

Responsive Philanthropy

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Domino's Founder Delivers More than Just Pizza

How Tom Monaghan's Philanthropy is Changing Higher Ed

By Jeff Krehely

In 1960, Thomas Monaghan used a \$500 loan to purchase a pizza shop in Ypsilanti, Michigan, called DomiNick's, which he soon renamed Domino's. By 1985, Monaghan—who claims he owes all of his success to “stupidity”—was worth several hundred million dollars, as his pizza empire had expanded around the globe. Today, Domino's has 7,000 stores worldwide and annual revenues of about \$4 billion.

Monaghan—who was also the owner of the Detroit Tigers from 1983 until 1992—sold most of his ownership in Domino's in 1998, and boosted his personal wealth to nearly \$1 billion. A longtime donor to religious causes and organizations, he has used the money from the Domino's sale to become one of the largest funders of nonprofit organizations, political action committees (PACs), and candidates for public office that share a strong devotion to orthodox Catholicism and extreme conservative policy ideals.

Monaghan is currently the

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Monaghan's Philanthropy Encompasses Education, Law, Politics

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president of the Ave Maria Foundation, which he established in 1983 with earnings from his pizza chain. The foundation—according to its 2003 IRS tax filing, the most recent one available—currently has assets of nearly \$180 million, giving away about \$42 million in grants in 2003. According to its Web site, the foundation has the rather banal mission to “support a variety of organizations which bring Catholic life and culture to the world.”

Monaghan, however, is rather selective about which parts of Catholicism he brings to the world. For the most part, his money supports organizations that are anti-choice, anti-gay, and generally exclusionary.

More than half of his foundation's 2003 grantmaking (\$24 million) was given to two institutions of higher education, the Ave Maria School of Law and Ave Maria University, both of which were in Michigan at the time the grants were made. Monaghan founded these schools in the late 1990s as an alternative to mainstream Catholic colleges and universities, which he believed had lost their orthodox Catholic focus. The law school's faculty includes failed Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork, and has hosted current Supreme Court justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas as guest speakers.

Establishing a strict Catholic university is not enough for Monaghan, however. Ave Maria University was recently relocated from Michigan to the Naples, Florida, area. Monaghan's goal: to build a gated Catholic community around the campus.

A story on Monaghan in the June 17, 2005, edition of the *Boston Phoenix* by Adam Reilly detailed his development plans: “We're going to control all the commercial real estate, so there's not going to be any pornography sold in this town. We're controlling the cable system. The pharmacies are not going to be able to sell condoms or dispense contraceptives.”

Father Joseph Fessio is currently Ave Maria University's provost—Reilly refers to him as the “spiritual DNA” of Ave Maria (the town and university). Fessio is reportedly a close associate of newly elected Pope Benedict XVI, and has a rather selective view of

Catholicism. In Reilly's interview, Fessio explains that Catholics need to adopt a political ideology that is strictly anti-Democratic, given the party's supposed true-blue support of abortion rights and gay marriage. When Reilly suggested to Fessio during the interview that Republicans tend to do less for the poor than Democrats do—even though helping the poor is a key part of Catholic doctrine—Fessio responded that, unlike abortion or gay marriage, “These are things which the Catholic Church can accept different points of view on.”

Another of Monaghan's “charitable” endeavors is the Thomas More Law Center, which he established in 1999. According to its Web site, the Thomas More Law Center “is a not-for-profit public interest law firm dedicated to the defense and promotion of the religious freedom of Christians, time-honored family values, and the sanctity of human life. Our purpose is to be the sword and shield for people of faith, providing legal representation without charge to defend and protect Christians and their religious beliefs in the public square.”

According to the organization's IRS documents, Monaghan's foundation is its biggest source of financial support, providing nearly \$4.4 million from 2000 through 2003. The center's advisory board includes Bowie Kuhn (the former commissioner of Major League Baseball), Senator Rick Santorum (R-Penn.), and Alan Keyes, who recently disowned his daughter when she told him that she is a lesbian.

In 2002, Monaghan forced an anti-gay ballot initiative on the residents of Ypsilanti, Michigan—even though he wasn't a resident of the town. In 1998, the town passed a nondiscrimination ordinance that protected people based on a variety of characteristics, including religion, age, race, and sexual orientation. The ballot initiative that Monaghan funded—through a front group called Ypsilanti Citizens Voting Yes for Equal Rights Not Special Rights—would have removed the protections related to sexual orientation, but would have left the other provisions in place.

“... American Prospect on hard-right religious colleges and universities, concluded that students are taught to live out a ‘Christ-centered’ existence... but actually learn to become Republicans.”

To their credit, the voters of Ypsilanti defeated Monaghan’s attempt at furthering his own political agenda.

Although most of his philanthropy has a decidedly political edge, Monaghan also devotes a substantial amount of his wealth to direct political causes. In 2004, he launched the Ave Maria List, a PAC established to counter the pro-choice (and often pro-Democratic) EMILY’s List. Through this PAC, Monaghan is credited with lending considerable support to the successful effort to defeat Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle in his reelection campaign in South Dakota in 2004. Granted, Daschle’s own convoluted stances on policy issues (and not just abortion and reproductive choice, which is what Monaghan targeted) were possibly among the biggest reasons for his political demise, but Monaghan’s money certainly helped.

According to filings with the Federal Election Commission (available at www.politicalmoneyline.com), in the 2002 and 2004 election cycles, and so far in the 2006 cycle, Monaghan has contributed approximately \$210,000 to candidates for public office (including Santorum, Florida Representative Katherine Harris, and Florida Senator Mel Martinez) and various leadership PACs. Based on the records reviewed, all of his political giving was to Republican candidates and PACs.

