

# **Editorial: Preaching the truth and dispelling falsehood are two sides of the same coin**

Father John Francis Noll founded Our Sunday Visitor with two purposes in mind: to help Catholics at all stages of life and at any point on their spiritual journey to grow in their understanding, practice and love of their faith; and to combat the anti-Catholicism that was rampant in the United States in the first decades of the 20th century.

At their heart, those two purposes were united: Preaching the truth and dispelling falsehood are two sides of the same coin.

Before he founded Our Sunday Visitor, Father Noll used to travel throughout northern Indiana to tent revivals that featured unscrupulous men and women posing as ex-priests and ex-nuns. These hucksters would rile up the crowd with scandalous claims about what the Church taught, and what priests and nuns supposedly did behind closed doors. From the back of the crowd, Father Noll would listen patiently until the fake priest or nun finished talking. And then, gently but firmly, he would ask a series of questions – questions that any true priest or nun could easily answer, but questions that these speakers could not. The crowd, who had come to the revival to have their prejudices confirmed, would quickly catch on, and on more than one occasion, they ran the purveyors of fake news out of town on a rail. On at least one occasion, they invited Father Noll to come back the next night to tell them what the Catholic Church really taught.

One might say that Father John Francis Noll was the original modern-day Catholic fact-checker. One hundred and 10 years

later, Our Sunday Visitor continues his legacy.

And for that, we, and our partner Aleteia (the world's largest Catholic website) have recently come under attack by nominally Catholic websites who have taken it upon themselves to decide that Catholic fact-checking – specifically concerning COVID-19 and the vaccines developed to combat its spread – is not what the world needs.

Wherever one personally may fall on the question of COVID-19 vaccines, the Vatican and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have both affirmed that the use of such vaccines is morally licit, and that the benefits of the use of the vaccines should not be lightly disregarded. From the beginning, this editorial board – unlike those who have attacked us – has accepted this teaching from Pope Francis and our bishops.

With that as a background, Our Sunday Visitor joined with Aleteia and an international consortium of Catholic media to provide in-depth coverage of the vaccines and vaccination efforts, and to bring both science and faith to bear on claims that the vaccines were physically harmful and that their use was morally illicit.

On March 16, 2021, Our Sunday Visitor [ran a news story](#) about these efforts and announced that the consortium was one of only 11 projects worldwide that had been chosen to receive a grant from the Google News Initiative to help fund its work – work that we were engaged in before receiving the grant, and that we would have continued to engage in if we hadn't received the grant. (Aleteia and the other members of the consortium ran stories about the grant as well.) A few weeks later, on April 13, 2021, we discussed the reasons for our participation in the consortium [in an editorial](#).

Among those reasons, we noted, was the prevalence among some Catholics of outright distrust of the scientific community

that had developed the vaccines and of government and religious leaders who are promoting their use. As COVID-19 continues its implacable march, those misunderstandings and distrust have exacted an enormous death toll. Today, after the vaccines have been available for over a year, most of those deaths are utterly senseless: Around the country, hospitals are reporting that the vast majority (85-95%) of their patients who die from COVID-19 are unvaccinated.

In early January, a nominally Catholic website that has frequently promoted misinformation about COVID-19 and the vaccines “revealed” what we (and Aleteia) had told our readers 10 months earlier. Along the way, they also proved why Catholic fact-checking is exactly what the world needs, making wild – and absolutely false – claims that both the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and George Soros’ Open Society Foundation have funded the consortium. Neither was asked to donate a single penny to the efforts of the consortium, and neither did so. These false claims stemmed from the fact that the Institute for Global Health in Barcelona, which has provided medical resources to the consortium, has received money from both organizations for other work that they do. That funding has nothing to do with the consortium and is irrelevant to the services that the Institute for Global Health has provided to the consortium.

Similarly, this website claimed that Aleteia entered into some sort of nefarious alliance with Google back in 2013. That claim, too, falls apart when one looks at the details: In that year, Aleteia adopted the same Google search technology, advertising services and app platform used by a large percentage of websites, secular and religious. One might just as well claim that Our Sunday Visitor has entered into a nefarious alliance with both Apple and Microsoft, because our editors and designers use Macs to do our work and send emails using Microsoft Outlook.

In 1918, six years after Father Noll founded Our Sunday

Visitor, the Spanish flu began its march around the world. Father Noll and the newspaper stood up for public health at that time, supporting efforts (including the use of masks and restrictions on the size of public gatherings) designed to slow the spread of the flu and bring an end to senseless deaths. A century ago, those measures were no more popular than they are today, but for Father Noll, the truth mattered more than popularity. May we be worthy of carrying on his legacy.

*Our Sunday Visitor Editorial Board: Gretchen R. Crowe, Scott P. Richert, Scott Warden, York Young*