth. Cordileone identifies its roots when stating, “The false wisdom, [James] says, is not from above but earthly; [James] calls it unspiritual, and most notably, demonic.”⁸³ Therefore, those shown to be of the false wisdom are under the sway of demonic influence. From there, he shows how such “wisdom” results in producing evil and disorder through the creation and normalization of certain dispositions. The two traits that characterize the earthly *polis* are *selfish ambition* and *jealousy*. However, the archbishop reinterprets them to show how through the culture created by the false wisdom, such vices are sought after and even perceived as virtues. Thus, he argues that the *false wisdom* not only impacts people at an individual level, but, more significantly, transforms social life into a skewed *polis* in which people appraise their individuality over others. Next, a more thorough description is given to reveal how relationships and/or community are seen within this *polis* as a hindrance: “‘Selfish ambition’ here means the attitude of doing something only for what you can get out of it, seeking any means possible to gain what you want for yourself only. And jealousy, of course, focuses one in on oneself and alienates one from others.”⁸⁴ The problem, as the archbishop alludes to, is that the *polis* formulated by the false wisdom is deceptive in that it asserts that true happiness can only be obtained through a hyper-fixation on oneself.

Cordileone legitimizes this perspective by further couching it in the Church’s meta-narrative. He demonstrates the poignant lineage of this *polis*. For example, he notes that the same deceptive

⁸¹ Sullivan and Anible, “The Epideictic Dimension of Galatians as Formative Rhetoric,” 124.

⁸² Deuteronomy 30:19, English Standard Version

⁸³ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para 3.

⁸⁴ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para 3.

logic was apparent at mankind's original fall. He encourages interlocutors to "remember" the creation story and how "God created order out of chaos."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, "this harmony was disrupted..." when Adam and Eve were deceived through the false wisdom in Eden.⁸⁶ Creation's disorder is thus placed at the feet of Satan, the "great divider, dividing us from God and from one another."⁸⁷ From there, he asserts that Satan is continuing his strategy to "divide and conquer." He even claims that such evil is in their midst, yet due to Satan's cunning, many do not see it. "But he does it very cleverly, because he knows that if we were to see evil for what it is we would be repulsed by it."⁸⁸ From these words, the archbishop's rhetorical actions thus far demonstrate his desire to instill an orthodox perspective regarding the narrative identity of the Church by revealing the spiritual dimension of the so-called culture wars. Through this act, the archbishop seeks to expose before onlookers how the current happenings directly relate to Satan's continuing desire to alienate people from God and one another. To do so, he must expose the alter-ideology threatening the Church.

Enforcing Exclusion: Exposing Secular Ground as Sacred Ground

After instilling perspective, Cordileone seeks to rhetorically *enforce exclusion* by "defining community boundaries" and "maintaining [the] purity within."⁸⁹ To begin, he first reveals the ethos of the *false wisdom* in the contemporary context. The archbishop articulates that the earthly polis has become so strong that its power is consolidated in the form of a religious-like entity. He announces its presence when saying, "In our own time, this has all become a sort of religion of its own..."⁹⁰ Unlike a classical religion, he continues by describing it as an amalgamation of religious and secular components invested in standing against the Church: "...one that takes the form of a hyper-aggressive, anti-Christian kind of secularism"⁹¹ He offers more evidence by way of their zealous actions and passion, even arguing that it "has all the *marks* of a religion"⁹² Although those listening would already be familiar with the various clashes between secularism and the Church, they would not necessarily have sensed the religious undertones. Thus, he attempts to provide more grounding when saying, they have "infallible dogmas, rituals, saints, creedal statements...[and] even sacraments"⁹³

Uniquely, Cordileone asserts that the Church's opponent is not new, but rather a re-presentation of the paganism known through the narrative history of God's people: "On this last point this new religion mirrors the pagan, which is to say demonic, religions of the ancient biblical world..."⁹⁴ In other words, the contemporary Church finds herself, like the ancient Israelites, in a world marked by idolatry and pagan worship. Cordileone sets up binary oppositions between the Church and secularism by *recontextualizing* abortion as a blessed sacrament: "The new secular religion of our own time takes on this practice in an almost sacramental way: indeed, abortion has become, for them, their blessed sacrament, what they hold most sacred, the doctrine and practice

⁸⁵ "Archbishop Cordileone." para 4.

