

# POPE FRANCIS DIES AT 88; LEGACY WAS MIXED

*This is the article that appeared in the May 2025 edition of Catalyst, our monthly journal. The date that prints out reflects the day that it was uploaded to our website. For a more accurate date of when the article was first published, check out the news release, [here](#).*

The death of Pope Francis on Easter Monday caught many as a surprise, though not as a shock. He definitely rebounded from the time he was hospitalized, but he never regained his normal stature.

Pope Francis was treated far more kindly by the media than his predecessors. That's because he was seen as a champion of social justice and an ardent foe of inequality. He was also seen as an agent of change.

By contrast, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II were traditionalists; they spoke more to the moral issues that plagued the West.

It appeared that the pope would have liked to have made more changes, especially with regard to the Church's teachings on sexuality. He made that apparent by the appointments he made of cardinals to senior positions. But he also knew his authority was limited by Scripture and tradition.

While Pope Francis was not an admirer of President Trump, stylistically they had much in common. Speaking from the heart, and off-the-cuff, are refreshing attributes, especially among elites, but they can also be a source of trouble. After the pope traveled abroad, he gave interviews on the papal plane that were so blunt that his spokesmen often had to walk back what he said. Trump's casual style can also be a problem.

In the pope's waning days, he drew parallels with President Biden. Francis was mentally astute but in failing health;

Biden was cognitively challenged. In both cases, it was not clear who was in charge of the store. This is a condition that is rife for mischief.

Attention will now turn to the pope's successor. Pope Francis appointed most of the cardinals who will make that choice. This suggests that someone closer to his vision of the Church will be chosen. On the other hand, he has chosen men from the hinterland, from far away places where a penchant for orthodoxy, not change, is commonplace. This suggests that the new pope may be more of a traditionalist.

It does seem likely that whoever is chosen will have to bring about more clarity than we have been accustomed to under Pope Francis. Quite frankly, the Holy Father often made pronouncements that fostered confusion. The time has come to promote a more coherent vision; this will require a gentle push of the pendulum back to the middle.

If the cardinals decide to choose someone who is a traditionalist, they can do no better than to look to Africa. It is home to the most brilliant orthodox clergy in the world. If the cardinals want to choose someone more like Francis, they will look to Europe.

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## JUSTIFYING BIGOTRY

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Look who's against fighting anti-Christian bias? An organized group of left-wing *religious* activists.

The Interfaith Alliance is a hodgepodge of left-wing activists, spread across a variety of religions. They are furious with President Trump's directive to U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi setting up a task force to root out anti-Christian bias in the federal government; we are assisting her in that effort.

Why would a group of professed religious people be against efforts to combat anti-Christian bias? Indeed, this is the only bias they appear to be okay with. To be exact, they deny it even exists. They say, "There is no evidence of widespread anti-Christian bias in the United States."

If that were the case, the Catholic League would not exist. We don't create bigotry, we respond to it. But in the minds of those affiliated with the Interfaith Alliance, the fact that we fight anti-Christian deeds means *we are a threat to liberty*.

They claim that efforts to oppose anti-Christian bigotry will "legitimatize discrimination against marginalized groups like the LGBTQ community, infringe on our reproductive freedom, and hurt our society's most vulnerable."

In other words, those who object to "Drag Queen Story Hours" for children, and those who oppose genital mutilation for minors, are the problem. Ditto for those who oppose child abuse in the womb.

Ironically, the Interfaith Alliance's opposition to fighting anti-Christian bigotry validates the reason why President Trump formalized efforts to combat it. We commend them for that.

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# POPE FRANCIS, R.I.P.

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**William A. Donohue**

Catholics around the globe are mourning the death of Pope Francis. He touched millions of the faithful, including non-Catholics and non-believers.

When Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio assumed the role of Pope Francis, his down-to-earth style captured the plaudits of Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It was his unscripted, and often spontaneous, manner of speaking that made him so authentic and appealing.

It also got him into trouble, especially when speaking to reporters aboard the papal plane following a trip overseas. On many occasions, following a chat with journalists, the Vatican press corps had to clarify what he meant. But no one criticized him for not speaking from the heart.

Unfortunately, the end of his pontificate was troubling. His approval of a Vatican document that allows priests to bless same-sex couples was met with widespread criticism. Indeed, it was so divisive that it seriously undid much of the goodwill he previously earned.

