

# S.F. Archbishop Cordileone wanted a fight, and now he has lost

By C.W. Nevius | April 16, 2015 | Updated: April 16, 2015 6:04pm

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Photo: Michael Macor / The Chronicle

IMAGE



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San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone during a meeting with the Chronicle's editorial board on Tues. February 24, 2015. Cordileone is a leading conservative "culture warrior" among the nation's ... [more](#)

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Ever since he arrived in San Francisco more than two years ago, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone has courted controversy. He attended rallies against same-sex marriage unapologetically, imposed “morality classes” on teachers at local Catholic schools, and supported the extreme views of Star of the Sea pastor Joseph Illo.



Through it all, Cordileone has maintained a serene equanimity. Illo, his surrogate, said in a January interview with Catholic World Report that when there was a backlash to Illo’s decision to ban girls from becoming altar servers, the archbishop told him, “the negative press coverage was par for the course for this kind of announcement, and we expect it to just be a flash in the pan.”

It’s now clear that was a naive miscalculation. Thursday’s full-page ad in The Chronicle calling on the Vatican to replace Cordileone, signed by more than 100 prominent Catholics, was just the latest volley. These people aren’t going away.

It is important to note that these aren’t cliché San Francisco radical activists — who, by the way, have been conspicuous by their absence in this discussion. These are parents, teachers and families. These are everyday people galvanized to action.

It can be said that Cordileone has gotten exactly what he wanted. As Illo gleefully said in the January interview, courting controversy with extreme views serves as “a poke in the eye of the liberal culture of San Francisco.”

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Teachers worry they may lose their jobs for failing to reach the standard of an archaic and small-minded set of “morality clauses” in the teacher handbook requiring them to “affirm and believe” that “adultery, masturbation, fornication, the viewing of pornography and homosexual relations” are “gravely evil.”

Meanwhile, Illo has created controversy with his decision to ban girls from becoming altar servers and handing out a pamphlet at Star of the Sea that asked the kindergarten through eighth-grade students if they engaged in masturbation, fornication or sodomy.

If the archbishop’s actions were just an opportunity to express an unpopular view and trigger a civic debate, it might be understandable and defensible.

### **Discriminatory agenda**

But Cordileone’s actions have real consequences. They are hurtful, mean and affect the lives of teachers, parents and students. As the ad in The Chronicle says, this kind of attitude “sets a pastoral tone that is closer to persecution than evangelization.”

The ad is addressed specifically to the Vatican. But it highlights the question: How can the pope continue to promote a vision of inclusion and acceptance while his representative in San Francisco pursues an agenda of discrimination?

Is it because this controversy isn’t important enough for the leader of the Catholic Church to get involved? Surely the Vatican isn’t that clueless. This city is not just a recognizable and acknowledged global urban center, it is international shorthand for acceptance of the rights of same-sex couples.

The church may disagree, but Cordileone is simply grandstanding by demonizing same sex-marriage as “gravely evil” in his morality clause.

How can the city of St. Francis remain silent when its religious representative espouses such archaic and hateful views?



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We've already seen how the archbishop's supporters are trying to marginalize opponents. In a statement this week, the archdiocese said those who signed the ad "presume to speak for the Catholic community of San Francisco. They do not."

## Vote of public opinion

This is a consistent tactic. When Illo announced that girls would no longer serve as altar servers, he maintained that the majority of school families supported his views.

"I've received over 300 e-mails about altar boys — mostly positive, except for the ones from the Bay Area," he wrote.

As subsequent angry public protests demonstrated, this claim of widespread support was an exaggeration at best.

The full-page appeal directly to the pope reinforces the idea. It is the archbishop who is out of step — with San Francisco, this country and the faithful members of this church.

This isn't so different from any other political cause. There are always times when a political party gets hijacked by an extreme, righteous wing. But there's always an election, a vote.

We've had one here in the electorate of public opinion. The archbishop lost.

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