

# IS AOC CATHOLIC?

Is Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) Catholic? She was, but there is no evidence she still is. Yet she is conveniently labeled as a Catholic by some of her supporters and she occasionally implies she is still Catholic.

Why does this matter? If she were not a congresswoman, it wouldn't. But when someone who is no longer a member of the faith community he was raised in passes himself off as a loyal member—for self-serving political purposes—that raises serious ethical problems.

Who is and who is not a Catholic is not purely a matter of self-identity. If someone born of Irish ancestry and raised as a Catholic calls himself a Jew, no one thinks he is Jewish. Truth matters, and the truth never turns on self-identity alone.

AOC spoke on February 27 at a congressional hearing on “The Administration’s Religious Liberty Assault on LGBTQ rights,” held by the House Committee on Oversight and Reform. She criticized the Trump administration for its policies on homosexuals and transgender persons, saying it was misusing religious liberty to undermine these people.

In her remarks, AOC never once identified herself as a Catholic, though she did play the religion card. She preferred to use such terms as, “From the perspective of a woman of faith” and “I know it is part of my faith.”

Not only did she not identify her faith, she said, “We are equal, in my faith, in the eyes of the world.” Catholics don't speak that way. They would say something like, “As a Catholic, I believe we are all equal in the eyes of God.”

In a glowing article on AOC posted on Huffington Post, it says that she “identifies as Catholic” and “frequently refers to

her religious beliefs on Twitter.” Not true. On Twitter, she never identifies herself as a Catholic: she calls herself a “raised Catholic” (see her tweet from 12-10-18). That is the way ex-Catholics speak, not those who are currently practicing their religion.

In a caustic exchange on Twitter with Kellyanne Conway, AOC spoke about her “Christianity + faith life” (tweet is from 4-28-19). Again, that is not the way Catholics speak. In fact, that is a really weird way for any Christian to talk. There is no need for the “+ faith life” if the person is truly a Christian.

We did a Nexis search of AOC to learn how often she identified herself as a Catholic. We looked for “As a Catholic” or “My Catholic.” The answer: Zero. The only reference to her Catholicity is from an article she wrote for America magazine on June 27, 2018, the Jesuit publication.

In her piece, she made a comment about the Catechism and forgiveness, and uses terms such as “For Catholics,” but never once does she say she is a Catholic. Yet that was the purpose of the article. It was titled, “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on her Catholic Faith and the Urgency of Criminal Justice Reform.” Why the reticence given this opportunity to showcase her Catholic credentials? Indeed, she could have told us something about how much her Catholic faith means to her, but she didn’t come close.

In her statement before the House committee, AOC did address one Catholic issue. Not surprisingly, she condemned the Catholic position.

“My faith commands me to treat Mr. Minton as holy because he is sacred, because his life is sacred, because you are not to be denied anything I am entitled to, that we are equal in the eyes of the law.”

What was all that about? Evan Michael Minton, who also spoke

before the committee, wanted to change from being a woman to a man (that is biologically impossible, but that is not the issue). In 2017, “he” sought a hysterectomy at a Catholic facility, Mercy San Juan Medical Center; it is part of the Dignity Health Care chain.

The Catholic hospital does not perform elective hysterectomies (such a procedure is only done to treat a serious medical problem and when there is no alternative treatment available). Mercy immediately referred “him” to another hospital within the Dignity chain that is not Catholic, and the procedure was performed within a few days. Even though there was no discrimination, “he” got the ACLU to sue Mercy.

In other words, AOC flexed her so-called Catholic muscles by taking the side of someone who deliberately sought an operation from a Catholic institution that it was prohibited by its religious tenets from performing. She obviously does not believe in the free exercise of religion as guaranteed by the First Amendment. Worse, she took the side of anti-Catholics.

The Catholic League does not tolerate fictions. Everyone knows that inside a pregnant woman’s body there is another human being, and everyone knows that no one can change his or her chromosomal makeup, even though many learned people believe otherwise. And everyone should know that AOC is a fraud.

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## **U.N. REPORT ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS ABSURD**

A recently released United Nations report on religious freedom that was presented to the Human Rights Council deserves a

sharp rebuke. While appearing reasonable at different junctures, the report is nothing but a frontal assault on religious autonomy and religious freedom. No wonder it was criticized by senior Vatican officials.