For the most part, the media treated Francis with kindness, though they did not always accurately report what he said. For example, his much publicized remark, "Who am I to judge?", was misquoted by the media. What he actually said was, "Who am I to judge him?" That is not a small difference. He made his comment in response to a question about a particular priest who had been accused of a sexual impropriety; it was not an endorsement of homosexuality.

It spoke well for Pope Francis that he rejected the practice of publishing the names of accused priests, something that is unheard of in every other institution. Regrettably, his inability to see through the deceitful character of his friend and fellow Jesuit, Bishop Gustavo Zanchetta—he was sentenced to prison by an Argentine court for sexually abusing seminarians—revealed a serious blind spot, one that earlier emerged in his dealings with priestly sexual abuse in Chile. Zanchetta is still a bishop.

More recently, Pope Francis' passivity in dealing with accused serial predator Fr. Marko Rupnik, another friend and fellow Jesuit—he was charged with grave, and indeed sacrilegious, sexual offenses—was another serious error in judgment. Rupnik was finally dismissed from the Society of Jesus in June 2023. After he was excommunicated, he was reinstated! Inexplicably, the pope allowed him to remain a priest in good standing. In fact, he kept a picture of him in his office.

Worse, Pope Francis chose as one of his most senior advisors, Luxembourg Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, a man whose passion for gay rights led him to say that the Church's opposition to gay sex is outdated. The pope knew this yet appointed him the "relator general" of the Church's "Synod on Synodality." The Synod, itself, proved to be a source of great consternation among many bishops.

The pope's strong defense of the rights of the unborn, and his condemnation of gender ideology, sat well with conservative Catholics. But they were not happy when he refused to honor questions regarding his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*; prominent prelates sought clarification on some doctrinal issues. The Holy Father was clearly more critical of conservative bishops than he was their liberal counterparts.

Even more significant, his attack on traditionalists, especially those who favor the Latin Mass, were frequent and lacking in nuance. Yet at the same time, Francis welcomed

known Catholic dissidents, men and women who were previously condemned by officials in Rome and the United States for sabotaging the Church. His embrace of Sister Jeannine Gramick was the most conspicuous example of this phenomenon.

Pope Francis often spoke about the need to decentralize the Church, yet he did more to centralize the power of the papacy than any of his predecessors in modern times.

He took away the right of bishops to approve new religious communities in their dioceses and changed canon law so he could fire bishops. His decision to essentially take control of the Pontifical Academy of Life, and the former John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, angered many in the U.S. He also took control of the Sovereign Order of Malta, ordering a new constitution and new senior officers.

On foreign affairs, Francis took a soft and conciliatory approach to the Chinese Communist regime, which sought to crush the Catholic Church. The arrest of Cardinal Zen, and the silence with which the Vatican greeted the news, did not sit well with many Catholics.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was condemned by the Vatican, though the Holy Father's statement blaming NATO, and not Putin, was seen as an example of his alleged anti-Western, and anti-American, bias.

In November 2024, the pope stunned Catholics and Jews alike when he called for an international probe of Israel's decision to defend itself from Hamas terrorists; he inquired whether this constituted genocide.

The pope admitted that as a young man the person who did more to shape his thinking about politics was a communist atheist, Esther Ballestrino. She introduced him to prominent communist publications.

Pope Francis made his mark on the Church, much as John Paul II

and Benedict XVI did. It remains to be seen whether his successor will hew more closely to his stance than that of his predecessors. May he rest in peace.

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# CARDINAL DOLAN VERBALLY ABUSED

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*Bill Donohue sent the following letter to the parties noted.*

March 14, 2025

Jelani Jefferson Exum  
Dean, St. John's Univ. School of Law  
8000 Utopia Parkway  
Jamaica, NY 11439

Dear Dean Jefferson Exum:

A recent incident was brought to my attention about the conduct of one of your law school students, Vishai Balani. He is alleged to have attacked Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, on X (since removed). On February 22, he said Dolan was "a bootlicking disgrace with your nose up Donald Trump's ass." He also used derogatory language to smear New York City Councilman Robert Holden and New York City Councilwoman Vickie Paladino. (See the enclosed.)

I have spent many years in higher education, and have written several books on civil liberties, so I am well aware that

student speech is given wide protection. I am also aware that with liberties come responsibilities, and this is especially true of Catholic institutions of higher education.

St. John's Law Mission Statement says the school strives to foster an "equitable" environment where "respect for the rights and dignity of every person" is maintained. The Student Code of Conduct proscribes "verbal," as well as "physical action," saying they are "inconsistent with the Core Values of St. John's University."

