

# CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

Michael P. McDonald, Director of Communications

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As the cultural pendulum swung back towards tradition, reason, and faith, the Catholic League made significant contributions to the culture war in 2025. There are critical battles still raging, but we gained significant ground this year.

As a parting gift, Joe Biden would give the Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award, to George Soros, a notorious anti-Catholic bigot who has done more to undermine western civilization and the United States than any single person. While disgraceful, this would be the last major insult from Biden. A few weeks later, President Trump would be inaugurated and the federal government began advancing the cause of religious liberty.

Trump quickly established his Religious Liberty Commission to end the weaponization of the government against Catholics and other people of faith. We eagerly looked for ways to assist the commission. Bill Donohue traveled to Washington to meet with a Department of Justice (DoJ) liaison. The Catholic League staff prepared a report that we shared with DoJ and the senior members of the commission to aid them in their work. This report was praised as the most detailed report on anti-Christian bias that the DoJ received.

Similarly, we renewed our efforts to get to the bottom of the FBI spying on Catholics. We continued to work with House Judiciary Chairman Jim Jordan, and we contacted FBI Director Kash Patel, who pledged to crack down on anti-Catholic

bigotry. As part of these efforts, the Trump administration released new documents on this scheme. We learned that the FBI's hostility to Catholics was more widespread than we were initially led to believe.

Another major story was the passing of Pope Francis. On April 21, he died from complications after a long illness. He served as pope for 12 years, leaving behind a mixed legacy. Progressives cheered his emphasis on social justice and his pastoral approach; traditional minded people were outraged by his near ban of the Traditional Latin Mass and other changes he was making, especially regarding the Church's teachings on sexuality. Of course, Pope Francis' legacy was more nuanced than that and in multiple media appearances we explained that.

As we watched the conclave to select the successor to Pope Francis, we did numerous interviews. On May 8, Pope Leo XIV was elected. As a relatively unknown candidate, we pushed back on the narrative that he would be Francis II. More importantly, we were the first Catholic organization to spring to his defense against trumped up charges from activists claiming he mishandled abuse cases in Peru.

This June, Bill participated in Fidelity Month by making a video about Flag Day and Father's Day. Begun two years ago by Princeton Professor Robert George, Fidelity Month is a time to celebrate God, family and country.

We also sent a letter to Apple TV over a scene in the popular show "Your Friends & Neighbors," which disgustingly mocked the Eucharist. We hit them hard for their defaming the Blessed Sacrament, and since then, there have been no repeat offenses.

Later in the summer, the IRS gave a great boon to religious liberty, when it updated its enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, giving greater freedom to 501(c)(3) organizations to participate in politics. After a Soros-funded "Catholic" organization used the IRS to attack us in 2008, we are glad to

know that we won't have the IRS looking over our shoulder even though these changes won't have a substantial impact on how we operate.

When the media were totally silent about a report by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops noting the almost complete eradication of clergy sexual abuse, we highlighted this good news. Unfortunately, more Catholics do not underscore these accomplishments allowing militant secularists to use this issue as a red herring to justify their attacks.

For instance, in Montana and Washington State, politicians tried to break the Seal of Confession alleging priests learn about abuse through the sacrament. Of course, neither state could point to any evidence that this was a problem. Bill wrote letters to lawmakers in both states. Montana killed their legislation within a week of our intervention, but the rabid secularists in Washington were undeterred. It was only after the DoJ won in court that the assault on Confession stopped.

But, it is not just politicians that use clergy sexual abuse to harangue the Church. *The Free Press* had an article that grievously misrepresents the scandal, making it appear that it is ongoing and far more widespread. This screed should never have been published.

But worse still is the friendly fire from within the Church. We were contacted by lawyers representing the Diocese of Camden. They wanted help to prevent the New Jersey Attorney General from using a grand jury to target the dioceses, which would be contrary to state law.

We were glad to help. Our legal counsel submitted an amicus brief and delivered an oral argument before the New Jersey Supreme Court. Needless to say, we were the only organization to offer any support for the diocese.

But, just one week after the arguments, Bishop Joseph Williams

decided to walk away from the case. Even though the diocese had won twice in lower courts, Bishop Williams threw in the towel on defending the due process rights of priests.

We were never contacted by anyone associated with the diocese about this decision. Instead, we found out from a priest in New Jersey. This is the thanks we get for trying to help. Ultimately, the New Jersey Supreme Court decided that the grand jury could proceed.

Another instance of friendly fire occurred when Brooklyn Bishop Emeritus Nicholas DiMarzio was sold out by the Archdiocese of Newark, after it agreed to shell out hundreds of thousands of dollars to two men who accused the bishop of abuse, even though a Vatican investigation cleared him of all wrongdoing.

Transgenderism remained a critical issue. We published approximately 25 articles and reports pushing back on this anti-Catholic and anti-scientific ideology, focusing on its inherently violent nature. While we dealt it serious blows, the elites and the secular-left are still wed to this issue. This is not only harmful to the poor people who have been seduced by transgenderism, it is also dangerous to everyone around them. Tragically, we saw that on several occasions.

On the morning of August 27, Robert Westman, a man who pretended to be a woman, opened fire on Catholic school children attending Mass at Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis. Two children were tragically killed by this transgender extremist. Many in the media and political life tried to spin his biography to suggest that it wasn't his adherence to transgenderism or hatred for Church teachings that prompted this attack. We quickly set the record straight.

Two weeks later, on September 10, a man, who identified as a furry online and in a relationship with a man who thought he was a woman, shot and killed Charlie Kirk at a rally at Utah

Valley University. Kirk was assassinated because he was an outspoken Christian, and the shooter and his boyfriend held a deep animus for Kirk's Christian message.

These incidents highlight why the fight against transgenderism remains so pivotal.

We were also involved in several other cultural battles.

We marked the 10 year anniversary of the New York St. Patrick's Day parade allowing LGBT groups to march under their own banner with Bill recounting the betrayal.

Higher education remained a hotbed of culture war activity. At Columbia, a Catholic Ph.D. candidate faced disciplinary actions for making comments on social media that accurately reflected Church teachings. Meanwhile, Northwestern offered an "Introduction to Christianity" class that was nothing more than an assault on the Catholic Church. At St. John's University in New York, a law student verbally abused Cardinal Dolan. We vigorously called out the guilty parties and asked for the situations to be remedied.

We also took an in-depth look at the data on assisted suicide. Needless to say, the most secular states in the nation lead the way in this horrific trend, and this will continue to grow into a major flashpoint in the culture wars. We were able to get out in front of this battle and laid down a crucial marker.

Politically, one of the biggest events was the election of Zohran Mamdani to be New York City Mayor. Bill authored an 18-page report unmasking Mamdani's phoniness. We made several other statements and media appearances warning of the threat Mamdani poses to religious liberty. Unfortunately, New York is too far gone, and Mamdani won. Worryingly, his victory may set a pattern that the left might use across America. Not to be deterred, we started a comprehensive "Mamdani Watch" to track what he is doing, providing a check to his hostility to people

of faith.

We scored a big victory when we convinced Sen. Dick Durbin to decline a "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Archdiocese of Chicago. We were the only lay Catholic organization to press Durbin to turn down the award. We sent him several letters pointing out that most of the policies he supported were contrary to Catholic teaching. The tipping point came once we provided the email of his chief of staff, and our subscribers to pound away. One day later, Durbin yielded.

The war on Christmas remains a critical flashpoint.

Initially, we sought to run a billboard in Washington with the message, "Christians Take Note. *Religious Liberty is Thriving Again*. Celebrate Christmas Like Never Before!"

Unfortunately, we were informed that D.C. bureaucrats would not approve the message unless we removed "Christians." We refused to bend to these dictates and looked for a new way to promote religious liberty.

We often get complaints from members about homeowners associations (HOA) being too restrictive with religious symbols at Christmas. To counter this, we took the resources we were planning on using for the D.C. billboard and used that to contact over 2,000 HOA officials asking them to respect the religious rights of the people in their communities. This helped minimize the attacks on religious liberty this Christmas.

We called out officials in Portland, Oregon, who used their Christmas tree lighting ceremony to promote woke causes. We contacted officials in St. Petersburg and Pensacola, Florida, about a drag show that mocked Christmas that was using city-owned theaters for the performances. We once again had to battle with a co-op in Larchmont that refused to display a crèche alongside a menorah. Like last year, they chose to be intolerant and have no decorations, but at least we were able

to end the anti-Christian discrimination. We also continued our decades-long tradition of displaying a life-sized nativity scene in Central Park.

Just days before Christmas, it was announced that the Vatican accepted Cardinal Dolan's resignation. His support of our mission was unyielding. We will miss our close relationship with him and look forward to getting acquainted with his successor.

Looking back, 2025 was a banner year. We made great strides in advancing religious liberty and pushed back on anti-Catholicism. While we reclaimed significant ground in the culture war, there are still critical battles ahead. As we look forward to 2026, we will keep pushing the advantage and joyfully look forward to the fights and, more importantly, the victories to come.

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# **CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2024 YEAR IN REVIEW**

**Michael P. McDonald, Director of Communications**

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2024 will go down in American history as a pivotal year. The people standing for tradition, reason, and faith fought to reclaim their country, and the Catholic League was right there in the thick of it.

By far, the biggest story of 2024 was the presidential election, and as history unfolded, we tirelessly worked to

educate Catholics on the critical issues at stake.

To this end, we published a report on the religious liberty policies of Donald Trump and the Biden-Harris administration. We noted how Trump was pro-religious liberty and never supported groups hostile to Catholics. We could not say the same for Biden-Harris and found their record sorely lacking. Our comprehensive report did more to educate Catholics on this subject than any other document put out by other organizations.

We additionally pointed out Harris' outright hostility to Catholics on several occasions. She stiffed Catholics this year by refusing to go to the Al Smith Dinner. While serving in the Senate, she was openly hostile to judicial nominees who were faithful Catholics. As California Attorney General, she crippled pregnancy resource centers and targeted pro-life activists.

While Harris had problems with Catholics that upheld the teachings of the Church, in her corner was a whole slew of Catholic dissidents. We called out these rogues.

Ultimately, Trump decisively won the election, in large part thanks to him carrying approximately 58 percent of Catholics. Moving forward, the work will turn toward ensuring that the safeguards for religious liberty are as robust as they can be. To that end, Bill Donohue urged Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito to resign early in the new Trump administration so they can be replaced by younger justices who will protect the court's religion friendly majority for years to come. Bill also raised concerns over Robert F. Kennedy's departures from Catholic teachings and the prudence of appointing him as Secretary for Health and Human Services.

While Trump's victory represents a return to tradition and commonsense, the opposition went down swinging. In 2024, we

saw a concentrated effort from the federal and state governments targeting Catholics and other people of faith.

We called out the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network after the Federal agency flagged “the purchasing of books (including religious texts)” as a sign of extremism. We also went after the Department of Justice (DOJ) for using the FACE Act to punish peaceful pro-life activists while giving a pass to violent pro-abortion radicals.

The FBI continued to stall in revealing the truth behind its probe of Catholics from 2023. Even after DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz released a report on the matter, several critical questions remained. For now, it appears that our doggedness to uncover the whole truth has at least curtailed the worst of it. Hopefully, the new administration can definitively put this issue to rest.

Another area we battled with the FBI was the release of Audrey Hale’s manifesto. In 2023, Hale, a woman who falsely believed she was a man, attacked the Christian Covenant School in Nashville, killing six people including three children. For over a year, the FBI withheld the manifesto from the public. Normally, such documents are released right away. We hounded them to disseminate the manifesto.

When it was finally released, it was clear why the FBI kept it hidden for so long. The manifesto showed that Hale was a very sick person, and her woes were further compounded by identifying as transgender.