The report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, Ahmed Shaheed, is more than tendentious: it is a polished ideological attack on our most foundational human right. Indeed, the report reads like a manifesto for LGBT rights. It is not the business of the United Nations to impose its secular, and indeed troubling, vision of sexuality on religions around the world.

One of its most glaring problems is the decision to link cases of violence committed in the name of religion—which are properly condemned—with instances of non-violent beliefs and practices that are seen as problematic by militant secularists. The conflation of violent acts with non-violent “discriminatory” ones is not persuasive. Indeed, by bundling inexcusable behaviors with wholly defensible religious precepts, the report shows its unmistakable bias.

For example, it is one thing to condemn the Islamic practice of stoning adulterers, quite another to lump this barbaric act with the imposition of “modest” dress codes. Similarly, when religious bodies hold to traditional moral beliefs on sexuality, they are entitled to have their convictions respected, not chastised.

It also makes no logical sense to conflate laws which criminalize persons on the basis of their sexual orientation, which is indefensible, with laws that restrict abortion, which are eminently defensible. Worse, it is outrageous for the Human Rights Committee to cite conscience laws, as observed in the United States, as problematic. Such laws are integral to religious liberty.

Another objectionable tactic is to treat nations that

criminalize homosexuality with the same brush as nations that object to homosexuality being promoted in their sex education textbooks. The latter is noble. Is the United Nations so thoroughly in the grip of the LGBT community that it can't see the difference between the two?

The report embraces "gender ideology," namely, the bizarre notion that one's sex is not rooted in nature. It goes further by criticizing nations such as Poland, with its vibrant Catholic community, for rejecting this madness. In doing so, the international forum discredits itself. It should not bend to ideological whims, especially when they are based on politics, not science.

At least the report does not seek to hide its mentors. It mentions its reliance on feminists and those who work with "LGBT+" persons (it does not say who the + people are). It also cites, positively, the work of a United States organization, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. They gave away the store on that one.

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice is not only a rabid pro-abortion group, it is virulently anti-Catholic. It endorsed the Freedom of Choice Act, which the Catholic League successfully fought. This was the most radical piece of abortion-rights legislation ever proposed (the Obama administration was behind it). It would have jeopardized the right of Catholic hospitals and doctors to refuse to perform abortions.

The most serious flaw in this seriously flawed document is its attack on religious autonomy. It makes an obligatory statement saying that "religious organizations are entitled to autonomy in the administration of their affairs," only to effectively undercut this pledge by taking issue with religious norms it finds objectionable. In fact, it cites objections to religious strictures made by feminists, as if religious bodies ought to defer to them.

Its most aggressive assault on religious liberty is the contention that religious dissidents should be on a par with religious leaders. This is what the report means by saying “religious communities themselves are not monolithic.” It even goes so far as to say that the rights of dissenters must be afforded “an enabling environment.” Maybe a big sign on church property that says “Welcome Mutineers” might work.

The sages who wrote this report should practice what they preach. They can begin by inviting Bill Donohue, as one of their dissenters, to join their forums, permitting him to checkmate their grandiose proposals. After all, we’re all equal. Aren’t we?

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## KANSAS CITY STAR’S RELIGIOUS BIAS

In a badly conceived editorial on March 2, the *Kansas City Star* railed against allowing private and religious schools to be exempt from Missouri’s minimum wage increase. It is the exemption for religious schools [read: Catholic ones] that exercises the editors the most. How do we know? Because it repeatedly singles out religious organizations for criticism.

Why is the editorial badly conceived? Because it is palpably hypocritical. It admits that public employers, including the public schools, are exempt from the minimum wage law, yet it is only mildly critical of this exception. In other words, if exemptions from this law are a problem, why has the *Star* consistently refused to take the public schools to task?

Moreover, why didn’t the *Kansas City Star* list all the organizations that are exempt from the minimum wage? They

include tipped employees, small businesses, and most farm workers. Under federal law, seasonal workers, public school teachers and administrators, and many others are exempt from the minimum wage.

The editorial gives away its bias by focusing on why religious schools are afforded exemptions from some laws.

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## **EUROPEANS UNDERVALUE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

The Pew Research Center recently released a survey of democratic rights in 34 countries. Countries represented in the survey were drawn from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, Canada, and the United States.

