

IS PACIFISM MORAL?

Bill Donohue

Let's cut to the quick. No, pacifism is not moral. Pacifism means that self-defense, and the defense of one's nation, is immoral. However pure the intent, pacifism holds that it is better to permit innocents to die than it is to use force to stop the aggressors. Now that is immoral.

This issue is back in the news largely because of the war in Iran. But it is also relevant again because of the recent death of Colman McCarthy, America's premier pacifist, and some remarks by Pope Leo XIV.

McCarthy wrote for *The Washington Post* for decades. He studied to be a monk and was popular in left-Catholic circles for his opposition to violence in any form and for any cause. He was 89.

He was such a purist that he even refused to stand for "The Star-Spangled Banner," objecting to the refrain "the bombs bursting in air." No doubt he hated fireworks. Any pacifist who views grades and exams as "forms of academic violence" surely must find Fourth of July celebrations to be verboten.

Though McCarthy was loved by his left-wing Catholic fans, he spoke with derision about Catholicism. "As the secretly elected leader of a male-run, land-rich, undemocratic, hierarchic, dogmatically unyielding organization headquartered in a second-rate European country, Pope John Paul II had few, if any, worries about accountability. He ruled, accordingly, as an autocrat."

Why the invective? Among other things, he hated the pope's defense of the "just war" doctrine. In his encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, His Holiness wrote that "the intrinsic value of life and the duty to love oneself no less than others are

the basis of *a true right to self-defense*" (his italics).

McCarthy would have none of it. He believed that we have no right to kill an aggressor even in circumstances where that is the only viable option. Moreover, he believed that even when someone was able to kill an aggressor from killing scores of non-combatant women and children, it would be better to let him slaughter the innocent. This is what pacifism yields—immoral outcomes.

Catholicism ascribes to the "just war" doctrine as broached by St. Augustine. He wanted peace as much as anyone but he also knew there were times when we had to fight in order to achieve it. He laid down several criteria for war, among them that the cause must be just; that there must be a probability of success; that the means used must be proportionate to the desired outcome; and that force should be invoked only as a last resort.

Many years ago, when I was teaching at a Catholic college, I listened to a visiting professor lecture the mostly Catholic faculty on the merits of pacifism. He cited the tradition of the Quakers as exemplary and had the audacity to chide the audience for its affiliation with a religion that justifies war in some instances. He was not too happy with me when I stopped him in his tracks, arguing that the only reason any of us are alive today is because enough Americans rejected pacifism as a just option in World War II.

Pacifists may say they believe in peace, but in my book they confuse peace with surrender.

Pope Leo XIV has not openly rejected the "just war" doctrine, but recent comments he made about the conflict in Iran come close.

On Easter Sunday, Pope Leo XIV called for all nations to lay down their arms and choose negotiation. On March 1, he went further, saying about the Middle East, "Stability and peace

are not achieved through mutual threats, nor through the use of weapons, which sow destruction, suffering, and death, but only through reasonable, sincere, and responsible dialogue.” That comment drew the ire of *Wall Street Journal* columnist Bill McGurn.

McGurn took strong issue with the word “only.” He is, of course, right. Countless wars have resulted in peace. In fairness, the pope was not speaking from a traditional mantle of authority—it was a tweet. No matter, he left himself open for rebuke. It also needs to be said that there are those who wage war on innocents and explicitly reject dialogue. What then? There are times when we can’t talk our way out of a confrontation.

St. Augustine won the debate in 418 A.D. when he wrote that “Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity...in order that peace may be obtained” (my emphasis).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* agrees with Augustine. “Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm. For this reason, those who legitimately hold authority also have the right to use arms to repel aggression against the civil community entrusted to their responsibility.”

The great American political philosopher, Sidney Hook (whom I greatly admired and studied under), once wrote that “Those who will never risk their lives for freedom will surely lose their freedom without surely saving their lives...” A better rejoinder to Colman McCarthy would be hard to find.

NOTRE DAME'S PROBLEM IS NOT UNIQUE

The University of Notre Dame is not only one of America's best institutions of higher education, it is also seen, for the most part, as an authentically Catholic institution.