Monaghan’s Ave Maria University isn’t the only prospective college that students can attend if they want a lesson in conservative politics disguised as religious devotion—and he’s hardly the only philanthropist providing substantial support to these kinds of institutions.

When *U.S. News and World Report* recently released its annual rankings of “America’s Best Colleges—2006,” the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), an umbrella group that represents evangelical and fundamentalist colleges and universities, boasted that almost every one of its 105 members in North America was on the list. Many of its members were also singled out for specialized rankings, including racial diversity, undergraduate research/creative projects, service learning, study abroad programs, and least student debt. Twelve of its members were on the list of schools that provided the best overall value for students.

The mission of CCCU is “to advance the

cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth.” Not surprisingly, most of its members have a statement of faith posted on their Web sites or admission materials, which—among other things—states that the Bible is an infallible source of truth and that learning should be based on it.

Grantmaking foundations provide substantial support to these institutions of higher learning, with approximately 130 funders awarding them nearly \$30 million in 2003. Most of this money came from relatively small independent family foundations—some of which have alumni connections to the schools. Close to \$1.5 million comes from community foundations, which could reflect giving from alumni who have donor-advised funds established at the community foundations. Somewhat surprisingly—considering the fundamentalist religious approach of most of these colleges—a diverse group of corporate funders awarded these schools approximately \$1 million in 2003.

These colleges and universities also almost always require their students to conform to strict codes of conduct that usually forbid the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, as well as partaking in any kind of sexual activity, unless it is between a married heterosexual couple. Many of the schools also explicitly denounce homosexual activity, and a few denounce gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered people themselves.

One school—Messiah College, in Pennsylvania—even posts on its Web site a “Homosexuals Anonymous” program, complete with 12 steps that will help homosexuals find relief from their supposed disorder. The Verizon Foundation gave Messiah a \$16,000 grant in 2003, while three independent family foundations gave the school grants totaling \$54,000 that year.

The Proctor and Gamble Fund, along with the Communities Foundation of Texas and two independent foundations, provided support to Asbury College in Kentucky, which also seems to have an anti-gay sentiment running through its campus community. For example, the campus newspaper at Asbury recently ran an editorial that stated, “Scientific research suggests that genetics may lead to or cause one’s sexuality. However, as Christians, we cannot put limits on what God

can do. The same God who parted the Red Sea and toppled the walls of Jericho can certainly deliver people from homosexuality." All told, Asbury received nearly \$350,000 from foundations in 2003.

Homophobia is also alive and well at Milligan College, in Tennessee, which received nearly \$500,000 in foundation grants in 2003. Bertram Allen, the chairperson of the school's social learning department and a professor of psychology, recently stated to a reporter from the college's newspaper, "Yes, [gays and lesbians would be welcomed on campus] as long as we don't know they are gay or lesbian."

Homophobia appears even more elevated at the Oklahoma Christian University of Science and Art, which in 2003 received a grant from the Bank of America Foundation. The school's handbook—available online—states the following (all grammatical errors are *sic*):

"Oklahoma Christian University believes the Bible and believes that the Bible does not recognize homosexual lifestyles as an acceptable human behavior. For this reason the University does not tolerate activities and promotion of homosexual lifestyles on campus or at University sponsored events. If a student is found to be advocating or practicing homosexual lifestyles or activities they will be required to attend professional counseling or be removed from the University. The violation of this policy and refusal to participate in counseling will be cause for immediate dismissal for the University."

It is not clear, however, what constitutes homosexual activity or advocating a homosexual lifestyle. Perhaps next year's issue of the handbook will provide some clarity (as well as be shown to someone with basic grammatical skills before printing). The university might also want to review the American Psychological Association's "Resolution on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation" (which is also endorsed by the National Association of School Psychologists). The resolution states: "The American Psychological Association opposes portrayals of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and adults as mentally ill due to

their sexual orientation and supports the dissemination of accurate information about sexual orientation and mental health, and appropriate interventions in order to counteract bias that is based in ignorance or unfounded beliefs about sexual orientation."

Other corporate funders giving to CCCU's members include the Dow Chemical Company Foundation, the Bank One Foundation, the Shell Oil Company Foundation, The 3M Foundation, the Eastman Kodak Charitable Trust, the Daimler Chrysler Corporation Fund, and the Wells Fargo Foundation.

Christopher Hayes, in a recent in-depth report in *American Prospect* on hard-right religious colleges and universities, concluded that students at these institutions of higher learning are *taught* to live out a "Christ-centered" existence in their lives, but actually *learn* to become Republicans. The close ties between Thomas Monaghan's political and charitable goals, and the views on homosexuality of several members of CCCU (as well as those on abortion, gay marriage, and poverty expressed by Ave Maria's Fessio), lend substantial support to Hayes' theory.

These close ties should serve as a wake-up call to some of the nation's corporate philanthropists, which at the very least need to better vet the organizations to which they donate. For example, the Verizon Foundation's grant to Messiah College—whose Web site advertises a Homosexuals Anonymous program—might conflict with its policy of not giving to organizations that discriminate on a wide variety of characteristics, including sexual orientation. The Bank of America Foundation claims that it doesn't give to religious organizations that have a sectarian purpose, yet it gave money to the Oklahoma Christian University of Science and Art, whose student handbook denounces gay people based on supposed biblical truths.

Finally, perhaps next year's edition of *U.S. News and World Report's* college rankings could take into account schools' culture as well as curricula. Schools that do not encourage open minds, and that shun independent thought and expression, should not rank among America's best colleges and universities. ○

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