Respondents were asked how important certain democratic values were to them, and how satisfied they were with the state of affairs on several variables. The following nine categories were chosen: Fair Judiciary; Gender Equality; Free Religion; Regular Elections; Free Speech; Free Media; Free Internet; Free Civil Society; and Free Opposition Parties.

The data reported the “% who say it is very important to have \_\_\_\_\_ in their country.”

The median score (the score where half the numbers are higher and half are lower) on Free Religion, as compared to the median score on the other eight categories, was relatively high for all parts of the world except for Europe. In other words, outside Europe, Free Religion garnered a relatively high percentage.

The median score for Europe was 57%. That was the lowest median score across the board. In other words, the other eight categories were seen as more important to Europeans.

“In over half the countries surveyed,” the report said, “those who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely to believe religious freedom is very important.” This makes sense, but it also means that those who are not themselves religious are not likely to support this foundational human right.

The survey confirms the de-Christianization of Europe. Regrettably, secular societies are, by and large, more inclined to value individual autonomy and devalue freedom of religion. Those who are religious are not only in a minority, they live in countries where their religious rights are comparatively tenuous.

Six nations stand out for their very high support for gender equality and their very low support for freedom of religion: Canada, Sweden, France, Netherlands, Spain, and Australia.

For those who value freedom of religion, matters were better in the United States. Of the nine categories, the top three were Fair Judiciary (93%), Gender Equality (91%) and Free Religion (86%).

The role that freedom of religion plays in the life of a free country is no longer understood by many in the West. It should be the focus of history textbooks and is deserving of a national conversation on how to preserve our freedoms. Instead, we are more interested in promoting the freedom of middle school kids to “transition” from one sex to the other.

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# POLL TAPS CHRISTIANITY'S DECLINE

The Pew Research Center survey on white evangelicals, President Trump, and Christianity's public role was released March 12. Half of all Americans say Christianity's influence is declining. This perspective was true for all religious groups; those who were the least likely to ascribe to this point of view were Jews, the unaffiliated and non-believers.

The reasons why this is happening vary. The number one reason given was the "growth in the number of people in the U.S. who are not religious" (60%). This was followed by "misconduct by Christian leaders" (58%) and "more permissive attitudes about sexual behavior and sexuality in popular culture" (53%). "Negative portrayals of Christianity in pop culture" was next (41%).

White evangelicals and Catholics have much in common: the majority cited all four of the above reasons for the decline of Christianity's influence, the lone exception being white evangelicals who cited "misconduct by Christian leaders" (48%).

Not surprisingly, Catholics, having been burnt by the clergy sexual abuse scandal, were the most likely (66%) to say "misconduct by Christian leaders" was a major cause of Christianity's decline. The other three most cited reasons are the most illuminating.

What does the growth of people who are not religious have in common with permissive attitudes about sexuality and negative portrayals of Christianity in pop culture? The sense that a more Christian nation would be a more moral one.

This sentiment is not without reason. The rejection of Christian sexual ethics, with its emphasis on sexual

reticence, is made manifest in sexual promiscuity and attacks on Christianity. This suggests that secular elites in the media, the entertainment industry, and education have crafted a culture that works to the detriment of most Americans. Yet they continue to see themselves as the enlightened ones. Most Americans know better.

The country is split on whether Christianity's decline is permanent (27%) or temporary (24%). Comparing the faithful to those who are not religious, the former are more optimistic than the latter about this being a temporary condition.

The decline of Christianity and the rise of secularism does not bode well for the future of American society. Self-giving and selflessness, which are hallmarks of Christianity, stand in stark contrast to the self-indulgence and selfishness that mark the culture of secularism.

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## **THE DARK SIDE OF BLOOMBERG**

Michael Bloomberg will never be president. After reading this, you may breathe a sigh of relief.

In the South Carolina presidential debate, Senator Elizabeth Warren commented that when she was a special-education teacher she was happy not to have a boss like Bloomberg. She recounted how he allegedly said to one of his pregnant employees, "Kill It!" Bloomberg denied the accusation.

In 1997, Bloomberg was sued by Sekiko Sakai Garrison. He settled with the Japanese woman, but neither the amount nor any other information about the non-disclosure agreement (NDA) has been made public.