That is why it was so disconcerting to read that a professor, Susan Ostermann, was named director of the Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies. She is not someone who happens to be "pro-choice"—she is a pro-abortion zealot.

Any person who falsely claims that the pro-life movement has "its roots in white supremacy and racism," and condemns crisis pregnancy centers as "anti-abortion propaganda sites," belongs working at Planned Parenthood, not Notre Dame. Planned Parenthood, of course, was founded by a bona fide white supremacist, Margaret Sanger.

Ostermann didn't get the job by mistake. She got it with the approval of the president, Fr. Robert Dowd, provost John McGreevy and the dean of the Keough School of Global Affairs, Mary Gallagher. Dowd claims he was "blindsided" by the appointment. That's strange. Did he not know that his predecessor, Fr. John Jenkins, publicly rebuked Ostermann for championing the pro-abortion cause? Surely McGreevy and Gallagher must have known.

The good news is that the blowback was ferocious and ultimately forced Ostermann to go back to the classroom. Led by the brilliant historian, Fr. Bill Miscamble, and the courageous Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Kevin Rhoades, the case was made to reject her appointment. Some twenty bishops, including Archbishop Paul Coakley, president of the bishops' conference, joined the fight, as did many students and alumni; those who have been given awards at Notre Dame also registered

their objections. So it ended well. But problems remain, and Notre Dame is not unique among Catholic schools.

I taught at a nominally Catholic college for 16 years, and witnessed firsthand how uncommitted many administrators and faculty are to the teachings of the Catholic Church. In fact, some were openly hostile to Catholicism, and this included the nun who ran the school. But La Roche College in Pittsburgh (now a university) is not atypical.

Georgetown University, a premier Catholic institution, has two pro-abortion student clubs on campus. Moreover, student government officials have sought to punish students who accept the Church's teachings on marriage. It also employs a professor who justifies rape and slavery, provided the rapists and slavemasters are Muslim.

Thankfully, Notre Dame is not like Georgetown. But its central problem is still extant. There are two main reasons why a pro-abortion extremist came close to being promoted: one is ideological and the other is a matter of identity.

While it is oversimplified to say there are social justice Catholics and pro-life Catholics, there is more than a measure of truth to it. Catholic teachings on the poor, the needy, the rejected, and immigrants are seen as being in the liberal camp; those that stress abortion, euthanasia, marriage, the family and sexuality are seen as being in the conservative camp. Both are expressions of Catholicism.

It has become abundantly clear that social justice Catholics are soft on abortion. That's being kind. Quite frankly, many of them—indeed most—do not regard abortion as “intrinsically evil,” which is the way the Church defines it. They see it as unfortunate. The Church also says racism is “intrinsically evil.” On that they agree. In short, racism upsets them infinitely more than abortion.

Are there Catholics in the conservative camp who are soft on

racism? No doubt there are, but in my experience there are far fewer of them than there are liberal Catholics who are soft on abortion.

The other problem is not ideological; it is matter of identity. Unfortunately, many Catholic professors and administrators are uneasy being identified as Catholic in higher education circles. To be exact, they have a deep-seated need to win the affirmation of secular elites. At bottom, they are not comfortable in their Catholic skin.

They know the way secular elites look at Catholics of a more traditional stripe, and they are scared to death of being thrown in with them. In other words, their reluctance to defend conservative moral teachings—even when they don't disagree with them—is done to win the blessings of secular elites, in and out of education. That's how insecure they are about their Catholic identity.

Christian Smith, a Notre Dame sociologist, recently wrote an article in *First Things* explaining why he left the school. He says the Catholic identity problem is due to three things, one of which is a strong desire to secure “mainstream acceptance by ‘peer institutions’: Duke, Northwestern, Vanderbilt, Washington University in St. Louis, Emory, Rice, Stanford, NYU, and the like.” He says “Notre Dame desperately wants to belong to this club.” Regrettably, this leads many to low ball their Catholicism.

Notre Dame will be challenged again, and it will come from within. But as long as it has enough faculty, students and alumni who are vigilant—and there is no question about that—it will never lose its reputation as a truly great Catholic institution of higher learning.

