

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Michael P. McDonald

For 50 years the Catholic League has led the charge in every major cultural battle, and in 2023, we continued this tradition.

We started the year off with a bang when we released our documentary, "Walt's Disenchanted Kingdom: How Disney is Losing its Way." The film explores how the once family-friendly media titan devolved into a woke behemoth promoting the most radical elements of the LGBT agenda.

The movie was made available on several different platforms. We reached an enormous audience and generated multiple friendly radio and TV interviews.

Further, "Walt's Disenchanted Kingdom" won critical acclaim earning recognitions at major film festivals. At the L.A. International Short Film Festival, we won four prestigious awards. Additionally, our movie was nominated for honors at The Prisma Film Festival in Rome, Italy; The Perth Christian Film Festival in Australia; and The Arizona Faith and Family Film Festival.

The biggest sign of our success was the troubles that plagued Disney. We had no illusions about taking down Disney. We wanted to educate the public and inspire Disney to reconsider its woke programming. Nevertheless, Disney had a rough year, and "Walt's Disenchanted Kingdom" helped contribute to their woes.

We followed up this success with a major fight with the L.A. Dodgers. In mid-May, the Dodgers announced they intended to honor the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of virulent anti-Catholic men who dress up as nuns, at the team's Pride Night.

We sent a letter to the head of Major League Baseball (MLB) about this outrage, and on the following day, the Dodgers disinvited the "Sisters." But then gay and trans activists, along with local government officials, besieged the Dodgers. Soon after, the Dodgers reinvited the "Sisters," offering them an apology, thus endorsing anti-Catholic bigotry.

We anticipated that the "Sisters" could be reinvited, and Bill Donohue personally prepared a report documenting their bigotry. We called on Catholics in the Los Angeles area to boycott the game to send a message to the Dodgers, and MLB, that anti-Catholicism cannot be tolerated.

We sent Bill's report to over 300 parishes in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, asking pastors to support the boycott. In the following weeks, we contacted other important Catholic stakeholders in the area. We expanded our reach by including prominent individuals of other religions and Latino business owners. In every case, we sent the report and our plea to boycott Pride Night.

We also hit the public airwaves. For the two weeks before the game, we ran scores of ads promoting our boycott. Our media blitz on KABC radio caught the eye of the *Los Angeles Times*. Moreover, we gave multiple TV, radio, newspaper, and internet interviews on the controversy.

Almost no one showed up for the ceremony honoring the "Sisters," and we drove down the game's attendance by 3,500.

On the heels of this win, the U.S. Supreme Court held that the First Amendment rights of a Colorado woman, Lorie Smith, must be respected when it comes to forcing her to express beliefs that are contrary to her conscience. This was a great victory for free speech and freedom of religion. We submitted an amicus brief in this case, *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*. We are delighted with this outcome and to have played a role in it.

In 2023, the most serious threat to religious liberty came

from the Department of Justice (DOJ). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) set its sights on Catholics.

We first learned of the anti-Catholic FBI caper when a whistleblower disclosed a memo from the Richmond Field Office investigating "Radical-Traditional Catholics." The memo drew heavily on anti-Catholic sources, such as the Southern Poverty Law Center. We weren't convinced this was a limited probe and publicly asked if orthodox Catholics were next.

We were right. It soon came to light that the FBI had looked into "mainline Catholic parishes" and "local diocesan leadership." We wrote to FBI Director Christopher Wray asking him to release those documents related to the memo. He didn't reply, but we didn't give up.

The House Judiciary Committee was also looking into the FBI for this. Although the Committee had some documents from the FBI, they were heavily redacted. When Wray testified before the Committee in July, he told Chairman Jim Jordan that the probe was contained to the Richmond Field Office and agreed to send less redacted documents.

Unsatisfied with Wray's response, we wrote to Jordan asking him to find out why ordinary Catholics were being investigated. The following day, the FBI finally gave the Committee less redacted documents, and we learned that it was not "a single field office." Rather, the memo grew out of work from several offices.

We wrote Jordan several more times proposing a series of questions that Wray needed to answer, and the Committee was very receptive.

The Committee produced a report in December revealing the FBI violated important procedures and safeguards. Further, the report exposed the FBI had no interest in dissident, left-wing Catholics. They had their sights on Catholics who are "pro-life, pro-family, and support the biological basis for sex and

gender distinction as potential domestic terrorists.”

We thanked Jordan and offered our support in the fights to come. In total, we wrote 11 letters to hold the FBI and DOJ accountable. We will keep at it as long as necessary. Ultimately, it will only end once the anti-Catholic element is purged from the FBI.