Bloomberg should never have been allowed to get away with this. Before dropping out, he succumbed to public pressure and said he would release Garrison from the NDA. But neither he nor his company reached out to her. So nothing ever came of it.

In the Catholic Church, NDA's are not tolerated (they once were). While there are legitimate reasons for having NDA's, such as protecting the privacy rights of victims, those who are in public office, or are in pursuit of it, must be held to a higher standard. This is doubly true of presidential candidates.

Last year a Bloomberg L.P. spokesman told ABC News that the company rarely settles disputes, preferring to take their case to the courts. What was different about this case? Why didn't Bloomberg take his chances in the courts? Why did he find it necessary to settle?

Garrison's lawyer told ABC News that she may be willing to speak if the NDA were to be voided. But the matter became moot when Bloomberg quit the race. Nonetheless, consider what we know.

According to Garrison's lawsuit, on April 11, 1995, at approximately 11:20 a.m., Bloomberg posed for a picture with two female workers and a group of students from New York University in the company snack area. He noticed Garrison standing nearby and struck up a conversation with her. "How's married life? You still married?" She said everything was going along just great, and that she was pregnant. Bloomberg responded, "Kill it!" Stunned, she asked him to repeat what he said. "Kill it!" He then muttered, "Great! Number 16!" He was expressing his unhappiness with the sixteen women who were out on maternity leave.

Who is telling the truth? Bloomberg or Garrison? We can't be certain but it sure looks like she is. There are several

reasons for drawing this conclusion.

Garrison understood Bloomberg's remark as suggesting she abort her baby in order to keep her job. She was visibly upset with him and told several managers in the company what happened.

In August 1995, four months after this incident, Garrison filed a complaint with the New York Division of Human Rights. According to ABC News, she spoke to "ten people within the firm, five of whom were managers."

What did they do for her? According to her lawsuit, filed two years later, nothing. It's actually worse than nothing. "The managers told her to ignore the comment, forget it ever happened and not to act on her complaint. These managers reiterated threats of termination if plaintiff pressed the complaint."

The day after the "Kill It" episode, Garrison went to work but was so distraught and ill that she had to leave. She called in sick the next day. She was subsequently fired.

Some in the media are portraying this as a he said/she said type of dispute: Bloomberg says he never said "Kill It!" and she says he did. But this account is false. There is at least one witness.

David Zielenzinger, a former Bloomberg technology worker, told the Washington Post he heard the conversation. "I remember she had been telling some of her girlfriends that she was pregnant. And Mike came out and I remember he said, 'Are you going to kill it?' And that stopped everything. And I couldn't believe it." Zielenzinger said this was vintage Bloomberg. "He talked kind of crudely about women all the time."

Bloomberg learned from some employees that Garrison was upset with him after their exchange. His remarks are telling. [She made handwritten notes of the call, which were obtained by the Post.]

Bloomberg called her at home and left a lengthy voice mail. He asked her to give him a call, saying he learned from another employee that "you were upset." He said that "whatever you heard wasn't what I said and whatever I said had nothing to do with pregnancies."

Why, then, did Bloomberg apologize? Here is how he ended the call. "I apologize if there was something you heard but I didn't say it, didn't mean it, didn't say it." A spokesman for the company did not deny this account.

Why would anyone apologize for something he never said? More important, why, if he never said it, would he say he "didn't mean it"? This indicates that he did say it, objecting only to her interpretation of what he meant when he advised her to "Kill It!" What should she have thought? That he was joking about his suggestion that she kill her baby? Did he think she would burst out laughing? What kind of man speaks this way?

Bloomberg had a thing about Garrison. Did he see her as an easy mark? She was the only Japanese woman working in sales in the New York headquarters at the time. Here are some things he allegedly said about her before his infamous "Kill It!" remark.

In front of male employees who knew her boyfriend, he asked her, "Are you still dating your boyfriend? You giving him good [he used a slang term for oral sex]?" On another occasion, after pointing to a newly-hired older female who was conversing with an overweight male salesperson, he asked Garrison, "If you had to, would you rather do THAT or THAT?"