We also pushed back on the Department of Homeland Security after it came to light that an internal advisory board recommended flagging those who served in the military, are religious, and support Trump as potential extremists and domestic terrorists.

We proved Biden’s White House and the media were wrong to insist the ban on religious symbols at the annual “egg roll”

party was in line with previous administrations. We found evidence to the contrary highlighting their deception.

Another disturbing trend was how the Biden administration used Orwellian language to influence public thought and sideline traditional Catholic values. We issued a report examining this.

On the state level, perhaps the greatest display of anti-Catholicism came from Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. While wearing a "Harris Walz" hat, Whitmer mocked the Eucharist by placing a Dorito on the tongue of a kneeling Liz Plank, a podcaster. We led the charge against Whitmer, alerting all Catholic parishes in Michigan of her horrendous act. We created such a media firestorm that she was compelled to put out a statement.

In the statement, Whitmer tried to say she was not mocking the Eucharist. Instead, she was championing the CHIP Act also insisting that no one was kneeling. Of course, this was a flimsy excuse and photographic evidence quickly proved she was lying. We did not fall for it and jumped back into the fray to confront her dishonesty.

We also called out a dangerous ballot initiative in New York that would trample parental rights and religious liberty. We mobilized Catholics across the state to vote no on Proposition 1. Bill wrote an excellent booklet highlighting the adverse impact the initiative would have, and we sent the booklet to important stakeholders in the Empire State. Unfortunately, New York is too far gone, and Proposition 1 passed.

Joining the government in targeting Catholics came a large swath of characters from all walks of life.

Twice in 2024, anti-Catholic activists defiled St. Patrick's Cathedral. In the first instance, LGBT radicals hijacked the cathedral to stage a funeral mocking Catholic traditions for a man who falsely claimed to be a woman. Then again, during the

Easter Vigil Mass, protesters invaded the cathedral screaming "Free Palestine" and holding a banner that read "SILENCE = DEATH." In both instances, we called out the crashers and the media, which either ignored the story or tried to frame the radicals as the victims.

After Harrison Butker, the kicker for the Kansas City Chiefs, spoke in defense of traditional Catholic values at Benedictine College, he was criticized by the NFL and slammed on social media. We happily came to Butker's defense with greater effect than any other Catholic organization.

The Olympics' opening ceremony featured a skit mocking the Last Supper starring transgenders. We wasted no time in contacting International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach and other officials around the world, targeting the Olympics' sponsors, and calling out those telling us it was not intended as an insult to Catholics.

Additionally, we called out the NBA for its selective interest in "human rights." While the league claims to promote social justice in America, it partners with China, one of the worst persecutors of Christians.

We also confronted the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) after they tried to intimidate us. The atheists complained to the IRS that we "engaged in unlawful political campaigning." We were undeterred, because we did nothing wrong, and promised to continue to publicly hammer anti-Catholic bigots.

Meanwhile, a coordinated effort by Christian bashers attempted to discredit Trump nominees Pete Hegseth and Mike Huckabee. We exposed the bigots targeting these men for their faith.

All of these attacks were not just acts of random bigotry. The secular left needs to weaken the power of the Church and the resolve of individual Catholics to advance their agenda, particularly on the issues of abortion and transgenderism.

In 2024, the media covered for the pro-abortion extremists in the Democratic Party. Repeatedly, we were told there was no such thing as late-term abortions by the “fact checkers” and the talking heads.

Even during the presidential debate between Trump and Harris, and again during the vice presidential debate between JD Vance and Tim Walz, who as governor of Minnesota signed a law which repealed protections for infants born alive following a botched abortion, the pundits lied saying that late term abortions are “misinformation” and babies born alive receive lifesaving care following an abortion.

The worst was the *New York Times*, which omitted the relevant portion of the sentence that proved Walz repealed safeguards for newborn babies.

We routinely pointed out the truth to correct these false narratives.

There was also a lot of action on transgenderism. The secularists went on a tear trying to advance this cause. Across the country parents and religious people saw their rights eroded so that men and women can pretend to be the opposite sex. In several instances, parents lost custody of their children or children were permitted to “transition” without parental consent. Additionally, faithful Catholics and Christians were denied the opportunity to provide loving homes to children in need.

Fortunately, we may have reached a tipping point on this issue. Across Europe, many nations have pulled back on their support for transgenderism. Closer to home polls throughout the year showed people rejecting this anti-scientific ideology.

We struck while the iron was hot with an ad blitz at both the Republican and Democratic conventions calling on both parties to commit to protecting children from this insanity. We also

showed our support for those who realized they were hoodwinked by transgenderism and have decided to “detransition.” Look for more of these people in the year to come.

We also fought back on several other key issues and scored critical victories in the process.

We exposed the myth of “Christian nationalist” violence comprehensively showing that the “violence” often cited has almost nothing to do with Christianity. It is just a fraudulent attempt to silence Catholics.

We set the record straight after the *Washington Post* published a report on abuse at Catholic-run Indian boarding schools in the United States. We thoroughly tore apart the erroneous conclusions.

When the media was totally silent about a report by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops noting the almost complete eradication of clergy sexual abuse, we highlighted this good news.

Bill also released his new book *Cultural Meltdown: The Secular Roots of Our Moral Crisis*, and our documentary “Walt’s Disenchanted Kingdom” won its ninth award.

We continued displaying our life-sized nativity scene in Central Park. Additionally, we arranged for a billboard this year in Madison, Wisconsin, home to FFRF. Our ad took aim at them for their mockery of Christmas with their Winter Solstice exhibit. We also defended a Catholic League member who wanted to display a Nativity alongside a menorah but was denied. The building decided to do the equal but intolerant thing and removed all displays. Meanwhile, around the country, atheist and satanic groups tried to dilute Christmas, but we pushed back.

We achieved great things this year, but it is only the beginning. It will take time to utterly route the secularists

that maligned and marginalized Catholics in the last few years. The cultural forces that engendered these attacks remain potent and will attempt to corrode our values in the future. The culture war cannot be won in a single election cycle. It takes years of dedicated effort. The forecast for 2025 looks brighter. However, there is still work to be done, and the Catholic League will be there to see it through.

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# **CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW**

**Catholic League For Religious And Civil Rights  
2023 Year in Review**

**Michael P. McDonald, Director of Communications**

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.*

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# CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

**Catholic League For Religious And Civil Rights  
2022 Year in Review**

**Michael P. McDonald, Director of Communications**

The forces working to undermine the Catholic Church and our Judeo-Christian values doubled-down in 2022. One might expect a traditional-minded organization to focus on mitigating losses; however, the Catholic League went on the offense undertaking many bold projects and played a significant part in the major culture war victories of the last year.

The biggest of these projects was the making of our documentary “Walt’s Disenchanted Kingdom: How Disney is Losing its Way.” It has a star-studded cast, and Jason Meath, the film’s director, did a magnificent job. We anticipate it will garner a wide audience when it is released in January 2023.

Another major undertaking was a survey of Catholics for the 60th anniversary of Vatican II. We did this to counter the narrative that Catholics were largely dissatisfied with the Church and wanted to see changes. To this end, we contracted McLaughlin & Associates to conduct the poll. They did great work, and the results will greatly help us set the record straight for years to come.

We also filed an amicus brief in *303 Creative LLC v Elenis*. This case involves a Christian web designer, Lori Smith, who launched a preemptive strike against the Colorado Anti-

Discrimination Act: it would require her to build wedding websites for “gay marriages.” Represented by the Pittsburgh law firm of Gallagher Giancola, we support Lori Smith in her quest to maintain her First Amendment rights. The Supreme Court will rule on this in 2023.

While we undertook these bold projects, there were several key victories before the high court. One case involved the religious rights of a football coach, who lost his job because he prayed on the field following games. The other involved the state of Maine discriminating against religious schools.

While both of these victories are important, the most critical decision from the Supreme Court in 2022 was the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. After nearly 50 years of determined efforts by Catholics across the country, Justice Samuel Alito, writing for the 5-4 majority in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, held that “Roe was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences.” That is why, he said, “It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives.”

Many organizations, particularly the Catholic Church, kept the fight for life going over the years, and in doing so, they contributed to this victory. We, too, played an active role in keeping this issue in front of the public through scores media appearances.

Even before the ruling came out, the pro-abortion fanatics desecrated two of the most prominent Catholic churches in the nation. On January 20, during the Vigil for Life at the National Basilica in D.C., Catholics for Choice used a light projector to broadcast their anti-Catholic message.

Two days later, another anti-Catholic outfit, New York City for Abortion Rights, projected “God Loves Abortion” and other vile slogans on the exterior of St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

Supporters of the group shouted obscenities at pro-life Catholics entering and exiting the Cathedral.

Then in May, when a draft decision was leaked suggesting the Supreme Court was prepared to overturn *Roe*, the pro-abortion fanatics began to increase their violence. When the court ultimately ruled in June, things reached a fever pitch.

We put together a representative list of the incidents of violence against Catholics so we could call for action from the proper authorities.

To this end, we sent a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland asking him to investigate Jane's Revenge, a radical pro-abortion group that uses domestic terrorists' tactics. Rather than take action against physical violence perpetrated against Catholics, the leadership of the overtly politicized Department of Justice (DOJ) chose to target pro-life activists instead.

On September 23, a Catholic pro-life activist, Mark Houck, was arrested by two dozen FBI agents—they came into his house with guns drawn—for allegedly violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act.

This kind of overreaction for a minor infraction of the law is deeply troubling, and it becomes even more troubling when paired with the DOJ's under-reaction to attacks on the pro-life side.

We wrote to the FBI and DOJ about this, but when they did not get back to us, we contacted several congressional leaders calling on them to hold the FBI and DOJ to accountable.

While it is troubling enough for Federal law enforcement to target Catholics, equally disturbing was the silence of prominent Catholics in Washington when pro-abortion radicals attacked Catholics. Both President Joe Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, "devout Catholics," remained mute on these

instances of violence.

For his part, Biden has grown more radical over the years in his support for abortion. This is evident in the people he has working around him. Six of the eight Catholics in his cabinet have long track records of championing abortion. Another prominent figure in Biden's White House is John Podesta, who previously tried to orchestrate a "Catholic Spring" to encourage Catholics to revolt against Church teachings.

In the aftermath of the *Dobbs* decision, even the corporations decided to join the radicals on the abortion issue. We made a tally of the companies that announced they would pay for abortions in their healthcare plans, thus short-circuiting states with laws protecting the unborn.

In addition to abortion, transgenderism—the dangerous idea that the sexes are interchangeable—was another major flashpoint in the culture war in 2022.

While it is bad enough that the Biden administration is promoting this fantasy, it took steps to thwart efforts by the states to protect children and promote the truth. Fortunately, several governors, particularly FL Gov. Ron DeSantis, pushed back against Biden's tyrannical tactics.

But Biden's most dangerous proposal was the effort to amend Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (a.k.a. ObamaCare) to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex to include "sexual orientation and gender identity." This would utterly shatter the religious liberty protections of Catholic hospitals and force them to provide transgender services. Beyond infringing on the First Amendment rights of Catholics, it would threaten the well-being of children.

During the public comment period, we asked Catholic League members to register their complaints by strongly emphasizing this threat to religious liberty. While this might not have been enough to totally deter Biden from his objective, it sent

a strong message to Washington.

While the Biden Administration was promoting transgenderism and actively undermining religious liberty, the courts were pushing back. Two appellate courts ruled that other Biden initiatives could not force Catholic hospitals and doctors to perform transgender procedures.

Additionally, corporations joined in promoting transgenderism in the past year. Twitter was one of the worst offenders. This prompted us to send a letter to Twitter after the company began sanctioning people for complaining about a male University of Pennsylvania swimmer competing on the women's team.