Regarding the Core Values, the Code says that "Students are required to engage in responsible social conduct and to model good citizenship in any community. Students shall not engage in any conduct that reflects a failure to live up to the expectations of all St. John's students." It ends by being specific: "Any behavior (verbal, written or physical) that abuses, assails, intimidates, demeans, and/or victimizes."

It seems plain that Vishai Balani has violated these norms. How you handle instances like this is not my business. But as president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, it is my business to combat attacks on individual Catholics and the institutional Church. Accordingly, I am asking that you take this situation seriously.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President

cc: Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York  
Fr. Brian Shanley, O.P. president of St. John's Univ.  
Jack Flynn, Director of Student Conduct  
Councilman Robert Holden  
Councilwoman Vickie Paladino



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# NORTHWESTERN OFFERS ANTI-CHRISTIAN COURSE

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*The following is an excerpt from a letter that explains why there is a problem at Northwestern.*

March 27, 2025

Dean Adrian Randolph  
Northwestern University  
Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences  
1918 Sheridan Road  
Evanston, Illinois 60208

Dear Dean Randolph:

It has been brought to my attention that a faculty member in the Department of Religious Studies at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Lily Stewart, is using her class, "Introduction to Christianity," to engage in a frontal assault on the Catholic Church. How do I know this?

The syllabus says the class "will explore histories of Christian colonialism, bigotry, liberation, and dissent." Indeed, it says, Jesus "has been at the forefront of projects of colonialism, violence, and subjugation, but also peace, liberation, and revolution."

Students are also put on notice. "Much of the material and topics that we are working with in this class include racist,

ableist, Islamophobic, anti-semitic, transphobic, misogynist, homophobic, self-harm, murder, and sexual assault.”

In other words, brace yourself in class when I discuss the historical contributions of the Catholic Church.

Imagine if a course on Islam were to portray the religion and its adherents as an evil force. What would Northwestern do when students and Muslim scholars complained?

It is to be expected that professors will develop an approach to their discipline that differs from that of others in their field. That is how it should be. But we are not talking about legitimate avenues of discourse or research. We are talking about a frontal assault on a world religion.

Those who engage in vitriolic caricatures of demographic groups, be they religious, ethnic, racial, or sexual, may find expression in social media, but they have no business in academia.

If there are some who read this letter who are not convinced that Professor Stewart has crossed the line, consider that there is a depiction of Jesus in the syllabus, with the following inscription:

***Hey girl.***

*How about I turn that water into wine,  
we put on some slow jams and just cuddle?*

#Hot.Jesus

This is not scholarship. It is hate speech with a scholarly veneer.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President

cc: Michael H. Schill, President  
Peter M. Barris, Chair, Board of Trustees  
Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Chair, Department of Religious Studies  
Lily Stewart, Professor Religious Studies  
Barbara Gellman-Danley, President, Higher Education Commission

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## SATANISTS LOOK ENFEEBLED

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The Satanic Grotto is not a well-known Satanic group, but it made a media splash in Kansas. On March 28, it held a “Black Mass” on the grounds of the Capitol building. Due to the leadership of Kansas City Archbishop Joseph Naumann, Christian protesters convincingly outnumbered the Satanists, making the small band of Satanists look enfeebled.

The leader of the Satanist group, Michael Stewart, was arrested for assaulting one of the Catholics who protested. When he was handcuffed, he yelled, “Hail Satan!” After he illegally entered the Kansas Statehouse, a scuffle ensued, and a few of those who confronted him were arrested.

Satanism is often associated with Devil worship, and at one time manifested itself as witchcraft. Some Satanists see themselves as atheists who put their entire trust in reason; others perceive Satan to be real.

Satanism is spiking internationally, and it appears to flourish at Christmas and Easter. To what extent it is responsible for Christian persecution is unknown, but to say that the Devil’s hand is not at work is risible.

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# AMICUS BRIEF UPDATE

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In the last issue of *Catalyst*, we mentioned that we have secured the services of the Pittsburgh office of Leech Tishman to represent the Catholic League in a case before the New Jersey Supreme Court defending the rights of priests in the Diocese of Camden. We mistakenly said that Superior Court Judge Peter Warshaw took the side of the Camden Diocese in February, 2025; it should have read May, 2023.

There has been an important development. Our attorney, Russ Giancola, not only filed the amicus brief, he was notified that he will be able to present oral arguments; this is not typical in friend-of-the-court briefs. We are delighted that he will do so.