When Bloomberg spotted Garrison wearing an engagement ring, he said, "What, is the guy dumb and blind? What the hell is he marrying you for?" A week later, he said to her, "Still engaged? What, is he THAT GOOD in bed, or did your father pay him off to get rid of you?"

Bloomberg once broke up a conversation between Garrison and a

male employee at a business convention so he could make a crude comment about the male employee's girlfriend (she was also an employee). As she entered the elevator, he said, "That is one great piece of ass. You must be a great f\*\*\*." On another occasion, when Bloomberg saw Garrison wearing a dress he didn't like, he told her, "Don't like the dress. Your ass looks huge in it." He made this comment to her on several occasions whenever she wore a new outfit.

One day Bloomberg saw Garrison return from lunch with a Tiffany shopping bag. "You ARE a real Jap" he said. He was either referring to her Japanese heritage, or, more likely, commenting on her acting like a "Jewish American Princess." Either way he was denigrating her and making an ethnic slur.

Bloomberg looks even more guilty when we consider that his contempt for pregnant workers is not confined to Garrison.

Less than two years before his alleged "Kill it!" comment, Bloomberg learned that one of his employees, who had just given birth, was having a hard time finding a nanny. He yelled at her in front of a large group of employees. "It's a f\*\*\*\*\*g baby! All it does is eat and s\*\*\*. It doesn't know the difference between you and anyone else!"

Bloomberg then made a racist comment. "All you need is some black who doesn't even have to speak English to rescue it from a burning building!" The woman burst into tears in front of her co-workers.

If the CEO speaks this way in front of his employees about pregnant women, it should come as no surprise that he tolerates—indeed promotes—an environment where sexual comments and behavior are not uncommon. This explains why Garrison's lawyer, Bonnie Josephs, said, "The atmosphere was toxic and harassing."

It wasn't just Garrison whom he spoke to this way. In court filings, women employees of Bloomberg allege he said such

things as, "I'd like to do that piece of meat"; "I would DO you in a second"; "I'd like to f\*\*\* that in a second"; "That's a great piece of ass."

He did not hide his sexism. In September 1996, in front of employees and news reporters at a conference in Toronto, he allegedly said, "I would like nothing more in my life than to have Sharon Stone sit on my face."

Bloomberg set the tone for his entire company. Garrison's immediate boss routinely displayed wind-up toys in the shapes of a penis and a vagina on his desk. He also placed them on her desk, and when she complained, he did it over and over again. This same man bragged to her about a male employee who performed oral sex on his secretary while she sat on his shoulders in their office.

It is hardly a surprise to learn that when Bloomberg was mayor of New York City, his company continued to foster a morally corrupt workplace.

In 2007, a lawsuit of discrimination against pregnant women and new mothers was filed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. It was conveniently dismissed in 2011, but not before 67 women said they were prepared to join the case. Bloomberg, they said, took aim at women after they became pregnant and after they took maternity leave.

Bloomberg's disdain for pregnant women is of a piece with his politics. His passion for abortion is so strong that as soon as he became mayor of New York City, he issued an executive order that forced medical students training to become an obstetrician or a gynecologist in a city hospital to learn how to abort a baby. "Kill it!" is something this man can't seem to get enough of.

This is the dark side of Michael Bloomberg. He pushed for all kinds of workplace rules to protect women from being harassed, but only after he spent years harassing them himself.

This is also the dark side of the Church's critics. Virtually every organization in the nation issues NDA's to limit their liability, the exception being the Catholic Church. Yet the Church is rarely praised for making the right reforms. Par for the course.

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## CONFESSIONAL SEAL AT RISK IN UTAH

Utah Rep. Angela Romero, a Democrat, is sponsoring a bill that would gut the seal of Confession. She maintains that it is necessary because priests learn of the sexual abuse of minors in confession and do not report this to the authorities.

In a January 13 letter to Rep. Romero, Bill Donohue wrote:

"I have two questions for you.

"Speaking about the victims of sexual abuse, you have said, 'Their perpetrators went to confession, confided in a religious leader, and nothing ever happened.' What evidence do you have for making this remark?

"Last year I asked a state lawmaker in California the same question. He sponsored a similar bill and, like you, he made a comment almost identical to the one you made. He could not offer any evidence. After we waged a vigorous campaign against him, he withdrew his bill.