But perhaps the biggest promoter of transgenderism was academia. We even had to call out the U.S. Air Force Academy for promoting it. Many prestigious private schools, too, taught this twisted ideology to young students behind their parents backs.

The most egregious incident occurred at Tennessee Tech when a drag performer partnered with a student group to put on a display of anti-Catholic bigotry. Fortunately, the university president condemned this outrage cancelling all campus events by the groups involved. He said that he was "also offended by disparaging mockery toward any religious group."

In addition to being heavily involved in the fight against abortion and transgenderism, we had to contend with expressions of anti-Catholicism that we thought were long over.

We had to deal with Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene. She insulted Catholics by saying "Satan's controlling the Church." We called for an apology. When she refused, we sent a letter to the House Ethics Committee calling on them to levy sanctions against her for her anti-Catholic remarks. Greene is an outspoken Republican, and this exchange highlighted our

independent streak.

Additionally, we had to call for an investigation of a DOJ lawyer who labeled organizations promoting religious liberty “hate groups.”

We had to intervene after Bridget Fleming, a member of the legislature for Suffolk County, Long Island, introduced a resolution that would have forced all prayers before official business to be “neutral.” We quickly sprung into action and within hours, Fleming’s resolution was dead. We were happy to help because this resolution was in response to an invocation led by Msgr. Robert Batule, who is on our board of directors.

We also had to get involved when the assistant principle of a school in Connecticut was caught on camera saying he would never hire a Catholic teacher “because if someone is raised hardcore Catholic, it’s like they are brainwashed.” We wasted no time contacting officials across the state to hold him accountable.

The media have long been an antagonist of Catholics, and 2022 was no exception. In the fall the Associated Press published a hit piece complaining about the confessional seal. It had no evidence to back up its claim. When we asked the authors to see their evidence, they never got back to us.

The forces seeking to undermine our Judeo-Christian heritage love attacking Christmas, and this year was no exception. In Massachusetts, a human rights commissioner was forced to resign after making anti-Christian statements when residents wanted to display a Christmas tree in the town’s public library.

We contacted over 350 Catholics associated with Cardinal Newman chapters at colleges and universities asking them to let us know of any anti-Catholic activities around Christmas.

We condemned a play at Harvard that reimagined Jesus as a “gay

Asian.” We sounded the alarm over several bloody horror movies with Christmas settings. We confronted government officials in King County Washington seeking to limit their employees abilities to display Christmas decorations. We also called out a Christmas parade in Texas that included drag queens.

In a more tasteful salute to the season, we continued the decades-long tradition of displaying a nativity scene in Central Park. We do this every year not only to honor the birth of Christ, but also to help educate others who wish to display a crèche on public property about the rules.

In 2022, we were delighted to learn our work continues to earn recognition.

Bill Donohue was featured in a documentary on Mother Teresa that originally aired in May on Sky in the U.K. and Ireland; it was also seen in Israel and Australia.

Donohue also received an Honorary Doctorate of Law from Ave Maria Law School. Additionally, the *Catholic Herald* named him as one of the top Catholic Leaders in the United States for 2022.

While the forces working against the Catholic Church and traditional Judeo-Christian values were in overdrive in 2022, we responded with equal vigor. We undertook several major projects and played a part in the important victories in the culture war this year.

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# CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS

# AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

## Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights 2021 Year in Review

**Michael P. McDonald, Director of Communications**

If one considers the hostility the Catholic Church and traditional Judeo-Christian values faced from the Biden Administration, corporations, education, and the perpetually aggrieved activist class, 2021 was a long year. However, the Catholic League managed to achieve many victories.

Out of all the enemies hostile to the Catholic Church, the government poses the most danger of them all. Particularly, with Joe Biden holding the presidency, the forces of the federal government ushered in many anti-Catholic policies. That this occurred under a self-described “devout Catholic” made this all the more infuriating.

Biden wasted no time attacking teachings at the heart of the Church. On January 20th, his first day in office, Biden issued an executive order allowing males who claim to be female the right to compete with females in high school and college sports. He also approved of them showering together.

On January 22, Biden said he was “committed to codifying *Roe v. Wade*.”

Then, on January 28, he issued an executive order to rescind the Mexico City Policy, the rule that bars U.S. foreign aid to international non-profit organizations that provide for abortion or abortion counseling. Biden also asked the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to begin the process of rescinding the Trump administration’s Title X family planning rule; among other things, it denies funds to

Planned Parenthood and other abortion mills.

On February 14, the White House announced that the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships “will not prefer one faith over another *or favor religious over secular organizations.*” But the whole point of creating an office of faith-based programs was to prioritize religious social service agencies.

Biden’s decision to appoint Melissa Rogers to head this endeavor was even more telling. He could not have chosen a more seasoned secularist to steer these faith-based entities.

On May 14, our worst fears for the office were confirmed. Rogers met with representatives from six secular organizations. None of them were religion-friendly and some are positively militant in their agenda.

Even on issues where Biden should have found common ground with the Church, he found ways to alienate the bishops. For instance, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) formally opposed the American Rescue Plan Act. Their concern was that there was nothing in the legislation that prohibited funding for abortions.

In an even more serious break with the concerns of the bishops, Biden pushed for action on the Equality Act. The effect of this legislation is to promote the most comprehensive assault on Christianity ever written into law.

The Equality Act has two major goals: it would amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity to the definition of sex; it would also significantly undermine the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) by allowing gay rights to trump religious rights.

In May, Biden raised more than eyebrows when he omitted any mention of God in his National Day of Prayer proclamation. What he did was unprecedented: No previous president has

failed to mention God since this celebration was created in 1952 by a joint resolution of Congress and signed into law by President Harry Truman.

On September 20, the White House issued a statement saying, "The Administration strongly supports House passage of H.R. 3755, the Women's Health Protection Act of 2021." But because there is not an abortion that Biden could not justify, the proposed law has nothing to do with women's health—it is a pro-abortion bill.

This legislation is anything but "women friendly." It would abolish the requirement that abortion can only be performed by a physician and eliminates health and safety regulations that are specific to abortion facilities. Further, the bill promotes the falsehood that abortion restrictions are racist. Similarly, it promotes the insane notion that men can become pregnant: it has more than two dozen references to "pregnant people"; this is roughly twice as often as they speak of "pregnant women."

With the alarming pace Biden moved to undermine the teachings of the Church, the Catholic League prepared a report, "President Biden's Policies: Departures from Catholic Teachings," that outlines many instances where his decision-making on important moral issues is at variance with established Catholic teachings.

Biden surrounded himself with henchmen who have long track records of hostility to religious liberties. Xavier Becerra was President Biden's worst nominee for a Cabinet post. The man is a menace to life and liberty and has no business serving in this capacity. The Catholic League found 16 serious flaws with his nomination. While we sent our detailed list of complaints to the Senate, they voted 50-49 to confirm him as Secretary of HHS.

In October, President Biden nominated Joseph Donnelly to be

the new U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See. When Donnelly served as a congressman, he was largely pro-life, but when he became a U.S. Senator, he pivoted and joined the pro-abortion camp. There is a reason why Donnelly was co-chair of Catholics for Biden. Like our “devout Catholic” president, he turned rogue.

Biden additionally nominated Dr. Atul Gawande to serve as the assistant administrator of USAID’s Bureau for Global Health. Gawande is a pro-abortion zealot writing a graphic piece for Slate in 1998 defending partial birth abortion. If this was not enough, several of his colleagues in the past objected to his utilitarian ethics. The Catholic League supported efforts to defeat his confirmation led by Sen. Marco Rubio. However, at the end of the year, Gawande was confirmed by a vote of 48-31 in a deal that included multiple other nominees.

We did better at securing victories on the state level.

In January, North Dakota State Sen. Judy Lee introduced legislation that would bust the seal of the confessional. The Catholic League quickly jumped into the fray. We mobilized our supporters to put pressure on the legislators to kill this bill. Soon after our supporters expressed their outrage, the legislation was withdrawn.

Another major victory we scored this year, ensuring the due process rights of accused priests, was in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. On July 21, the court ruled 5-2 that the statute of limitations begins when an alleged crime took place not when the so-called victim recalls the alleged offense. In their ruling, the court cited an amicus brief from the law firm Jones Day hired by the Catholic League.

Over the summer, we learned that Judicial Watch was representing the Center for Medical Progress in a quest to obtain documentation of alleged human organ harvesting at the University of Pittsburgh. According to their probe, organs

were harvested while the baby's heart was still beating.

On August 17, Bill Donohue wrote to Pennsylvania Auditor General, Timothy L. DeFoor, asking him to determine whether state and federal funds were being used by Pitt for arguably criminal activity. This was another victory because in September the university agreed to have its fetal tissue research practices independently reviewed.

While the forces of the federal government working against traditional Catholic values created challenges, we unfortunately witnessed a massive sea change on the part of the corporations.

For instance, Major League Baseball (MLB) decided to get involved in politics and promote social justice causes in America; however, MLB has no problem working with Communist China to increase revenue. This is the same communist regime that is committing the biggest violation of human rights, particularly the right to religious liberty, in the world today. To call out MLB for this hypocrisy, Bill Donohue wrote an open letter to the Commissioner of Baseball, Rob Manfred, and called on our supporters to contact him as well. Manfred got belted by our email base.

To cite another example, Cigna's employment policy reads like something that was penned by some fanatical dean on a college campus. Asking employees if they are Christian is troubling, but what makes it so serious is that it is being done for malicious reasons. Instructing Christian staffers that they are unjustly benefiting from what Cigna calls "religious privilege" is obscene. When we listed the email contact for the head media staffer, our subscribers jumped on it and registered their outrage.

Disney has a long history of offending Catholics. For many years, it partnered with the movie distribution company, Miramax, owned by Bob and Harvey Weinstein, releasing a series

of anti-Catholic films. When it took over ABC, it was responsible for more bigoted fare.

In today's woke culture, Disney has apologized to just about every group they have offended over the years. Every group except for Catholics that is. To remedy this, we once again enlisted our supporters to express their ire with this situation to the head honchos at Disney.

While corporations are largely succumbing to cancel culture and woke ideologies, the Catholic League continued to fight and has been successful in making them relent on some of their more egregious violations.

On January 24, Catholic World Report (CWR) received notice from Twitter that its account had been locked for hateful conduct when it described HHS Assistant Secretary Rachel Levine as "a biological man identifying as a transgender woman."

Three hours after we listed the email address of a key official at Twitter, asking our subscribers to protest its decision to freeze CWR's account, Twitter reversed itself.

Institutions of higher learning have long used their positions to promote radical left-wing causes. In 2021, we have seen this radical spirit seep down into larger swaths of the education establishment.

A sex education bill was being considered in some states that was the most wildly irresponsible assault on common decency and common sense ever proposed. It had little to do with sex education; rather, it was a radical sex engineering bill. Indeed, it was the most extreme attempt to transform the norms and values of young people ever envisioned. We fought it and will continue to do so wherever it appears.

As the new school year began, what children learn became one of the biggest flash points in the culture war. With this as

our backdrop, the Catholic League reviewed many prominent history and government textbooks.

One thing became abundantly apparent from our deep dive into these textbooks; namely, the current curriculum provides a biased perspective against traditional and Catholic values. By and large, these textbooks present religion, traditional values, and conservatism in a negative light.

In 2021, activist organizations also joined the culture war on Catholicism.

The bishops were their favorite targets. Ultimately, this stemmed from Biden's radical departures from Catholic teachings. On June 16, the bishops met to discuss how to address this situation. They agreed to formulate a teaching document on the Eucharist. On November 15, they met to complete their task. While the final document did not address the problems Biden created, that did not stop the activists from attacking them.