Unfortunately, we are the only Catholic lay group filing an amicus. When it comes to religious liberty issues, in general, there is usually no problem in getting others to support the Catholic Church. But when it comes to the rights of accused priests, many get gun shy. Not us.

The term “witch hunt” is overused, thus losing currency. But when state governments litigate against priests in decades-old cases of abuse—giving every other group, religious or secular, a pass—what else can we call it?

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# RESTORING CATHOLIC RIGHTS; OUR ROLE WITH THE DOJ AND FBI

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We have established a working relationship with the Trump administration seeking to redress attacks on Catholic rights emanating from the federal government.

To be specific, after Bill Donohue wrote to U.S. Attorney General Bondi volunteering our efforts in addressing this issue, he received a letter from the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice providing contact information.

We will be sure to give this person a boatload of documents. We have more data on violations of Catholic civil and religious rights stemming from the federal government than any organization in the nation.

Donohue also wrote to Congressman Jim Jordan, who heads the House Judiciary Committee, regarding his success in subpoenaing documents on how the Biden administration violated the rights of Catholics. We have a good working relationship with his staff.

Donohue said to Jordan, "In 2023, I wrote ten news releases on this subject: four were open letters to you; one was a letter I wrote to FBI Director Christopher Wray; the rest were standard news releases. I issued three more statements in 2024, two of which were open letters—one to Wray and one to you."

Donohue then restated some questions that he previously posed to Jordan on this subject.

“On what basis did the FBI conclude that these Catholics [Radical-Traditional Catholics] warranted a probe? Do they have a history of violence? If so, where is the evidence? If not, why were they singled out?”

“On what basis did the FBI decide it was necessary to enlist ‘mainline Catholics’ to spy on their fellow parishioners? Where is the evidence that ordinary practicing Catholics pose a security threat to the United States or to other law-abiding Americans? How common is it for FBI agents to infiltrate houses of worship—of any religion—employing ‘tripwire sources’?”

Donohue asked new questions as well. Of particular interest was the 2024 report by Inspector General Michael Horowitz. He found that the FBI tried to establish a relationship between mainstream Catholics and extremists, but that it “lacked sufficient evidence.” Donohue asked, “Why did the Analysts think there was a relationship in the first place?”

Donohue also wanted to know why “the entire probe was based on one person, Defendant A. Not only was he identified as a violent bigoted thug, he did not even attend a Catholic church—he went to some breakaway church.” He concluded, “Was he used as a pretext to go after Catholics?”

We are very happy to team with Attorney General Pam Bondi and House Judiciary Chairman Jim Jordan in getting to the bottom of these totally unwarranted attacks on Catholics by federal authorities.

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# MIRACULOUS RECOVERY

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**Michael P. McDonald**

Anthony Foti is the web designer that keeps our website firing on full cylinders. He is a man of deep faith. He and his family attend the Latin Mass, and together with his wife, he has instilled the Catholic faith deep in the hearts of his children. But last year, Anthony and his family's faith would get them through tragedy and triumph.

Their ordeal started around Easter last year. The Foti household came down with some illness. It seemed pretty standard, and about a week later, it seemed like it had run its course. However, it lingered in his young daughter Maria.

They took Maria to the pediatrician several times due to ongoing fever and unusual pain in her back. Maria underwent strep and blood count tests and all the normal stuff you would do for a child with a virus. During that week, Maria complained of back pains, which progressively got worse, but they were not constant leading her pediatrician to believe it was body aches that you get from being sick.

But by Sunday, April 7, this back pain appeared to be more than just a body ache. Maria woke up complaining of severe back pain and a stiff neck. They quickly took Maria to the hospital where she had a few exams and was sent home.

By the next morning, her condition had deteriorated. Maria could not stand up. They took her back to the hospital. This time the tests revealed Maria had an extremely high bacteria count in her system, and an MRI uncovered a massive abscess along six of her spinal disks, which was causing compression

on her spinal cord. Maria was transferred to Cohen's Children's Hospital where a pediatric neurosurgeon awaited to perform emergency spinal surgery.

While Anthony waited during those agonizing hours, he prayed with all his might. As family and friends reached out to help, he asked them to pray for Maria. A home cooked dinner is appreciated, but what Maria really needed now was their prayers he told them.

After several grueling hours, the head neurosurgeon came out to speak with Anthony and his wife. The surgeon informed them that he was able to remove the abscess from Maria's spine, but she would be completely paralyzed from the waist down. The surgeon said he was not particularly religious, but if they were praying people, they should start praying.