NORMALIZING OBSCENITIES

A Catholic League staffer was recently having dinner with friends at a New York steakhouse when she witnessed a table of several mature women talking loudly, some of whom were throwing around the “f-word” with abandon.

It used to be that such language would be heard in pubs, but not in pricey restaurants, much less by women in their senior years. But times have changed. The dumbing down of language, just like the dumbing down of virtually every other standard of decency, has become the norm. President Trump, and Biden before him, have certainly made their contributions to this end.

We can blame the entertainment industry and the media for normalizing obscenities. Movies have long featured expletives, but now TV shows and the mainstream media are following suit.

Recently, I was reading a news story in the *New York Times* on the anti-ICE protest in Minneapolis. It quoted the Minneapolis mayor, Jacob Frey, saying the government’s position was “bull – – -,” I have been reading this newspaper for decades, and I honestly don’t recall reading this word spelled out in a news article before. Then I read the next sentence. It quoted Frey telling ICE to “get the f–out of Minneapolis”; the obscene word was printed in full.

The next night, I heard Fox News host Greg Gutfeld complaining how insincere the anti-ICE protesters are about the welfare of illegal aliens. He said, “they don’t give two s–s about these people.” He was not censored. The show airs at a time when children watch TV. And this is not the first time Fox has lowered its standards.

Then I read an op-ed by John McWhorter, a linguist who teaches at Columbia University, in the *New York Times*. He was celebrating the increased use in public of the “f-word.” He

said, "I actually think it's a positive development." He opined, "The normalization of the word...is a sign of maturity in American English." Ironically, he chose not to spell it, instead referring to it as the "f-word." He concluded saying he was "happy" that we are "getting to the point where we can all speak the way we think and live."

What about the "n-word"? Would McWhorter, who is black (I happen to admire his work on race), celebrate its invocation on TV and in newspapers? If not, why not? Why wouldn't it be a sign of maturity?

A number of years ago on CNN I was objecting to the display of some obscene artistic display when the host smugly chided me for not respecting free speech, the way the cable channel does. I immediately challenged him, saying they would not allow me to say the "n-word" on TV, only I actually said the word. I smiled, but he didn't, when they – rightfully – censored me. "See," I said.

We decided to find out how some of the big media have been handling this issue. We looked at AP (Associated Press), the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. They all have a "Standards" or "Stylebook" section that addresses this issue. While they generally don't print obscenities, they make exceptions. What is crystal clear is that in recent times all three are more likely to spell out the "f-word" than the "n-word."

Why are liberal elites more likely to find the "n-word" offensive than the "f-word"? They certainly don't object when blacks call each other the "n-word"; it is done in song all the time.

Good parents and teachers should teach their children how offensive both words are. Unfortunately, fewer appear to be doing so, and one reason why is because the frequent invocation of these words in public has a way of sanitizing

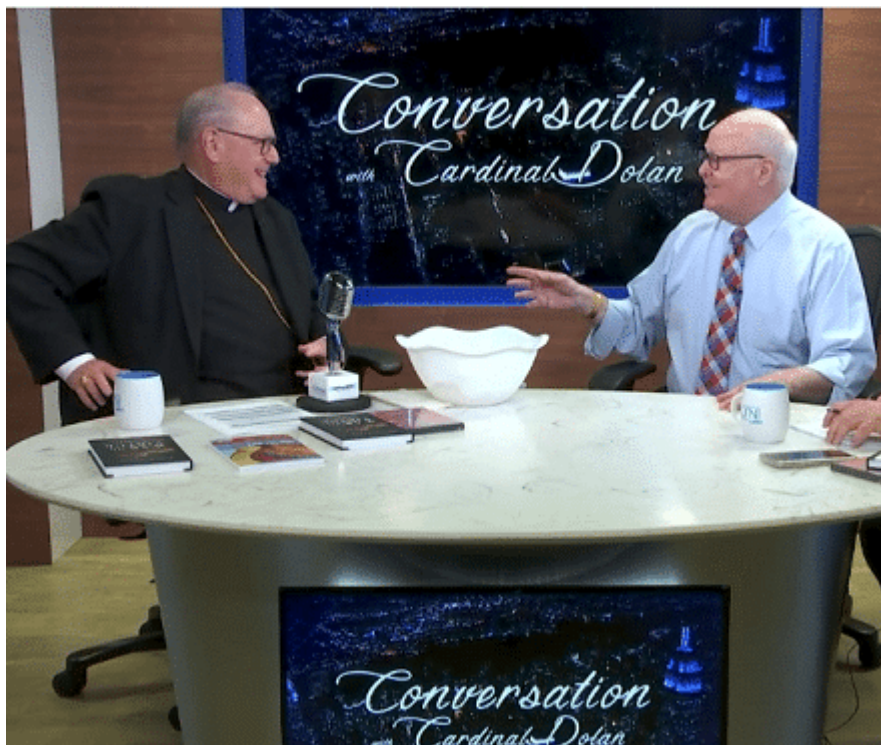
them. We are more upset about a high school football team adopting a Native American tribal name as its mascot than we are mature women screaming the “f-word” in a public establishment. Moreover, calling a team the “Indians” is seen as hate speech, but telling those who object to “f-” off is okay.