We often heard that the bishops were partisan hacks attacking Biden to do the Republican Party's bidding. They were wrong to make such a claim. *The Catholic League issued a report showing that some bishops gave praise or criticism to presidents from both parties based on particular policies.*

Nevertheless, the National Catholic Reporter continued to promote this idea. We reached out to our supporters who kindly bombarded the Reporter with emails.

In addition to the Reporter, Faithful America and Faith in Public Life, two groups funded by atheist billionaire and Catholic-hater George Soros, also attacked the bishops. Again, our supporters let their voices be heard.

However, attacks on the bishops were not limited to failed journalists or Soros-funded paid activists. Even politicians heaped insults on the bishop. Rep. Jared Huffman tweeted, "If

they're [the Catholic bishops] going to politically weaponize religion by 'rebuking' Democrats who support women's reproductive choice, then a 'rebuke' of their tax-exempt status may be in order." After our supporters lambasted him, he changed his tune.

Unfortunately, the activists did not just limit their attacks on the Church to insults and threats. In 2021, we saw a continuation of the vandalism and destruction of Catholic property.

If there was one Catholic target the activists loved going after in 2021, it was St. Junípero Serra. The 18th century priest did more for the rights of indigenous peoples than any of his contemporaries, yet activists across California, including Gov. Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, have removed his statue and name from the public square.

Even this year's commemoration of September 11th offered the activists a chance to attack. At least for patriotic Americans, the 20th anniversary of 9/11 carries great significance, but it has a special meaning for Christians. We recalled the sacrifice of millions of faithful Americans who have given their lives to defend this great nation over the years. The activists used the occasion to compare faithful Americans to the Taliban.

Over Thanksgiving, it was revealed that the Salvation Army's elites made common cause with the activists in promulgating Critical Race Theory. The International Salvation Army issued a lengthy report, "Let's Talk About Racism," that accuses white people of being racists and therefore must apologize while arguing that America is an inherently racist society.

The Catholic League issued a comprehensive report analyzing the initial statement from the Salvation Army and the hypocrisy in their efforts to cover their tracks. Once again,

our supporters expressed their ire and hopefully the elites at the Salvation Army will stop this nonsense that gives a bad name to their noble volunteers.

It is all the rage among elites in many quarters to sanction sex transitioning for minors. The Catholic League had enough of this madness and called it for what it is—child abuse.

We raised the alarm all year on this issue. Over the summer, we produced a detailed report that highlighted the most serious physical and psychological harm that these procedures can cause. Additionally, we looked at how the subject is taught in school.

In 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court made several strong rulings defending religious liberty. First, the Court dealt a blow to church restrictions in California. This led to a slew of victories over states limiting the ability to worship. Later in the year, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Catholic foster care agencies can reject gay couples from adopting children. This was a huge victory for religious liberty.

However, not everyone is a fan of religious liberty. For instance, at the end of the year, Mollie Paige Mumau, who was listed as a member of the board of directors for the National Education Association (NEA), took to social media attacking those who sought a religious exemption from vaccine mandates. She specifically said they deserved to lose their jobs, get seriously ill, and die. Additionally, she recommended that they be shot for not getting the vaccine.

Bill Donohue sent a letter to the NEA urging the leadership to remove Mumau from her position on the board. Within a week, she was no longer employed at her school leaving her with no standing in education. The Catholic League was the only civil rights group in the nation to weigh in on this fight.

Another fight the Catholic League found itself embroiled in

December revolved around politicians sharing Christmas pictures on Twitter that had nothing to do with Christmas. Bill Donohue contacted the offices of Rep. Thomas Massie and Rep. Lauren Boebert when they shared pictures of their families in front of Christmas trees with guns. He asked them to remember that Christmas is not about the 2nd Amendment, but instead it is about Jesus.

Speaking of Christmas displays, the Catholic League continued its decades long tradition of displaying a nativity scene in Central Park. We do this every year not only to honor the birth of Christ, but also to help educate others who wish to display a Crèche on public property about the rules.

Just days before Christmas, we had a very satisfying ending to a dispute with Costco. The editorial director of the store's monthly magazine, *Costco Connection*, wrote a short essay in the December edition about the month's holidays. He insulted Christians with a short and snide account of Christmas. By contrast, he offered a longer and glowing treatment of Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. Our email subscribers jumped all over this and let him know what they thought of his article. He then nervously called Bill Donohue trying to walk it back. But the damage was done, and he got nowhere with Bill, who set him straight.

Ultimately, the forces working against us will fail, and no small part of their inevitable failure stems from the Catholic League's dogged determination to fight for what is right. We will continue to speak the truth and boldly take a stand.

In a bold defense of the Church, Bill Donohue released his new book *The Truth About Clergy Sexual Abuse: Clarifying the Facts and the Causes*. In its pages, he sets the record straight and defends the Church.

Additionally, the Catholic League launched a new YouTube series. The "Catholic League Forum" takes a timely look at the

big issues threatening our Church and freedoms in pithy and entertaining segments.

With so many forces working against us, the Catholic League not only continues to find new ways to fight but more importantly score significant victories. While no one can guarantee what 2022 might bring, with the fantastic support of our members, the Catholic League will continue the staunch defense of the Church and undoubtedly secure more victories.

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# **CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2020 YEAR IN REVIEW**

## **CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2020 YEAR IN REVIEW**

**Bill Donohue**

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.

Almost all of those whom we seek to help are from the United States, but there are exceptions. The most notable one for us in 2020 was Australian Cardinal George Pell. After years of being dragged through the courts for crimes he never committed, he was finally exonerated on April 6 when Australia's High Court unanimously overturned his conviction on five counts. The whole controversy was a sham from the very beginning.

I was proud to tell the media of our role. Starting on March 12, 2013, we issued 24 news releases in our defense of the beleaguered cardinal. Our statements to the media were widely distributed in Australia and the United States. "This will go down in history as one of the most egregious instances of

injustice ever visited upon a high-ranking member of the Catholic clergy," I said.

In the United States, 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.]

Tlaib has a history of using filthy language, so what she said was not a shocker. Still, she is a sitting congresswoman and deserved to be sanctioned. We did not have any illusion about her being reprimanded—Congress is not good about levying penalties against their own—but we knew our request would become part of her personnel file, so if she were to act up again, it would raise the chances of her being sanctioned.

We know Tlaib got stung: after getting 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.

We predicted that Barrett would not have to endure the kind of barrage against her that she experienced in 2017. We were right. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who accused Barrett of being driven by Catholic dogma, pulled back this time, making sure not to make any more anti-Catholic remarks. Ditto for Sen. Dick Durbin. He had made Catholic-baiting comments when Barrett was up for the appellate seat. He tamed himself this time around.

In our defense of Barrett, we issued 10 news releases, garnering 32 media hits, putting everyone on notice. We also mobilized Catholics to contact Senator Charles Grassley, who chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2017; they did so in droves, as Grassley himself admitted. It was too close to the election to go down this road 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. Many cities and states were run by mayors and governors who abused their office, overreaching their authority. While emergency situations beckon emergency decrees, the uneven, and indeed unjust, application of shutdowns in many parts of the country were cause for grave concern.

On March 27, at the beginning of the shutdowns, I enunciated the Catholic League's position. "Whenever religious liberty collides with public health, the government is obliged to put the least restrictive measures on religion." A few weeks later, we supported U.S. District Judge Justin Walker when he invoked a temporary restraining order blocking Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer's ban on drive-in church services.

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.

It wasn't just the initial reaction of government officials that proved to be worrisome: the ACLU got into the act supporting the shutdowns. This appeared strange given the organization's defense of individual rights and its historic

disregard for any other issue, whether it be national security or civil unrest. Yet as I have shown in two books and many articles on the ACLU, it is anything but a principled organization. I issued a lengthy analysis of its hypocritical handling of the legal issues attendant to the shutdowns.

The ACLU took advantage of Covid-19 by suing California Gov. Gavin Newsom for not letting convicted felons out of prison. This was hardly a shocker: the civil libertarians have long been opposed to prisons. It also rallied to the defense of protestors who violated social distancing rules, making an exception to its newly found interest in public health.

Matters came to a head when New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor de Blasio okayed mobs taking to the streets to protest racial injustice—often engaging in violence—while putting restrictions on houses of worship. At the end of June, U.S. District Court Judge Gary Sharpe issued a preliminary injunction, saying they exceeded their authority. He also chided them for “encouraging what they knew was a flagrant disregard for the outdoor limits and social distancing rules.”

At the end of the year, Cuomo put more restrictions on certain neighborhoods in Brooklyn. His latest edict put severe limits on the number of people who could attend churches or synagogues. He admitted that his occupancy limits would be “most impactful on houses of worship.” That was not too smart. The U.S. Supreme Court informed him that he exceeded his authority and that his order could not be implemented, pending a review by the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals.

The high court did the same thing to California Gov. Gavin Newsom a week later. His draconian restrictions were put on hold while the district judge who approved his order reviewed the ruling against Cuomo. These were two key victories for religious liberty, and Justice Amy Coney Barrett proved to be decisive in both cases.

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.

What Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan called “The Summer of Love” turned out to be “The Summer of Hate.” The hate mongers voiced their hatred of America and of Western civilization, tearing down iconic statues on public property. They also targeted churches, many of which were Catholic. It kept the Catholic League busy seeking to answer the deluge of media calls. We detailed the damage that was done.

Bibles were burned, churches were torched, schools were trashed, and Catholic graves were defaced. The vandals also destroyed statues of Saint Junípero Serra, the 18th-century missionary priest who did more to secure human rights for Indians than anyone else. We contacted the District Attorney of Marin County supporting a plea by San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone asking that the six vandals who toppled the statue of Saint Serra in San Rafael on October 12 be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

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 Shows” (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.

Media bias is most often reflected in the content of their stories. But sometimes there are acts of omission that reflect bias. Such was the case when the bishops' conference released the latest data on clergy sexual abuse in late June.

It was revealed that during the period July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019, 37 allegations had been made by current minors against almost 50,000 priests and deacons. During this time, 8 of the allegations were substantiated, 7 were unsubstantiated, 6 were unable to be proven, 12 were still being investigated, 3 were referred to religious orders, and 1 was referred to another diocese.

This means that .016% of the allegations made could be substantiated. To put it differently, 99.98% of priests and deacons (there are twice as many priests) did not have a substantiated accusation made against them. The media failed to report this. Worse, those who prepared the document and shared the data failed to do the computation. They always do.

Education is another source of anti-Catholicism, especially these days. We scored a victory, which was shared with others, when our fight against public control of private schools in New York State won. We beat back an initiative that would have allowed the public school industry the right to police Catholic and other private schools. We fought this in 2018 and 2019, outlining to state education officials our objections. In 2020, the power grab was shelved.

Teaching students to hate America is very popular among

radical educators. There is nothing new about this, save for the fact that the desire to do so has penetrated the textbooks used by elementary and secondary students, not just college students. Matters got worse when the *New York Times* rolled out its "1619 Project," a curriculum-centered program that teaches students how racist America is.

Students learn that America was not founded in 1776 in a fight for liberty; they learn it was founded in 1619 in a fight for slavery. Of course, they learn that Christians were responsible for slavery.

We struck back. We sent to every school district that had adopted the "1619 Project" a detailed history of the racist legacy of the *New York Times*. The family that started the newspaper were slave owners. The racist commentary and the racist workplace of the *Times* were amply cited. We told the educators who received our work on this issue that they had a moral obligation to tell their students the truth about the racist origins and developments of the "newspaper of record."

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.

We heard from students, alumni, the campus newspaper, the head of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission, and the media. Castro would not talk to anyone, but we sure did. At the very least, his behavior is now part of his public record.