Anthony threw his whole heart and soul into those prayers. He constantly prayed the Rosary, beseeching the Blessed Mother for aid. He asked every saint he could think of to intercede on behalf of his daughter. A cousin reached out to let Anthony know that she had access to a first class relic of St. Gemma Galgani, the patron saint of back surgery, and she would bring it to him so that Maria could pray with it. Interestingly, the feast of St. Gemma coincided with Maria's stay in the hospital, and what happened next, Anthony attributes to the intercession of St. Gemma.

Approximately 24 hours after the surgery, Maria started to wiggle her toes. According to all the doctors and the experts, she should not have been able to do that. But she was, and later that night she was able to lift her knee up. A few days later, Maria was able to walk with assistance. Her medical team was astounded by her speedy recovery.

On April 12, Maria had a follow-up MRI. Anthony remembers waiting beside his little girl and praying the Rosary with all his strength. He felt this awe come over him as though the



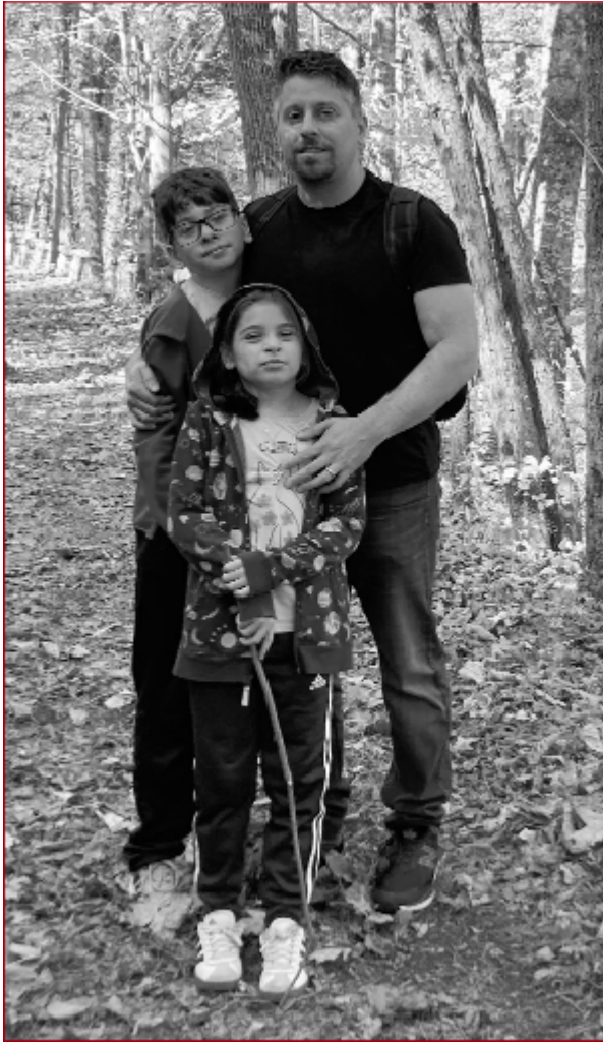
Mysteries were coming to life. Suddenly, he saw Maria in the MRI kicking and moving her lower body as if she was re-growing the synapses, and he knew that God was healing her. He prayed even harder.

The neurosurgeon began calling Maria the “Miracle Girl.” Even he was convinced Maria’s recovery was more than just modern medicine at work. On April 17, Maria was discharged from the hospital. She would go on to an inpatient rehab facility where she would spend 10 days. By the end of April, Maria was home with her family.

She would continue on with physical therapy for the rest of the year. At one of her appointments, an infectious disease doctor wanted to see how she was recovering. He told Anthony that what Maria had was extremely rare. In fact, there were only 22 cases of pediatric epidural abscess in medical literature. When he saw Maria moving around he was amazed.

A couple months later, Maria was being evaluated by a neuropsychologist. After reading her medical history, the doctor was amazed that Maria could move around normally. This expert asked Anthony a very familiar question: were they, by chance, religious?

It has been a year since Maria’s sickness, and she has made a full recovery. While the secular experts cannot explain it, those of us who keep the Catholic faith can see the hand of Providence in her recovery. As it says in James [5:15], “And the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up.”



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## PHOTOS OF MIRACULOUS RECOVERY

To see photos of Anthony Foti's daughter and her miraculous recovery, click [here](#).