

2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

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The following is a shortened version of what is posted on our website.

When I became president and CEO of the Catholic League in 1993, the lion's share of anti-Catholic bigotry stemmed from the entertainment industry and the media. Fast forward to today and we find that the primary source of anti-Catholicism is government.

In other words, we are regressing. It is one thing to be disparaged, even viciously so; it is quite another to be discriminated against.

The first serious discriminatory act of the year took place in Utah.

Utah Rep. Angela Romero, a Democrat, sponsored a bill that would have gutted the seal of confession. She said it was necessary because priests learn of the sexual abuse of minors in confession and do not report it to the authorities.

On January 13, I wrote Romero a letter asking her two questions. She maintained that sexual abusers confide to priests in the confessional about the nature of their crimes, and yet nothing ever comes of it. I asked her to identify just one perpetrator who ever made such a claim. She could not.

She could not answer my other question either. I wanted to know why she was seeking to breach the confidentiality of the priest-penitent privilege but showed zero interest in busting privileges afforded lawyer-client and psychologist-patient relationships. Don't they learn of sexual abuse behind closed doors?

We asked our email subscribers to contact the Utah Speaker of

the House, Rep. Brad Wilson, seeking his help in opposing this bill. He publicly said he did not support it. Rep. Romero huffed and puffed, saying she would go forward with her bill. In the end, she did not. Our supporters overwhelmed her fellow lawmakers with their objections.

New York Archbishop Cardinal Timothy Dolan was the target of one of the most unprincipled and well-orchestrated attacks against a bishop to surface in many years. His offense? He said nice things about President Donald Trump in a conference call.

We wasted no time taking on the bullies. From the National Catholic Reporter to the George Soros-funded Faith in Public Life, we identified and confronted Dolan's foes. They were not interested in disagreeing with him. No, they sought to shut him up. They failed.

On March 2, we received good news. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that it would review a Superior Court decision in a case involving the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. In 2019, we entered an amicus brief in defense of the diocese.

The question before the court was whether a grand jury could decide whether the statute of limitations starts at the time of the injury (which is typical) or, as the plaintiff sought in this case, at the time when she was awakened to the gravity of her alleged victimization.

Renee A. Rice said she was molested 40 years ago by a priest; he denies it outright. She further maintains that two bishops tried to cover it up, even though the diocese sent her a letter *10 years before her lawsuit*, encouraging her to come forward about her alleged abuse. Her attorneys said the clock determining the start of the statute of limitations should begin in 2018, at the time of the grand jury report on clergy sexual abuse. That is when it occurred to her, they contended, that she was a victim.

When the case was formally taken up by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, we filed another amicus brief, represented once again by lawyers from the Jones Day firm in Pittsburgh. Oral arguments were heard on October 20.

One of the most left-wing radicals in Congress is Rep. Rashida Tlaib. On March 16, I wrote to Rep. Ted Deutch, head of the House Committee on Ethics, asking that the Committee issue a letter of reprimand to the Palestinian extremist.

The day before, Tlaib retweeted a post from activist David Hogg that read, "Don't let this administration address COVID-19 like our national gun violence epidemic. F**k a National day of prayer, we need immediate comprehensive action." [Both tweets did not use asterisks.]

After Tlaib got bombarded with emails from our supporters, she tried to walk back her obscene assault. Message delivered.

Another left-wing extremist is Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC). I wrote to her on August 3rd when she lashed out, without provocation, at Father Damien, the 19th century priest who gave his life serving lepers on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. Referring to a statue of him in the U.S. Capitol, AOC said, "This is what patriarchy and white supremacist culture looks like!"

"Your remarks evince an offensive ethnocentrism," I said to the New York congresswoman. "You disrespected the people of Hawaii: It is they who hold Father Damien in high regard. You should be careful not to judge a people's culture and history through your own provincial lens."

Once again, our email subscribers chimed in, letting AOC know what they thought about her assault on this heroic priest.

In 2017, we came to the aid of Notre Dame Law School professor Amy Coney Barrett. She was nominated by President Trump for a seat on an appellate court. The outburst of anti-Catholicism

that she experienced was a disgraceful moment in American history.

We are happy to report that our relentless defense of Barrett, and our effort to shame those who unjustly attacked her, paid off. We have evidence that our news releases on those who were maligning her were read by senate staffers. So when she was nominated to be on the Supreme Court in 2020, we were ready to do battle again.