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. No matter, the Catholic League will be up to the battle.

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# **CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2019 YEAR IN REVIEW**

**Bill Donohue**

When the year began, I was anxiously awaiting an opportunity to defend the Catholic Church in one of those storied debates sponsored by the Oxford Union. The debate was scheduled for February. But in early January, about a month after being invited, I was disinvited.

We learned that some sources in the U.S. notified those in the U.K. about me, giving them information they deemed problematic. Why invite someone who may win when the pretext of the debate was to put the Catholic Church on the defensive? So while the Oxford Union proved to be cowardly, we took their decision as a backhanded compliment. It was a smart move on their part. It was also intellectually dishonest.

On the education front at home, students from Covington Catholic High School in Kentucky were slammed by the media for abusing an Indian activist in our nation's capital at a March for Life event. A video of the event surfaced showing the activist approaching the students, looking for a confrontation. We called out those who unfairly attacked the students, and there were quite a few who did, including

Catholics. The students behaved well, unlike the activist, the media, and pundits.

When those in the arts, education, the entertainment industry, and the media go after Catholics, they usually assault our sensibilities. Bad as that is, nothing is worse than having the heavy hand of government chime in: the power of the state is unparalleled.

In this regard, there was bad news and good news in 2019. The bad news is the extent of such assaults at both the state and federal levels. The good news is the Catholic League was on the winning side in case after case.

Senators Kamala Harris and Mazie Hirono showed their anti-Catholic colors by attacking a Catholic nominee for a job on the federal bench. Brian Buescher was nominated to serve on the U.S. District Court of Nebraska, but his alleged crime was his membership in the Knights of Columbus.

The senators reckoned that there was no place in government for practicing Catholics. To wit: The Knights accept the Church's teachings on marriage, the family, and sexuality, and that is a non-starter for those wedded to the gay and pro-abortion agendas.

We were among the first to come to bat for Buescher, and our effort paid off. After much haggling, he was seated on the court in August.

There was a Trump nominee for a seat on the U.S. District Court for Western Michigan that we took issue with. Michael Bogren said there was no difference between Catholic farm owners refusing to rent their property for the purpose of a gay wedding and the Klan's right to discriminate against blacks.

We contacted every member of the Senate Judiciary Committee expressing our concerns about his remarks, calling on the

chairman of the Committee, Sen. Lindsey Graham, to reject his nomination. Bogren got the message—the tide was turning against him—and he withdrew his nomination on June 11.

When Ralph Northam, the governor of Virginia, appointed an out-and-out anti-Catholic bigot, Gail Gordon Donegan, to a state council on women's issues, we went into high gear: we launched a massive protest, enlisting everyone on our email list. Three days later she resigned.

Rep. Brian Sims is another anti-Catholic bigot. The Pennsylvania legislator badgered an elderly Catholic woman for eight uninterrupted minutes because she was praying outside a Planned Parenthood abortion clinic. His behavior, which was unprovoked, followed an occasion where he aggressively attempted to intimidate teenage girls, hoping to stop them from protesting against abortion.

We contacted the Chairman of the Committee on Ethics, seeking censure. When that effort failed (the operative code dealt with conflict of interest issues), we redoubled our efforts. This time we supported a resolution to censure Sims broached by Rep. Jerry Knowles. After the summer recess, Sims, feeling the pressure, did something he previously refused to do: he apologized to the woman whom he victimized.

Our most satisfying victory of the year was the massive email campaign we orchestrated opposing an effort by a California lawmaker to break the seal of Confession.

This scurrilous attempt to allow the government to encroach on the religious rights of Catholic priests and their penitents was met with a frontal assault. California State Senator Jerry Hill introduced a bill that would require the clergy to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the authorities, without regard to circumstances.

Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez led the fight and we stood side-by-side with him. Hill was forced to amend his bill, but

while it was an improvement, it was still objectionable. On June 12, I wrote to Hill about his bill.

“Regarding SB 360, you have been quoted as saying that ‘the clergy-penitent privilege has been abused on a large scale, resulting in underreported and systemic abuse of thousands of children across multiple denominations and faiths.’ Could you please provide my office with documentation to support that claim? I will not be coy: I don’t believe you can. But go ahead and prove me wrong.”

He never replied. What was he going to say?

We continued to fight Hill, and succeeded in eliciting over 7,000 emails, letters that were sent to those on both sides of the issue. On July 8, on the eve of a scheduled hearing on his initiative, he withdrew his bill.

Dana Nessel, Michigan’s Attorney General, has it out for Catholics. In February, she held a press conference on a state investigation into allegations of clergy sexual abuse. She hit below the belt when she told residents to “ask to see their badge and not their rosary” when contacted by investigators. She never sought to badger any other segment of the population.

We unloaded on Nessel on several occasions, and the good news is that both lawmakers and judges finally caught on to her act.

Michigan State Rep. Beau LaFave called her out for saying that a retired Catholic judge should not have been hired by Michigan State University to address sexual abuse. She complained about his ties to the Catholic Church, as if that should be a disqualifier.

A federal district court judge in Michigan who upheld the religious freedom of a Catholic foster care and adoption agency specifically cited Nessel’s “religious targeting” of

Catholics. He was unstinting in his rebuke of her anti-Catholic bigotry.

In Pennsylvania, for the second consecutive year, the Catholic League filed an *amicus curiae* brief in the courts defending the rights of priests. We appealed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in support of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown decision to fight a Superior Court's use of a grand jury report as the starting point in triggering the statutes of limitation. It was unprecedented: it sought to change the practice of allowing the clock to start at the time of the injury. At the end of the year, a decision was still pending.

U.S. Attorney General Bill Barr gave a rousing speech on religious liberty at Notre Dame Law School in the fall. What he said was historically accurate and sociologically astute. Yet he set off a firestorm of criticism. We vigorously defended him.

Some sought to shut down his free speech. Faithful America, a radical entity that was initially bankrolled by atheist billionaire George Soros, launched a petition drive asking the Justice Department's Inspector General and Office of Professional Responsibility to investigate him for allegedly violating his duty to guarantee religious liberty. We struck back with a petition drive in support of him.

Perhaps nothing caused more excitement in Catholic circles in 2019 than the 6,000-word essay by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on the origins of clergy sexual abuse. He was attacked by left-wing Catholic intellectuals and others for daring to cite the role of the sexual revolution, the role played by homosexual priests, and the role of dissent in the Church, as causative agents of the scandal. What he said was undeniably true and we were only too happy to defend him. He is a brilliant and courageous man.

Media bias is nothing new but when *USA Today* ran a lengthy

story in early October singling out the Catholic Church for fighting unjust legislation, and the Associated Press (AP) followed within 24 hours with a flawed survey of former priests accused of sexual misconduct, it made us wonder what was going on.

The Catholic Church has been the victim of religious profiling for many years. State laws suspending the statutes of limitation for crimes involving the sexual abuse of minors have long given a pass to the public schools, as well as other entities. We took *USA Today* to task for trying to intimidate Catholics for pushing back. Our email subscribers gave the reporters a piece of their mind; the paper's response was as flatulent as it was defensive.

We also delivered a message to AP for questioning why the Catholic Church doesn't track every accused priest who either left ministry or was tossed. There is no law requiring any institution to play GPS cop on former employees who left under accusations of a criminal act. The reporters really showed their true colors when they went so far as to complain that the Church doesn't demand that accused priests who are no longer in ministry register as sex offenders. *No accused person is registered as a sex offender unless he has been convicted.*

When the *USA Today* and the AP stories broke, just one day apart in early October, we thought that would be the end of such non-stories. In fact, it was just the beginning.

The idea that the Church should not defend itself the way every other organization does was mimicked by the *Star-Gazette* in upstate New York; it appeared the month after the *USA Today* piece ran. We also learned that even before the *USA Today* story ran, CBS and NBC, as well as internet sites, were screaming about all the money the Church was paying for lobbyists. A law firm, SeegerWeiss, was tabulating the data. Yet all of these organizations do not hesitate to acquire the

best defense attorneys money can buy when they are in the hot seat.

In November, the Wisconsin affiliate of National Public Radio did a hit job on the Church by dragging up old cases of abuse. Is there any institution in the nation that could not be subjected to the same scrutiny? In December, CNN weighed in with the most inane story of them all.

“Pedophile Priests Operated at this California School for Decades.” The CNN story was about one school in California; it examined cases dating back to the 1950s. Its title was factually wrong: every alleged victim was a male high school teenager, meaning that it was homosexual priests (as usual) who were the offenders. The story never mentioned any new cases.

For years the media have been lecturing the Church about keeping molesting priests in ministry for too long. What happens when the abusers get the boot? The media complain that the Church is required to police them. How about other employers? Are they expected to “supervise” ex-employees who have been fired for sexual misconduct? No. The “rule” only applies to the Catholic Church.

After AP ran its story in October, similar stories appeared the next month in the *Denver Post*, *USA Today*, and WCPQ-TV Cincinnati (the ABC affiliate). When we researched if there were any stories like this done on non-Catholic organizations, we found none.

AP ran an unfair story in November and a fair one in December. The former was an investigation into the way diocesan review boards handle cases of alleged abuse; the latter was an update on all the states that were conducting an investigation into past cases of abuse.

What was the problem about the story on the review boards? It was the suggestion that defense attorneys hired by the Church

were somehow unfair when they grilled the accusers. That is what they are supposed to do. Should the Church go easy on those who are making serious charges about an offense that took place decades ago, and where in all likelihood some, if not all, of the parties to the case are dead?

Just before and after Thanksgiving, NBC ran a series of stories about Church employees and their views on a range of Church issues. As with the fair AP story, I was interviewed for this big report. I was treated fairly in both instances, and the overall coverage was also fairly done.

There are so many wholly indefensible comments made about priests on TV, especially by late-night talk-show hosts, it is hard to keep up with them all. In 2019, it was not Bill Maher who took first prize, it was Trevor Noah of "The Daily Show."

Noah got so vulgar and vicious on his Comedy Central show that in the spring we hand-delivered a searing letter to 22 top executives at Viacom (the owner of Comedy Central) asking them to rein him in. "There are other options we can take," I said, "and I will not hold back. But I thought I should at least apprise you of this matter now in the hope that we won't have to pursue other options."

Noah got the message and pivoted: He laid off the Church.

As expected, organized atheists attacked Christians at Christmastime, but what was different in 2019 was the brazenness of these groups—they attempted to cash in on Christmas.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State sent out a survey as part of its bid to gain new membership; it portrayed those who support religious liberty as proponents of discrimination. According to these militant secularists, anyone who accepts the biblical teachings on marriage and the family is a bigot out to sunder the rights of homosexuals.

Freedom From Religion Foundation ran a full-page ad in the *New York Times* that demonized Christians for exercising their First Amendment right to religious liberty. They accused them of trying to impose a “theocracy” on the nation. This was pure demagoguery pushed by atheist extremists.

In both instances, these religion-hating organizations—they hate Christians the most, holding a special place for Catholics—used Christmas to raise money while bashing us. It was a new low. If white racists used Black History month to make money while bashing blacks everyone would brand them as opportunists as well as racists. This is what the religion haters did in 2019 to Christians.

We ended the year with the publication of a booklet I wrote, “The ACLU at 100,” that chronicled the history of the organization in time for its centennial in January 2020. I sought to debunk the myth that it is a non-partisan institution. I also challenged its reputation as a force for freedom in America. It was based on my two books on the ACLU, as well as new material.

The year 2019 led the Catholic League into battle on many fronts, and we came away with many key victories. This is a tribute to the Catholic League staff and, importantly, to our supporters, without whom we would never be able to score a single victory.