⁸⁶ "Archbishop Cordileone." para 4.

⁸⁷ "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 4.

⁸⁸ "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 4

⁸⁹ Sullivan and Anible, "The Epideictic Dimension of Galatians as Formative Rhetoric," 124.

⁹⁰ "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 5.

⁹¹ "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 5.

⁹² "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 5.

⁹³ "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 5.

⁹⁴ "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 5.

upon which their whole belief system is built.”⁹⁵ By making this unexpected association, abortion becomes even more suspect as it stands *contra to the source and summit of the faith*. Seen through this lens, abortion, like the Eucharist, is a sacrifice of the body, blood, and soul of that which is sacred. The difference, however, is that abortion exposes alienation from God and others at its root whereas the Blessed Sacrament is the pure embodiment of communion. He exposes the sacramental nature of abortion even further through the irrational reactions regarding even minimal restrictions. “That is why we see such visceral and violent reaction to any even minimal regulation of abortion in the law, regulations that even those who believe it should be kept legal would see as reasonable...”⁹⁶ Through this point, he underscores the religious fanaticism to which abortion is protected. The most powerful attestation emerges, however, as the archbishop reconnects these actions directly to Satanic influence. He does so by reminding the audience that recent abortion regulations were challenged by none other than the Satanic Temple on the grounds of religious liberty. To this end, he demonstrates how the alter ideology has cultivated a polis in which abortion is literally believed to be necessary and without it, all is lost: “they *need* abortion to carry out their religious rituals.”⁹⁷ By recontextualizing abortion as a sacrament advocated for even by the Satanic Temple, the archbishop provides clarity between the two sacrifices from which to choose.

True Wisdom and the Heavenly Polis

After having clearly laid out the characteristics of false wisdom and how it is embodied in a modern form of paganism, archbishop Cordileone resituates his focus on the faithful “by defining the *ethos* of the community...”⁹⁸ To do so, he recites the virtues listed by *James* and *Jesus* in the Beatitudes to cultivate said attitudes and actions in their lives:

What he says here, is it not what our Lord teaches in proclaiming the Beatitudes? “Pure,” that is, “clean of heart”; “peaceable,” as in, the peacemakers are the ones who are truly blessed; “gentle” and “meek”; “compliant” which is the true sense of being “poor in spirit”; “full of mercy,” that is to say, “merciful”; “hunger and thirst for righteousness” which bears the “good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity ... of righteousness.” In short, this is the life of virtue.⁹⁹

These virtues, counter to the vices of the alter-ideology, are oriented around community. Through this difference, Cordileone rhetorically illustrates how the Christian life is ultimately centered upon *identification* in that these virtues truly lead to happiness by reuniting us to God and others. “And let’s be clear: ‘beatitude’ is synonymous with ‘happiness.’ God wants us to be happy, and He provides us this path to get there...”¹⁰⁰ This image of identification, however, is contrasted with one of alienation in which selfishness leads to complete isolation from others: “...the devil wants us to be miserable . . . and he entices us by getting us to think only of ourselves and so dividing us from one another and ultimately from God.”¹⁰¹ From these distinctions, the archbishop further delineates the life of virtue as the correct path for the true Christian because through them, one

⁹⁵ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 8

⁹⁶ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 8.

⁹⁷ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 8

⁹⁸ Sullivan and Anible, “The Epideictic Dimension of Galatians as Formative Rhetoric,” 124.

⁹⁹ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 9.

¹⁰⁰ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 9.