"The second question is this: Why are you seeking to breach the priest-penitent exemption, but are not seeking to violate the lawyer-client privilege or the exemption afforded psychologists and their patients? Do they not learn of sexual



abuse behind closed doors?”

We asked those who receive our emails to contact the Utah Speaker of the House, Rep. Brad Wilson, seeking his help in opposing this bill. Here is how he responded:

“I have serious concerns about this bill and the effects it could have on religious leaders as well as their ability to counsel members of their congregation. I do not support this bill in its current form and—unless significant changes are made to ensure the protection of religious liberties—I will be voting against this bill.” (His emphasis.)

Rep. Romero, however, doubled down, saying she is going forward with her bill, accusing Donohue of making a “soft threat.” She was obviously referring to the following concluding portion of Donohue’s January 10 letter:

“You are treading on dangerous territory. When the government seeks to police the sacraments of the Catholic Church—or encroach on the tenets and practices of any world religion—it is gearing up for a court fight. The First Amendment secures religious liberty, and that entails separation of church and state.”

Donohue stood by that statement. Regarding her remark, she moved well beyond the “threat” stage when she introduced a bill that attacks a sacrament of the Catholic Church—and there is nothing “soft” about that. Now she is claiming victim status because of a pushback by Catholics. What did she expect? That Catholics would allow an agent of the state to trample on their constitutionally protected rights?

Here is what Romero told the media. “Am I against organized religion? No. I’m Catholic. Maybe this is a little more personal for me. I’ve had victims here in Utah, people who have experienced and sexual abuse and child abuse. Their perpetrators were protected by a religious institutions. I have a problem with that.” [This is exactly the way she was

quoted.]

We have a problem with so-called Catholics telling us they are not against the Catholic Church when they seek to destroy one of their sacraments. That gets real personal. As for the perpetrators, there is no evidence—Donohue asked her to give it to him—showing that breaking the seal of Confession would result in prosecuting molesters.

It is a red herring, a contrived pretext that would allow the government to effectively cause the Sacrament of Reconciliation to implode. No practicing Catholic would ever sponsor such a bill, nor would a member of the faithful from any other religion.

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## **WESTERN EUROPE BALKS ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has been a vocal advocate of religious liberty, both here and abroad. He has now established a new International Religious Freedom Alliance with 27 member states.

They have all pledged to promote religious beliefs in a myriad of ways, and have agreed to condemn religious persecution wherever it exists. Conscience rights are central to this initiative and a condemnation of “blasphemy laws” is another important feature.

One of the 27 nations that signed the statement was Colombia. Ironically, Open Doors recently assigned it 41st place among the worst 50 nations in the world known for Christian persecution. However, it is not state officials who are

responsible—it is guerrillas and organized crime. It is a very positive sign that state officials are now pledging to condemn religious persecution.

Not surprisingly, Israel signed on as a supporter of religious liberty. Also unsurprising is the absence of Muslim-run states. Of the 50 worst nations for Christians to live in, as determined by Open Doors, 38 are run by Muslims.

It is not good news to learn that only 27 nations have so far gotten on board. Most glaringly, only two nations from Western Europe have joined—the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. By contrast, 11 nations from Central and Eastern Europe are participants: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

In 1967, Enver Hoxha, a Communist, declared Albania to be the world's first atheist state. Now it is more supportive of religious liberty than France, Germany, and Spain. These three nations were recently named by the Gatestone Institute as among the worst perpetrators of anti-Christian attacks in Europe. That they refused to join an international alliance defending religious freedom is telling.

The collapse of Christianity and the rise of militant secularism has conquered Western Europe, and with it has come religious persecution. Conditions are better in North America, but they are not great. There is something organically sick about secularism in its current manifestation. It is not practicing Christians and Jews we need to fear—it is religious and secular fanatics.

What the Western world desperately needs is a Christian renaissance. Fortunately, Secretary Pompeo is doing what he can to inspire it.

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# FLORIDA CBS AFFILIATE APOLOGIZES

On January 3, the CBS affiliate in St. Petersburg, Florida, WTSP, posted on its website a news story that read, "Former Sarasota Bishop Charged with Sexually Battering Child." It was about a former bishop at the Westcoast Center for Human Development in Sarasota; he was arrested and charged with battering a child.