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**CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS  
AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2018 YEAR IN**

# REVIEW

## CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2018 YEAR IN REVIEW

**Bill Donohue**

Victory is sweet, even if it takes what seems like an eternity to secure. In January, we protested the most obscene anti-Catholic play ever produced, “Jerry Springer: The Opera,” but we didn’t know the outcome of our efforts until November. When we won, the wait was well worth it.

Over the years, we’ve protested lots of vile attacks stemming from the artistic community: sometimes we lead a demonstration, and sometimes we seek to have the exhibition pulled (especially when public funds are involved). This time we chose a different strategy: we implored the president to pick a responsible chairman to lead the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). President Donald Trump did just that in November when he chose Mary Anne Carter.

“Jerry Springer: The Opera” received NEA funds via the production company, The New Group, an Off-Broadway site. We decided that the most effective way to stop using public funds to assault Catholic sensibilities was to get the right person to run the NEA. That led to a press conference at the National Press Club on January 23.

Joining me at the event was Dr. Deal Hudson, president of the Morley Institute on Church and Culture and a member of the Catholic League’s board of directors; Brent Bozell, president of the Media Research Center and member of the Catholic League’s advisory board; and Ralph Reed, chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition.

On January 24, I wrote to President Trump asking him to nominate a responsible chairman of the NEA, and the next day I

challenged Dr. Jane Chu, the sitting NEA head, to justify spending public funds on Catholic hate speech. We exchanged letters. Soon after Carter was selected as acting chairman of the NEA, and on November 1 she was officially nominated to succeed Dr. Chu.

In March, we had a role in an important victory when New York City officials decided not to take down the statue of Columbus in Columbus Circle. Here's how our contribution evolved.

I had testified at the end of 2017 questioning the propriety of honoring Frederick Douglass, the ex-slave who had done great work opposing slavery but was nonetheless an anti-Catholic bigot (I did not support taking down his statue in Central Park). I also used the occasion to ask officials not to cave in to political correctness by dishonoring Columbus, a view that was shared by other Catholics who testified. Common sense prevailed and Columbus Circle was not altered.

We had another stellar victory at the end of March when Connecticut Supreme Court Judge Andrew McDonald failed in his bid to become Chief Justice. He was defeated March 27 by a vote of 19-16.

We had locked horns with McDonald when he was a state senator. In 2011, he introduced a bill that was an unprecedented power grab: the government would take over the fiscal and administrative decisions of the Catholic Church in Connecticut. Moreover, lay Catholics would be authorized to run the internal affairs of their parish, throwing the pastor overboard. McDonald failed, largely due to the efforts of then-Bridgeport Bishop William Lori, with strong support from the Catholic League. McDonald then became a Supreme Court judge.

When McDonald sought to become Chief Justice, we were galvanized once again. He tried to portray himself as the victim of an anti-gay campaign, but it didn't work. As I told

the media, *"There was not one person or group identified in all of these stories who has said anything anti-gay about him."* In fact, only McDonald's fellow Democrats drew attention to his homosexual status.

We had reason to claim another victory in June when our efforts, along with that of others, paid off: an attempt to silence the voice of the clergy dealing with the sex education curriculum in Fairfax, Virginia failed.

I put the following question to school authorities: "Is the Fairfax County school board prepared to spend large sums of money on a lawsuit challenging its discriminatory initiative?" Fortunately, the school board voted down a proposal that would have stopped the clergy from counseling young people beset with sexual problems.

Everyone is affected by the pop culture, and this is especially true of young people. Many TV shows are not only unfair to those who hold traditional moral values—they are routinely disparaged—those who are practicing Christians are further ridiculed. In 2018, no one beat Samantha Bee, whose TBS show, "Full Frontal," was positively crude.

Bee began the year bashing Catholics on an almost weekly basis. But she really crossed the line in the spring when she invoked the "C-word" to describe the president's daughter, Ivanka. We had had enough.

We started a boycott of select sponsors, choosing those with a family-friendly reputation. In a matter of a few months, we managed to get the following companies to stop advertising on Bee's show: Verizon, Procter and Gamble, Wendy's, Ashley HomeStore, the Wonderful Company (maker of pistachios), Popeyes, and Burger King.

Bee got the message and stopped with her vicious attacks on Catholics (and the president's daughter). We halted our boycott in the fall, pledging to monitor her show for any

future offenses.

Nothing consumed us more in 2018 than the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. It was back in the news over the summer and the fall, angering Catholics who were hit with new revelations about old cases. Our job, as always, was to fight wrongdoing against the Church without ever defending wrongdoing by the Church. We had our work cut out for ourselves.

There were three big stories that dominated the news. One was an accusation made against Cardinal Theodore McCarrick that he molested a minor decades ago; it was New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan who made public the charge (his own commission on this subject found the accusation to be credible). The second issue was the release of a Pennsylvania grand jury report on clergy sexual abuse extending back to World War II. The third matter was the decision by Pope Francis to block efforts by the U.S. bishops to adopt new rules governing episcopal accountability.

The first and third stories involved internal Church issues, and were therefore outside of our purview. But the second story was right up our alley: we protested the lack of due process afforded the accused, as well as clear falsehoods contained in the grand jury report.

When the grand jury report was released, I wrote a lengthy rebuttal, seeking to correct many myths that colored most media accounts. No one had been found guilty of anything, and none of the accused had a chance to tell his side of the story. That's because almost all the cases stemmed from the last century and most of the accused were either dead or out of ministry.

No other institution was subjected to this kind of scrutiny: for example, other religious institutions, as well as the public schools, were let off scot free. Catholics, I argued,

were being played—they were being set up to believe the worst about their religion absent any comparative data on other organizations.

We did not take this lying down. We secured the work of a Pittsburgh law firm, Porter Wright Morris & Arthur; the attorneys challenged several aspects of the grand jury report that was released by Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro. He was not unknown to Catholics in the Keystone state, having singled out the Church before in order to impugn its moral authority.

On September 21, the law firm filed an *amicus curiae* brief in the Western District of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. Our position was unambiguous: anyone who hurts a minor must be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, but such investigations and prosecutions must be conducted in accordance with the protections required by the United States Constitution and the Pennsylvania Constitution.

At the end of October, the CBS show, “60 Minutes,” got into the act by doing a segment on Buffalo Bishop Richard J. Malone. He had admitted making a few bad decisions but defended his overall record. From our perspective, it was the questionable remarks made by Malone’s former executive assistant, and the incredible duplicity of CBS—it had had its fair share of predators in high-ranking jobs but never turned its “60 Minutes” cameras on them—that deserved to be exposed.

From the end of November to the beginning of December, I had an email exchange with top officials at the *Boston Globe* over a study the newspaper did, along with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, on the way U.S. bishops have handled cases of clergy sexual abuse. It proved to be revealing.

The two newspapers made a big news splash at the beginning of November when they released the findings of a study which claimed that one-third of current bishops—more than 130—have

been “accused” during their careers of “inadequately” responding to sexual abuse. The study appeared just prior to a bishops’ conference in Baltimore, which dealt with this subject.

I have a nose for this kind of thing. This explains my use of quotation marks. Accused by whom? And on what basis was the determination made that the response was inadequate? I also sensed that probably no one ever asked to see the raw data. So I did.

The week before Thanksgiving, I emailed Brian McGrory, editor of the *Boston Globe*, asking permission to examine the court records, media reports and transcripts of interviews that reporters had with church officials, victims, and attorneys. When he didn’t answer, I asked again, this time mailing the request to his office.

After Thanksgiving, I received an email from Scott Allen, Assistant Managing Editor for Projects. He said I could not see the data because the newspaper decided not to publish it. I then asked to be given permission to at least read the transcripts of the interviews (which had been my real interest all along), but was again turned down.

Allen said they decided not to publish the transcripts on their website, so therefore I couldn’t see them. I asked why they wouldn’t post them, and he replied that they conduct interviews all the time and don’t publish the transcripts. Here is how I responded.

“But this is different. This is not a news story. I am a sociologist who is interested in seeing the raw data of a research project whose conclusions have been made public. It is common practice in professional research undertakings to make public the data upon which the conclusions have been made.”

That was the end of the exchange.

These newspaper officials demand total transparency from the bishops, wanting to see every entry in every priest personnel file, but their interest in transparency is a one-way street—it never applies to them.

It was a source of great satisfaction that I exposed the two newspapers for failing to cooperate. I can just imagine which victims' leaders, and their Church-suing attorneys, were selected for an interview. I have long called many of them out, showing them to be liars.

On December 3, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in a 6-1 decision that the Pennsylvania grand jury report on the Catholic clergy cannot make public the names of 11 priests who challenged the release of their identities; they claimed that doing so would violate their constitutional rights as guaranteed by the state constitution.

The Catholic League *amicus curiae* brief, which was cited in the court ruling, proved victorious.

The priests maintained that they did not have an opportunity to challenge the accusations made against them to the grand jury. Moreover, they said the report contained "false, misleading, incorrect and unsupported assertions." Thus, their reputations would be smeared if their names were not permanently redacted. The court agreed.

Had all the priests in Pennsylvania who were named in the report taken the same position as the plaintiffs—none were given a realistic chance to rebut the charges (many were dead)—the grand jury report would have imploded.

This was a sweet victory for priests' rights. It was enormously gratifying that we played a role.

Less than a week before Christmas, the Illinois Attorney General issued a report on the Catholic clergy. Lisa Madigan said her probe was inspired by the Pennsylvania grand jury

report that was released in August. She did not explain why she did not launch an investigation of the Illinois public schools following an incredible story in June by the *Chicago Tribune* on rampant sexual abuse in Chicago's public schools going on in 2018.

Nor did Madigan explain why she found fault with the way Church officials defined "credible" and "substantiated" accusations. On what grounds did her office make such determinations? She never identified what specific cases her office found where allegations should have been deemed "credible" or "substantiated." In other words, her office failed to *substantiate its claims*.

In early December, Tom Perez, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, spoke to a liberal gathering in Washington, D.C., and proceeded to berate Christians. He said Democrats have a hard time getting their message across when millions get their political cues from

"Fox News, their NRA newsletter, and the pulpit on Sunday."

Perez unloaded on the clergy and the faithful, making a veiled stab at President Trump. "That person on the pulpit is saying, 'ignore everything else that this person is doing. We have to focus on one issue of *Roe v. Wade*.' And people buy it because that's their only source." He never apologized for insulting the intelligence of Christians.

Christmas continues to be the focus of the ongoing culture war, and 2018 was no different.

We erected our life-size nativity scene in Central Park, as we have for over two decades. We also took this opportunity to make it a teaching moment: it is not unconstitutional to place religious symbols on public property unadorned by secular symbols *if* the spot is regarded as a public forum, open to artists, musicians, and others.

We called attention to places such as Rehoboth, Delaware which banned a nativity scene from being displayed in its Bandstand: it is a public forum and can allow religious symbols. The mayor caught flack from the community after we weighed in against him.

Some public schools continued to war on Christmas, most spectacularly Manchester Elementary School, which is part of the Elkhorn Public Schools in Nebraska. School officials banned displays of Santa Claus, Christmas trees, Christmas songs, the colors red and green, and candy canes. They were sued and the plaintiffs won.

The year 2018 proved to be a tough one for the Catholic Church. We are happy to say, however, that we had our fair share of victories. That is something all our members can be proud of, for without them, none of this would have happened.

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# **CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2017 YEAR IN REVIEW**

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**Bill Donohue**

“The election of Donald Trump may signal a change for the better on religious liberty issues. We will know in due course.” That is how I concluded the “2016 Year in Review.”

Trump’s persona is difficult to take, but his policies on religious liberty are a welcome change from the decisions

rendered by the Obama administration. It is not even a close call.