Barrett handled herself well, disarming her critics with her brilliance and poise. We were only too happy to defend her once again on TV and radio, and in granting interviews to newspapers and internet sources.

The biggest story of the year outside of the presidential race was Covid-19. We never expected to be drawn into this health crisis, but we were.

The Catholic League was instrumental in a big victory that involved attempts to justify curtailment of the Eucharist; the abridgements were purportedly invoked because of public health concerns. At the end of May, Howard County Maryland Executive Calvin Bell announced that he was going to ban “the consumption of food or beverage of any kind before, during, or after religious services, including food or beverage that would typically be consumed as part of a religious service.” This would, in effect, ban the distribution of sacramental wine at Mass.

We immediately alerted our email subscribers, noting that this was an issue of monumental importance, one that should trigger a strong response from Catholics no matter where they lived. Our supporters came through, overwhelming County officials. I know this because I received a phone call from Scott Peterson, spokesman for the County. He said he was “bombarded” with letters of protest. The ban was withdrawn.

The riots that swept the nation following the death of George

Floyd, a black man who had a run-in with Minneapolis police, proved beyond a doubt that the expressed public health concerns of government authorities—social distancing must always be practiced—were politically expedient. No one who protested faced any penalty for flouting Covid-19 protocols. Yet church services were curtailed in the name of safety.

Left-wing activists throughout the country voiced their hatred of America by tearing down iconic statues on public property. Bibles were burned, churches were torched, schools were trashed, and Catholic graves were defaced. The vandals also destroyed statues of Saint Junípero Serra, leading us to ask the Marin County D.A. to prosecute the criminals to the full extent of the law. It kept the Catholic League busy seeking to answer the deluge of media calls. We detailed the damage that was done.

Our first victory of the year was won against a media outlet. It took place on January 3rd when we squeezed an apology from the CBS affiliate in St. Petersburg, Florida, WTSP. It falsely claimed that a Sarasota Catholic bishop had been charged with sexually abusing a child. The bishop was Protestant. We jumped on this issue immediately, and our protest resulted in an apology.

Trevor Noah's "The Daily Show" (like Jon Stewart before him) is a hotbed of anti-Catholic bigotry. He got so bad in 2020 that it impelled us to contact the board of directors of ViacomCBS, the parent company of his Comedy Central show. Here is a sample of what I wrote on May 20. "Noah is cruel. You have a bigot in your employ. The evidence that is being forwarded to you [we provided extensive documentation of his attacks] is conclusive. You can do something about it. Please do."

Did the memo to the board work? Noah certainly zipped it for the rest of the year.

Filipe Castro, a Texas A&M University professor, earned the ire of the Catholic League. He posted some of the most obscene and patently anti-Catholic comments on social media, and apparently was going to get away with it. We jumped on this issue, publishing his vicious assaults—they included physical threats against Catholics—sending our evidence to the media, university officials, the Board of Regents, the campus newspaper, the governor and his staff, the regional accrediting body, and various congressional and state lawmakers.

In November, with funds raised by our members, we were scheduled to have the American Association of Superintendents and Administrators send an eblast to its list of subscribers across the nation. The digital post, which I wrote, alerted superintendents to what is acceptable and what is not acceptable regarding Christmas celebrations in the schools.

It was titled, “No Need to Cancel Christmas.” We made the case that while Christianity cannot be promoted, that does not mean that schools are required to censor every expression of Christmas. “No federal court has ever ruled that Christmas must be censored in the schools.”

But then, at the last minute, the officials at this organization backed out of the deal. Of the six education organizations that we contacted, all but one either rejected our ad or did not get back to us (the one that agreed to go with it was a quarterly, making the timing impractical).

Two weeks before Christmas we scored an important victory. An upstate New York county government denied the local Knights of Columbus Council the right to display a nativity scene outside the office building. Our intervention led to it being displayed inside the building next to a menorah and Christmas tree.

The year ended on a worrisome note. We had plenty of reasons

to be concerned about the kinds of religious liberty policies that President Joe Biden might promote. After all, it was the Obama-Biden administration that gave us the Health and Human Services mandate forcing Catholic entities such as the Little Sisters of the Poor to pay for abortion-inducing drugs in their healthcare plan.

While President Trump alienated many people with his persona, he did more to protect and advance religious liberty than any president in American history. What Biden will do remains to be seen, but from what he has pledged to do—pushing for legislation that would roll back the religious exemptions afforded by Trump—the assault on religious liberty is likely to quicken.