We had no problem with that story. But we did have a problem with a similar story on this bishop that was posted the next day. It was titled, "'It's Disheartening': Former Catholic Church Abuse Victim Says Local Bishop Could Have More Victims."

In fact, there was no Catholic bishop charged with sexual abuse—it was the same Protestant bishop mentioned in the first story. The story began by stating that this bishop was "behind bars." Then—out of nowhere—it said that sexual abuse is happening across the country, citing a man who says he was abused 50 years ago by a Catholic priest.

The headline was totally dishonest. Furthermore, mentioning that a Catholic priest victimized someone a half-century ago was as gratuitous as it was scurrilous.

Something broke down. How could this CBS affiliate get it right the first day and then take cheap shots at the Catholic Church the next day—in a story unrelated to the bishop?

It would be like doing a story on a current reporter from a Sarasota newspaper charged with sexual misconduct, and then adding a story about a former WTSP reporter who was accused of

a sexual offense 50 years ago, mentioning WTSP in the headline!

On January 6, we issued a news release addressing this matter. We are happy to report that after giving our readers the email address of Kelly Frank at WTSP, the station issued an apology. Here is the reply.

“After reading the headline and the story, we have added language to the headline and provided a clarification to make it clear that while the alleged victim we spoke to was a member of the Catholic Church, the Bishop in question represented a non-denominational church. We regret this omission and apologize for it.”

Good for WTSP. It is always better to remedy a wrong and apologize for making it than to stonewall your critics.

Thanks to all of those who made their voice heard. Unless you follow through, progress will not be made. We can't do this by ourselves.

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## **DETROIT FREE PRESS IS AN ABSOLUTE DISGRACE**

Let's say you are a reporter who detests the Catholic Church (there are more than a few out there), and would like to do an article that reflects badly on it. You come across a story that may qualify, but it is rather routine: it is about high school boys acting inappropriately.

Not satisfied, you decide to enhance the piece by trotting out a story about a noted Catholic public figure (Brett Kavanaugh)

who was accused of acting offensively when he was in high school. It happened decades ago in some other part of the country, and the charges were never corroborated by anyone, but that doesn't matter. It can be made to fit.

Still not satisfied this will embarrass the Church, you add a story about a Catholic priest who, while having nothing to do with the original story, is serving time for what he did in the 1990s.

The story then ropes back to high school boys today in two Detroit Catholic schools who did something really newsworthy: they got into a brawl following a hockey game.

This 2679-word cut-and-paste "news story" appeared in the January 2nd edition of the *Detroit Free Press*.

To say this story was disjointed would be an understatement: forcing unconnected stories—stuffing them together without any segue—is what we would expect from a high school student hoping to finally make the honor roll. If a reporter did a story on African American high school students who acted inappropriately, and added to it a story on O.J.—jamming in a story about Bill Cosby—and ended with a note about brawling black high school athletes, it wouldn't pass the smell test. The odor of bigotry would be in the air.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Education found that between 2013 and 2016, Detroit Public Schools listed 45 criminal cases of sexual misconduct, and 233 incidents of sexual harassment involving students.

Worse, the district had no Title IX investigation procedure. Moreover, just a few years ago, *USA Today* did a major study of sexual misconduct in the public schools in every state, rating them on several measures. Michigan received an overall score of "F."

Those who work at the *Detroit Free Press* have no interest in

sticking it to the public schools, which is why they would never do to them what this article did to the Catholic Church. They are a disgrace to the profession of journalism.

We urged those who get our emails to contact *Detroit Free Press* editor Peter Bhatia.

Here is what he wrote in reply:

Thanks for your e-mail. However, the allegations made by Dr. Donohue are completely without merit. The story was responsible, deeply reported and factual, reporting on a difficult situation that has arisen over time in Catholic boys' schools here. Take the time to read the story and I think you will see it is fair. To borrow a phrase from Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Dr. Donohue is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.

Here is Bill Donohue's reply:

Mr. Bhatia's reply is flatulent. He says the story's facts are accurate. That was not my point, and he knows it. My point was that this was a contrived non-story with disjointed accounts spliced together to put a bad face on the Catholic Church. I even gave as an analogue how this might play out if the target were African Americans. His dodge is further proof of the dishonesty and juvenile journalism of the *Detroit Free Press*.