“Trump Will Be Religion Friendly.” That is the title of an article I wrote in the first edition of *Catalyst in 2017*. I cited some of his appointees as evidence, one of whom, Betsy DeVos, came under heavy fire for her support for school choice; she does not believe in discriminating against religious schools.

“There is one more important consideration,” I noted. “To the extent that Trump makes appointing pro-life judges a priority, he is likely to select men and women who will honor our right to religious liberty; competing rights will not be eviscerated, but they will not eclipse our First Amendment right.”

It didn't take long before Trump made good on his pledge: His selection of [Judge Neil Gorsuch](#) to take the place of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court was brilliant.

While Trump only had one pick to make for the high court, he appointed many fine men and women to the federal bench. His most contentious choice was Amy Coney Barrett, a professor at Notre Dame Law School. On the merits, she was clearly qualified. But then bigotry came into play.

Barrett was targeted by Sen. Dianne Feinstein and Sen. Dick Durbin, both of whom made remarks that smacked of anti-Catholic bigotry. Feinstein came “perilously close,” I said, to establishing “a religious test.” I [wrote](#) to the two of them outlining my concerns.

Trump issued an executive order on religious liberty that, while lacking teeth, gave direction to his cabinet on how to proceed. That point was missed by some of his most serious critics. He also took on Planned Parenthood, signing a bill that allows the states to strip the abortion mill of funding.

When the president and the pope met, the media tried to spin the meeting as one in which Pope Francis had to bite his tongue, even to the point of selecting pictures that tried to prove their point. But as we pointed out, [Pope Francis differed with President Obama](#) on serious issues much more than he did with President Trump. We also [demonstrated](#) how the photos were chosen to elicit a preconceived conclusion.

During Obama's two terms, nothing angered practicing Catholics more than his Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate. It was designed to force Catholic non-profit organizations to pay for abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives and sterilization. Trump undercut the HHS mandate by providing an exemption to religious organizations; it was a big win for religious liberty.

The Catholic League has long been hated by the enemies of religious liberty. One of the haters, attorney Rebecca Randles, sued me and the league for allegedly libeling a man several years ago. It was a bogus lawsuit from the get-go, and she knew it. The case bounced around in the federal courts—she lost every single appeal—until it ended in 2017 in a [victory](#) for us. Kudos to Erin Mersino for representing us, and to the Thomas More Law Center for picking up the case.

Another source of hate is SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests). We have been battling it for decades, showing it for the fraud that it is. In 2017, it crashed. The two top leaders were forced to quit, leaving in disgrace. This is a long story, but it is well worth [reading](#).

Horror tales about cruel Irish nuns abusing women and children are part of the propaganda spewed by Catholic bashers. The lies that make up this folklore came to the surface in 2017 when the bodies of 800 children were allegedly found on the grounds of a Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, outside of Galway. No media outlet distorted the truth more than Irish Central. We took great delight in [debunking the lies](#).

One nun who continues to draw the attention of bigots is Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Teresa, as she is still fondly called, was the source of an obscene depiction by a New York City store, the Bedford Cheese Shop. Our fast response generated a healthy protest, resulting in a [victory](#): the offensive statement against her was withdrawn and an apology was issued by the store's owner.

When the haters aren't attacking nuns, they are setting their sights on priests. They love to talk about priestly sexual abuse, as if that is still a big problem. It isn't. As we indicated, [.004 percent](#) of the clergy had a new substantiated case made against him between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016.

There is no top Catholic clergyman in the world who has been subjected to more false allegations, and indeed harassment, than Cardinal George Pell of Australia. The [war](#) against him is an outrage, and the Australian government, as we [detailed](#), is no better.

It is not an easy time to be a practicing Christian on college campuses these days, and if anyone doubts this to be true, let him [read](#) what happened at Rollins College.

A militant Muslim feminist professor berated a Christian student at the Florida college, violating his religious liberty and freedom of speech. We intervened, and after a protracted battle with school officials, we helped secure victory for the student. It was an ugly chapter.

The culture war picked up steam in 2017 when monuments and statues of iconic Americans were condemned by left-wing fanatics. We dubbed it "[Monument Madness](#)," showing how politicized and dishonest the campaign is. This [war](#) was driven by hate; there was nothing noble about it. I [testified](#) in New York City about this issue, drawing a rather surprised response from the audience.

The entertainment industry is always fodder for trouble. We

finally won our battle with the ABC show, "[The Real O'Neals](#)." It would have gotten the ax earlier but the network did not want to appear to be giving in to us.

The big news in 2017, however, was the implosion of Hollywood stars caught up in a dirty web of sexual abuse scandals.

If the Hollywood celebrities who were outed as predators had no history of anti-Catholicism, it would mean little to us. But when the likes of Harvey Weinstein are fingered, it matters a great deal.

The two of us squared off against each other [many times before](#), so when the news broke about his pathological behavior, we couldn't help but recount all of the sick portrayals he made over the years about priests, and every aspect of Catholicism.

It was not just Hollywood moguls who were called on the carpet for sexual misconduct; politicians such as Sen. Al Franken, were named. We [listed](#) the vile comments he has made about priests, calling for his resignation.

No one in the entertainment business has relentlessly offended Catholics as much as Bill Maher. When he unloaded on Christians at the end of the year—after giving his buddies [Louis C.K. and Franken a pass](#)—we unloaded on him. We launched a [petition](#) asking HBO to discipline Maher the way they did when he offended African Americans; we also cited HBO's decision to remove all shows that the station carried by Louis C.K. Thousands responded to our call.

As more and more celebrities were outed as predators, we put together a "[Special Report](#) on Sexual Deviants and Sexual Enablers who Trashed Catholicism." It detailed accusations made against the offenders and those who covered up for them; we also included a selection of their condemnations of the Catholic Church, most of which dealt with clergy sexual misconduct.

More hypocrisy surfaced at the end of the year when the [Boston Globe](#) revealed that it would not release the names of sexual abusers in its employ. This same newspaper received a Pulitzer Prize for uncovering sexual abuse by priests, and a film, "Spotlight," was made about it. But it now insisted that there should be one standard for the Catholic Church—full disclosure—and one standard for the *Globe*—respect for privacy rights and confidentiality.

This story was followed by one from the [New York Times](#). It said that reporter Glenn Thrush, who was found guilty by the newspaper of sexual misconduct, could stay on the job; he was required to undergo counseling. Unlike what it had repeatedly demanded from the Catholic Church, the authorities were never contacted, and the offending party was allowed to remain on the payroll. Counseling, which the *Times* often said was an insufficient response to sexual misdeeds, was now seen as sufficient.

At year's end we experienced another round of attacks on Christmas. The most prominent early offender was a [ruling](#) by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority to deny the Archdiocese of Washington the right to place a Christmas ad on the exterior of D.C. buses. The ad never depicted, or mentioned, Jesus, but that didn't matter to the anti-Christmas bureaucrats. They censored it.

Those responsible for the "War on Christmas" tried to argue that it doesn't exist. It didn't work. To that end, we issued a [report](#) providing all the details.

The most notorious assaults on Christmas came from the much vaunted, but much discredited, venue of free speech—college campuses. First prize went to the University of Minnesota: it decreed that Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and the colors of red and green were inappropriate "religious iconography" during the holidays.

We ended the year comparing how President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump fared on religious liberty issues during their first year. After providing the [evidence](#), we concluded that Obama was not a religion-friendly president, but Trump surely was.

As always, we are grateful for the support of our members. Without them, there is no Catholic League. Many thanks to all.

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Twenty years ago, I wrote that “the most invidious form of anti-Catholicism is that which emanates from elite circles.” I also noted that “there is also a brand of anti-Catholicism that comes from less urbane quarters, from places that target the undereducated. And no one is better at doing this than Chick Publications.”

In 2016, the founder of that company, Jack Chick, died at the age of 92.

We fought him for years, exposing his efforts to convince Protestants of how “un-Christian” Catholics are. He was ahead of his time in his ability to get his message out: he not only published books and magazines, he printed an endless stream of 3×5 inch cartoon-like booklets that were released all over the world. “Are Roman Catholics Christian?” was one of his most famous.

Do you know who really hated Jack Chick? Liberal Catholics. They are able to demonstrate tremendous tolerance when the Church is beaten up by the establishment, but don't let anyone accuse them of not being able to think for themselves. That is why they rarely complain when those in the artistic community, education, the media, and the entertainment industry, bash Catholicism—they desperately want to be accepted by the secular elites.

Jack Chick's contribution to anti-Catholicism, significant though it was, is not the kind of fare that should worry Catholics these days. Assaults on religious liberty is what should concern them—the Catholic League gives them priority—and this is especially true when the agent of hostility is the government.

When the Church is sued for administering the sacraments, we can no longer take religious liberty for granted. That is why we fought back. The good news is that we won.

In 2014, a lawsuit was filed in Louisiana that, had it succeeded, would have effectively gutted the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We quickly filed an amicus brief, coming to the defense of Father Jeff Bayhi. He was sued by the parents of a girl for failing to report to the authorities that she was abused by a lay member of the parish (who has since passed away). He reportedly learned of this in the confessional, which is precisely why he did not report it.

After first losing in the State Supreme Court, we won in the State District Court. The final decision came in October when the Louisiana Supreme Court upheld that decision, stating that the seal of the confessional must be respected by the government as a matter of religious liberty.

Still unresolved is the right of the federal government to dictate to Catholic non-profits what they must cover in their healthcare plans. This is an issue we have been fighting for

years, and 2016 was no exception. We took advantage of every media opportunity to press our case against the Obama administration's Health and Human Services mandate.

It is currently in limbo: the U.S. Supreme Court dodged the issue by ordering the lower courts to reconsider the constitutionality of the mandate. If it became law, it would mean that such entities as the Little Sisters of the Poor would have to pay for abortion-inducing drugs in their healthcare plans.

The justices asked both sides to submit new legal briefs, requesting that alternatives be explored. Not until a ninth justice is named to the high court will this issue be settled. President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to appoint judges who respect religious liberties, so the prospects are encouraging.

What is not encouraging is the sight of lawyers employed by the federal government who show nothing but contempt for religious liberty. To be specific, a document was issued in September by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights that set off the alarms. I called it "the most anti-First Amendment report issued by any agency of the federal government."

I was referring to a report, *Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Non-Discrimination Principles with Civil Liberties*. The title was a misnomer: no attempt was made to reconcile anything. Instead, the document made it very clear that when there is a showdown between non-discrimination and religious liberty, the latter should yield. Never mind that religious liberty is enshrined in the First Amendment, and that non-discrimination is not part of the Bill of Rights—we need to reconstruct the Constitution.

According to Martin R. Castro, the Obama appointee who authored this report, "The phrases 'religious liberty' and 'religious freedom' will stand for nothing except for hypocrisy so long as they remain code words for

discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Christian supremacy or any other form of intolerance.”

Castro did not define what he means by “Christian supremacy,” but it is not a stretch to think he meant nativity scenes at Christmastime, and other “offenses.” Fortunately, many others besides the Catholic League pushed back hard—the bishops jumped on this as well—the result being that there were no legs to Castro’s gambit.

The big news of 2016, of course, was the election of Trump. We were drawn into the presidential race, though we stayed clear of endorsing anyone. Our first foray came early in the year when many in the media misrepresented to Pope Francis what Trump said about immigration, and then distorted the pope’s response. I am happy to say that I got a chance to correct the record when I was interviewed by Fox News as part of the lead news story of the night.

The pope was set up. He was told that Trump “wants to deport 11 million illegal immigrants, thus separating families.” That was patently false. Earlier, Trump said on “Meet the Press” that he would not split up families, explicitly saying, “No, we’re going to keep the families together.”