Unfortunately, this trend is not limited to the DOJ and FBI. Across the Western world, people of faith, mostly Christians, are being harassed and arrested by government agents at an alarming rate. The most common reason why they are bullied is their biblical objection to the LGBT agenda and opposition to abortion. Their rights are being trounced.

No one received a greater public flogging than House Speaker Mike Johnson. The all-out assault on him is meant to discourage younger Christian conservatives from running for office and to discredit the Founders and our Judeo-Christian heritage. We warned Catholics that the same people behind these vicious assaults against Speaker Johnson hate the religious principles upon which America was founded and those who cherish them.

Some lambasting Catholics were exposed as frauds in 2023. For years, we heard from activists that the residential schools in Canada, some of which were run by Catholics, amounted to genocide against indigenous people. This reached a fevered pitch last year when it was alleged that mass graves had been discovered. In 2023, when these grave sites were excavated, no bodies were found. We issued a report showing this was a hoax.

This year the Biden administration announced a new rule requiring foster parents to affirm LGBT children. This gives all the power to kids and tramples the religious liberty rights of parents.

This rule implies that foster children would do better in the affirming care of transgender parents. We examined this claim

and found that the transgender community is predisposed to violence. Particularly when it comes to “intimate partner violence,” transgenders are more prone to this than any other demographic. We compiled a report highlighting this.

Transgender violence is not just limited to themselves. This year, we witnessed a wave of trans domestic terrorism. We documented these attacks in a report. The biggest of these was the shooting at Covenant Christian School in Nashville. A woman pretending to be a man targeted the school and killed six people, including three children. Although police recovered a manifesto indicating the shooter’s motive, the authorities continue to keep its contents a secret.

Another critical front in the culture war was education. We prepared a report on the many ways in which public schools are deliberately sexualizing children.

The endemic radicalism in education stems from years of Christian bashing on campus. We documented how “Christian Privilege” classes, workshops, and lectures have been in vogue at universities across the country.

This now permeates into the lower grades. We contacted over 80 public officials in Washington State after a teacher called parents concerned about the sexual indoctrination “Christofascists.” Even more troubling, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, lambasted parents who support school choice claiming they had a “particular Christian ideology to dominate the country.” We called on her to resign.

The Biden administration rescinded a rule created by Trump that protected the religious rights of students on campus. We issued a report on how prior to Trump’s rule religious students regularly had their rights eroded.

In 2023, a report by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops confirmed that the clergy sexual abuse scandal ended

long ago and is now practically non-existent. The number of credible allegations against the clergy consistently fell between 2004 and 2022. This is good news, and we will keep flagging this.

During the “Synod on Synodality” we issued a report highlighting the successes of Catholic communities that adhere to orthodoxy and decline of those that embrace heterodoxy. Additionally, we kept tabs on the dissidents, who tried to hijack the proceedings.

On October 7, Hamas launched the deadly attack on Israel. The radicals in this country rallied in support of the Islamic terrorist group. We noted that Israel had met the requirements for a “just war,” as defined by the Church and called out the radicals for celebrating the attack and promulgating anti-Semitism.

We continued displaying our life-sized nativity scene in Central Park. Building on this tradition, this year we also had a huge digital billboard celebrating Christmas in Times Square. It was shown four to six times an hour for the two weeks before Christmas. We played off the theme of “diversity” turning it back on the people that use it as a cudgel to marginalize Catholics.

After the atheists at the Freedom From Religion Foundation forced a small town in Iowa to take down a crèche on public property, government officials added some secular symbols and the nativity scene was restored. We begged the atheists to sue us for displaying our own crèche in Central Park, and the bullies refused to do so.

2023 was a milestone year for the Catholic League, marking our 50th anniversary. First founded in 1973 by Fr. Virgil Blum, the league has grown into the largest Catholic civil rights group and remains one of the last grass-roots advocacy organizations in the country.

We celebrated this occasion on April 27, at the New York Athletic Club. Many prominent clergy and lay people were in attendance. Raymond Arroyo served as the Master of Ceremonies, and Walter Knysz, Cardinal Dolan and Bill Donohue gave remarks. It was a great evening.

Bill also released his book [War on Virtue: How the Ruling Class is Killing the American Dream](#) and marked his 30th year as president and CEO of the Catholic League.

This year perfectly encapsulated our last 50 years. We had major accomplishments and scored critical victories. What the next 50 years will bring is anyone's guess. But with dedicated supporters, the Catholic League will surely keep winning in the years ahead.

Michael P. McDonald is Director of Communications at the Catholic League.