¹⁰¹ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 9.

maintains communion with Christ and others: “The true Christian is the one who lives according to true wisdom and so is on the path to lasting happiness, a path which is walked by means of the virtues...”¹⁰²

Next, the archbishop argues the essentialness of the community over the individualism offered by the earthly polis: “And God gives us the help that we need, above all the grace of the sacramental life of the Church.”¹⁰³ Thus, Catholics who assert individual autonomy to the neglect of the Church display evidence of being infected by the false wisdom of the earthly polis. Cordileone differentiates the Church and her rightful authoritative ethos by asserting that true communion is only found to be in her possession and no one else’s: “We have the real Blessed Sacrament.”¹⁰⁴ To reject the authority of the Church is to forfeit access to the divine grace needed to live virtuously (ie, sacraments). However, by exhibiting a life of order laid out in the Beatitudes—“a path which is walked by means of the virtues,” one is deemed worthily to partake of the sacramental life because they are submitting to Church authority and her teachings. When in sync, the virtuous life and submission to the sacramental life of the church epitomize eucharistic coherence and the sacred order.

Desecration, Idolatry, and the Prophetic

After offering images of the two wisdoms, the archbishop challenges Catholics to consider their own participation in social evil. In fact, he unexpectedly places the blame on Catholics who have divided intentions. For example, he asks “How much of the desecration of human life we witness in our time is due to a loss of the sense of the sacred, even that which is most sacred, the Blessed Sacrament? Do we do all possible to respect the integrity of the Blessed Sacrament and avoid its desecration by receiving reverently and worthily, always giving God our best in worship?”¹⁰⁵ Such questions imply desecration of the sacred and a need for members to cultivate eucharistic coherence. More importantly, these rhetorical questions signal unhealthy members within the heavenly polis thereby calling into question needed change for the future. After creating a space for identification, Cordileone switches to the prophetic voice as he seeks to alienate those who persist in desecrating that which is most sacred.

He begins the process of disassociating by noting how some Catholics seek to partake in the rituals of the alter-ideology like the ancient Israelites. In fact, he rhetorically connects modern abortion to the ancient pagan ritual of child sacrifice. To silence challengers, he reads *Psalms* 106, which is a lament of the sinful history of the Israelites. “They sacrificed to demons their own sons and daughters, shedding innocent blood, the blood of their own sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan.”¹⁰⁶ He uses this text to reveal the etymological connection in Hebrew between *demons* and *idols* inevitably illustrating the enduring practice of child sacrifice. However, despite being commanded to stay away, the Israelites were deceived. The consequences of their actions were shared in that both the community and God’s name were desecrated. As such, God pronounces the judgement of excommunication: “I myself will turn against and cut off that individual from among the people; for in the giving of offspring to Molech, my sanctuary was defiled and my holy name was profaned” (Lev 20:2). Cordileone applies this story to the current

¹⁰² “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 10.

¹⁰³ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 10.

¹⁰⁴ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 10.

¹⁰⁵ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 10.

¹⁰⁶ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 6.

moment by questioning the number of Catholics who, like the Israelites, continue to fall prey to such idolatry: “How many people are there who claim to be Christian and yet have been mindlessly co-opted by the new secular religion and its false blessed sacrament?”¹⁰⁷ He challenges the authenticity of pro-choice Catholics by inscribing status to them synonymous with worshippers of Molech. Thus, like those swayed by the false wisdom in Canaan, they remain under pending judgment because they have desecrated the Church and the name of Christ.

His indictment continues by amplifying their desecration of the heavenly polis through their attempt to maintain dual citizenship and partake from both altars—the Eucharist and Abortion. However, attempting to worship both God and Molech reveals cancerous moral reasoning dangerous to the whole community. His rebuke concludes by rhetorically interlacing the Blessed Sacrament and life in the womb, which, as Kaveny illustrates, is an attempt to promote “healthy regrowth” based on the sound reasoning of the Church. “But there is only one Blessed Sacrament; to live as if there were two brings desecration of what is sacred on both fronts: the Bread of Life on the altar and human life in the womb.”¹⁰⁸ Such logic stems from the Catholic tradition in which society’s ills are intertwined with the loss of the sacred specifically by those who desecrate the Blessed Sacrament. To commit abortion, as seen in Leviticus, desecrates that which is most sacred; while, at the same time, participating in the Blessed Sacrament unworthily inevitably results in desecration against other people. Such sacrilege, the archbishop implies, can only be met with excommunication or conversion.