Another media falsehood was floated when reporters condensed the pope’s reaction to Trump’s alleged position, thus distorting his words. “Trump is Not a Christian” is how the media characterized the pope’s reaction. What the pope actually said was, “A person who thinks *only* about building walls...is not a Christian.” He added, “I say only that this man is not a Christian if he has said things like that...and in this, *I give the benefit of the doubt.*” The qualifying words that I italicized were conveniently omitted from most news stories.

I did more than correct the record when it came to Hillary

Clinton: I unintentionally set the table for the FBI to disable her. Here's what happened.

It started out innocently enough. On August 31, I read a front-page story in the *New York Post* on how former congressman Anthony Weiner used his own four-year-old son, Jordan, as a "chick magnet" to lure sexual relations with women. Weiner's wife, Huma Abedin, is a top aide to Clinton. This was the second story in three days on Weiner's perversions.

Having been sickened by the abuse scandal in the Church, as well as by the way the media have played it—they rarely report on the sexual abuse of minors in other communities, secular or religious—I filed a formal complaint with the authorities asking for an investigation of Weiner.

My request was honored. In the course of looking for child pornography on Weiner's laptop, the New York Police Department found that his computer was shared by Abedin. Not only that, emails sent by her to Clinton on her private server were discovered. The NYPD then contacted the FBI and it started a new probe.

After she lost to Trump, Clinton blamed FBI director James Comey for losing the election. Specifically, she said it was his announcement on October 28 that a new round of investigations were under way that turned voters against her. Of course, had she not had her own private server when she was Secretary of State, this would not have become an issue.

Moreover, had it not been for my complaint to the New York City branch of the New York State Administration for Children's Services, requesting that Weiner be investigated for child abuse, Comey would not have gotten involved. And had it not been for media bias against priests, I would not have felt obliged to press this case. It is strange how history unfolds.

Hollywood had a field day in 2016 with the issue of priestly sexual abuse. Though the latest data show that exactly .01 percent of the Catholic clergy had a credible accusation made against them for sexually abusing minors, Hollywood fed the media's appetite for Catholic bashing when it gave "Spotlight" the Oscar for "best picture." The film was based on the scandal in the Boston archdiocese.

The movie itself was not the problem—the scandal was as real as it was devastating—the problem was projecting a falsehood to the public: the media, and many in Hollywood (including those connected to the movie), sold the pernicious notion that the scandal is ongoing. It is not: the Church has a better record on this issue than any institution in the nation. It is in the public schools, and in places such as Hollywood, where child rape is commonplace, though there is little interest in pursuing them.

Another facet to this story is the way state lawmakers seek to "correct" the problem of the sexual abuse of minors by writing laws that target only private (read: Catholic) schools. New York and Pennsylvania were the two most aggressive states pushing to selectively punish Catholic offenders while letting public school molesters off the hook. We fought all such patently biased bills, doing so with great effect in New York.

The Catholic League started its war on these discriminatory bills in March, and in June we declared victory: the bill by Assemblywoman Margaret Markey, like all her previous ones, failed. Better still, after more than a decade of vindictively sticking it to the Catholic Church—only once did she include the public schools in her bill—she not only lost, she was voted out of office.

We pulled out all the stops to defeat Markey. On April 1, I wrote to everyone in the New York State legislature requesting that bills which suspend the statute of limitations for crimes involving the sexual abuse of minors be reconsidered. Instead

of applying only to private schools, I asked that they consider bills that only apply to the public schools. My point, of course, was to point out the absurdity, the hypocrisy, and the injustice of selectively pursuing such crimes.

I also wrote a full-page ad that was placed in the Albany *Times Union* exposing these machinations. Titled "Sexual Abuse Lobby Is Agenda-Ridden," I laid bare the activists and lawyers whose goal it was to punish Catholic molesters while allowing public school employees to escape scot-free. It hit a chord.

The hero in this struggle was Cardinal Timothy Dolan. He worked overtime to secure justice. Also active was Brooklyn Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, a good man who was libeled by Markey: she accused him of once offering to bribe her in return for dropping her bill. We called her out for this smear. Her stunt failed as even many on her side didn't believe her. She had no evidence whatsoever.

We were delighted when another vengeful public servant, Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane, was driven from office. Like Markey, she had it out for the Catholic Church, and like the New York lawmaker, the Catholic League tangled with Kane, pointing out how duplicitous she was. Her maniacal interest in pursuing old cases involving Catholic schools, while turning a blind eye to abuse incidents in non-Catholic settings, was abhorrent.

What drove Kane from office, however, was not the voters: she was convicted on nine counts, including two felony perjury charges, for leaking grand jury information, and then lying about it. Justice was done, even if she got away with her unethical assault on the Catholic Church.

Justice was also done when the courts repeatedly turned back ACLU attempts to force Catholic hospitals to violate the teachings of the Catholic Church. The issues that the ACLU

seized on were abortion, contraception, and sterilization; these are non-negotiable subjects for Catholic hospitals.

At the beginning of the year, San Francisco Superior Judge Ernest Goldman dismissed the ACLU's attempt to force Mercy Medical Center in California to carry out sterilization procedures. In the spring, the ACLU lost in the U.S. District Court of Michigan when it sought to coerce Trinity Health Corporation, a Catholic non-profit, to perform abortions. It also made another failed effort to revisit the Mercy Medical Center case, this time supported by the California Medical Association.

In all of these instances, the ACLU proved why it has a reputation for being a foe of religion, and there is no religion it seeks to upend more than Catholicism.

Sometimes our role in fighting anti-Catholicism doesn't yield quick results, but when we eventually win, the victory is still sweet.

At the end of last year, I wrote to Tennessee lawmakers who oversee education issues about a serious problem that arose at the University of Tennessee. Its Office of Diversity and Inclusion had literally sought to censor Christmas. Students were warned to make sure that "your holiday party is not a Christmas party in disguise." They were also instructed not to "play games with religious and cultural themes, such as 'Dreidel' or 'Secret Santa.'"

The lawmakers followed through with the requested investigation and in the spring it was announced that they voted to strip the Office of Diversity and Inclusion of \$337,000 in state funds. Justice was done.

Our protest of a situation at Colorado State University did not result in a clear-cut victory, but it did yield important dividends nonetheless.

The university's student senate proposed a "diversity bill" that granted senate seats to various constituents on campus; those representing adult learning, veterans, the disabled, LGBT students, women's groups, and various racial and ethnic groups were recognized. But when students asked for equal treatment for Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim students, they were denied.

I contacted the Dean of Students on this issue, and after much haggling, she said that all parties to the controversy have learned from this experience and that it was an opportunity to grow as an academic community. Much more should have been done, but this is the way many administrators react when pressed by advocacy organizations. It is a safe bet, however, that our message was delivered.

When Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez was embroiled in a fight over a California bill that would have undermined important exemptions to religious schools, we quickly joined his effort. The result was the bill was revised, and the onerous portions were stricken.

The bill would have required religious schools that receive state funds to provide bathrooms based on "gender identity," rather than male-female. It would have required that married dorms be opened to same-sex couples. In fact, the bill permitted the government to decide what "religious practices" and "rules for moral conduct," would be acceptable.

We pushed back, as did others, making basic religious-liberty arguments. While the outcome was auspicious, the very fact that we had to fight for our religious tenets, suggests how hostile some lawmakers are to Catholicism.

Over Labor Day weekend, there was an ugly incident involving a high school football game in Scottsdale, Arizona. After parents complained, and we learned of what happened, we contacted school officials. An investigation was launched. The

outcome was another demonstration of our clout. Here's what occurred.

Prior to a game between a Catholic school and a public school, a statue of Our Blessed Mother was vandalized on the campus of the Catholic school. During the game, a student dressed as Jesus paraded up and down the sidelines, mocking Catholics.

The vandals were gross: they attached a sex toy to the lower half of the Virgin Mary statue, and over its head they put a mask of Hillary Clinton. The "dancing Jesus" character continued his stunt in the second half of the game, even after parents complained.

We contacted the Interim Superintendent of the Scottsdale Unified School District and she responded professionally, and with dispatch. She apologized for what happened, commenced an investigation, and thanked the Catholic League for its intervention.

Macy's earned our ire when it fired a senior store detective at a store in Queens, New York for merely holding to Catholic beliefs on sexuality. After a woman and her daughter found a man dressed as a woman in the women's restroom, they complained, and the detective arranged for him to be removed; the cross-dressing man was told to use the men's room.

However, the offending male reported this incident to Macy's officials, and, incredibly, they informed the detective that he was the problem. Unbeknownst to him, Macy's allows cross-dressing men to use the ladies room. The detective said he was unaware of this policy, adding that it ran against his Catholic convictions. But he insisted he would nonetheless enforce the policy going forward. This wasn't good enough—he was fired. The man secured an attorney and the case was taken up by the New York State Division of Human Rights.

This is thought control: the man was terminated for his religious beliefs—not his behavior. Consequently, we pounded

the mega-department store with one news release after another. In addition, I wrote an op-ed page ad in the *New York Times* alerting the public to this outrageous condition. To be sure, Macy's got a black eye as a result, but at year's end there was no final adjudication to this vindictive act.

As we saw in the case involving the University of Tennessee, there are occasions when our initial involvement does not lead to a desired result, but eventually it does. This, we believe, will be the case with our protest of the ABC show, "The Real O'Neals."

The show is loosely based on the life of Dan Savage, a vile anti-Catholic whose vulgar language is a staple of his routine. That Disney, which owns ABC, would give this man a platform (he is also an associate producer of the show) does not speak well for the supposedly family-friendly entertainment giant.

On February 29, the *New York Times* ran an op-ed page ad I wrote, "Shame on Disney-ABC." It detailed our objections to the persistent mocking of Catholicism by cast characters, and underscored our central objection to the program: Dan Savage's role. Commenting on Savage's history of hate speech, I said, "His filthy remarks about Jesus and Our Blessed Mother are so over the top that they would make Larry Flynt blush."

The ratings of "The Real O'Neals" were not great, but Disney-ABC did not want to appear to bow to pressure, so it stood by it for another season. We predict it will be pulled in 2017.

Mother Teresa was canonized on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend. The media, for the most part, treated her fairly. In anticipation of what could have been an onslaught of Catholic bashing, beating up on this saintly woman, I got out in front of the looming controversy by writing a book, *Unmasking Mother Teresa's Critics*.

The book had more footnotes than it did pages, and for a

reason: I did not want anyone saying these were just Donohue's unsupported claims. I took on all of her most famous detractors, the late Christopher Hitchens being the most prominent among them.

How much my book contributed to the media's respectful hearing of Mother Teresa's contributions is impossible to know. But if it helped at all, it was surely worthwhile. She was a very special person, and Catholics have every reason to be proud of her.

No year ends without fighting another round of battles over Christmas, and 2016 was no exception. Satanists and atheists proved they have more in common than separates them—they adorned the public square with their protesting symbols on the same sites as nativity scenes, seeking to neuter the meaning of Christmas.

The Catholic League fought and won a battle in the Portland, Oregon area when a school district banned Santa, as well as religious symbols, from the office doors of school employees. The good news is that our protest led district officials to apologize and rescind the ban.

The singing of "Silent Night" was cause for opposition in a Mesa, Arizona school, and a cross atop a crèche was banned in Indiana. Regarding the latter, our side fought back: after the ACLU succeeded in censoring the cross, the folks in Knightstown, Indiana blanketed the town with crosses on lawns, parks, and local shops—they were everywhere!

The election of Donald Trump may signal a change for the better on religious liberty issues. We will know in due course. No matter what he does, the Catholic League will still be integrally involved in the culture war. We have the determination and the resources to win. Bet on it.