Two Paths: Death and Life

As the homily begins to close, the archbishop starts revealing pieces of the rhetorical context. For instance, he “thanks” the empirical audience as being part of a “movement to affirm the dignity and inviolability of human life in the womb.”¹⁰⁹ He also encourages prayer by noting the two supreme court cases as proof for the possibility of further progress being made. However, he contends that, even if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, the fight would continue because the devil would not stop with his “attacks on the dignity of human life.”¹¹⁰ A form of these attacks are foreshadowed by Cordileone when reminding listeners of the Governor’s desire to make California an abortion-friendly state. “Our own governor has promised to make California a sanctuary state for abortion...”¹¹¹ After calling it a “sanctuary state”, he quickly translates the Governor’s words juxtaposing the ideas of “sanctuary” and “abortion”. By doing so, he exposes the “diseased moral reasoning” of the earthly polis which celebrates freedom to such an extent, it destroys others: “...which is to say a sanctuary state for killing, for killing the innocent, a sanctuary state for the worship of Molech.”¹¹² Such an accusation embodies a truncated form of the prophetic wherein an indictment is given to those community members intermingling with the alter-ideology.

In contrast to the cursed image of “a sanctuary state for the worship of Molech”, Cordileone charges faithful Catholics to long for a *culture of life*. He exhorts listeners to “live a life consistent with [the] ethos” of the heavenly polis and as such, the prophetic promise of blessing is given. Thus, a sacred space of life is prophetically offered in which individuals choose a life of virtue

¹⁰⁷ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 11.

¹⁰⁸ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 11.

¹⁰⁹ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 12.

¹¹⁰ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 13.

¹¹¹ “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 13.

¹¹² “Archbishop Cordileone.” para. 13.

over selfish ambition inevitably resulting in communion rather than alienation. Echoing the words of Pope John Paul II, Cordileone denotes that communion lies at the heavenly polis's core: "So we will continue to work to build a culture of life, by advocating for life, by providing women in crisis pregnancies love and support and all that they need to know they are valued, respected and have friends walking with them in their time of distress, giving them the opportunity to make the happiest decision of all, the decision for life."¹¹³ Like Moses, Cordileone stood before his diocese offering two different poleis—a culture of life and a culture of death. Only one path can reestablish the sacred order of God and his fellow-man: "The solution to building a culture of life is us being true Christians, those who live by true wisdom..."¹¹⁴

Conclusion

The rhetoric of Archbishop Cordileone at the 2022 Walk for Life West Coast represents a unique use of the prophetic voice amid communal disputes regarding abortion. Through his discourse, the archbishop sought to expose the religious structure of secularism, its virtues, and, ultimately, its false blessed sacrament; while, at the same time, reinforcing the Church's identity and her possession of the true Blessed Sacrament. Using James' two paths of wisdom, he distinguishes the heavenly polis from the earthly polis. Whereas one originates from heavenly wisdom, the other is a false, earthly wisdom. Through his use of various rhetorical strategies, he was able to expose the alter-ideology, delineate the virtues characteristic of the Church, and, finally, disassociate those who attempt to retain dual citizenship. Although many critics argue that use of the prophetic style only confounds the problem, Kaveny argues that the prophetic style is, at times, the only cure for a community in crisis. Thus, the archbishop, after patiently deliberating with members of his diocese, switched to the prophetic to reassert the Church's rightful authority and purify the community. Even more, he fulfilled his own historic obligations as father of the household. Despite his efforts, an even bitter medicine had to be administered nearly five-months later. On May 19, 2022, the archbishop sent a letter notifying Speaker Pelosi of her denial of Communion which stated: "As you have not publicly repudiated your position on abortion, and continue to refer to your Catholic faith in justifying your position and to receive Holy Communion, that time has now come."¹¹⁵ Yet, even now opportunity for repentance and acceptance back into the community awaits.

¹¹³ "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 13.

¹¹⁴ "Archbishop Cordileone." para. 15.

¹¹⁵ CNA, "Full Text of Archbishop Cordileone Letter to Nancy Pelosi Banning Her from Communion," Catholic News Agency, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/251315/read-the-letter-from-pelosi-s-archbishop-barring-her-from-communion>, para. 7