Why should this matter? Every survey in this century on the subject of civility and the moral order shows that Americans – across all demographics – are genuinely concerned about what has been happening. Things are going south. When people treat linguistic offenses like pedestrian commentary, they are letting their guard down. By itself such a phenomenon will not change our cultural landscape, when it is coupled with other attempts to normalize deviancy, it certainly does.

In the 1990s, Daniel Patrick Moynihan warned that “we have been redefining deviancy so as to exempt much conduct previously stigmatized, and also quietly raising the ‘normal’ level in categories where behavior is not abnormal by any earlier standard.” Agreeing with him in his *American Educator* article, “Defining Deviancy Down,” was John Cole. As an example of what Moynihan noted, he said were increased incidents of “profane and abusive language” targeted at teachers by their students. Today, matters are much worse. Cursing out a teacher is defended by some as free speech.

Normalizing obscenities is not worth celebrating. It only increases the coarseness that has engulfed our society.

CARDINAL DOLAN WILL BE MISSED



William A. Donohue

It is an understatement to say that the Catholic League will miss Cardinal Timothy Dolan—he is a very special man. He always fought for justice, and his amiable character won the applause of Catholics and non-Catholics alike. He was certainly very kind to me.

We met for the first time on April 15, 2009, when he was installed as the new Archbishop of New York. I was waiting on the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral as he exited, and after he spotted me, he came over to greet me. I told him something he repeated many times—to me and others: "You are my Irish terrier and I am your pit bull."

Though we did not meet until he came to New York, I had a working relationship with Dolan when he was Archbishop of Milwaukee. I mentioned this in my news release of February 23, 2009, the day the news broke that he was selected to run the New York archdiocese.

"In the fall of 2007, the Catholic League launched a boycott and PR campaign against the Miller Brewing Company for its

sponsorship of a vile anti-Catholic gay event, the Folsom Street Fair, in San Francisco. After six weeks of pounding Miller, we got what we wanted: an apology for four anti-Catholic incidents and a pledge not to sponsor the event again.”

We would not have succeeded without the support of Archbishop Dolan. Miller officials complained to him about my campaign against them, but to no avail: he said he was on our side.

Similarly, in 2023, after I registered my objections with Rob Manfred, the Commissioner of Baseball, for allowing the Los Angeles Dodgers to honor an anti-Catholic gay group on “Pride Night,” he called Dolan to protest my public stance. Dolan told him to call me. “I’m sure Bill will be glad to talk to you.” Manfred never called.

Soon after Dolan became Archbishop of New York, he took me to a Broadway play. Later in 2009, he invited the entire board of directors of the Catholic League to have dinner in his residence. His support for our mission was unyielding.

One reason why Dolan was always in our corner was his commitment to the rights of accused priests. It is well known that he has been busy trying to afford just compensation to those who have suffered at the hands of offending priests—almost all the abuse took place decades ago—but less well known is his defense of priests who have been unfairly maligned.

Cardinal Dolan was quickly embraced by his brother bishops. In 2010, he was elected president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. He led with distinction, taking on the unfair measures of Obamacare that sought to penalize Catholic non-profits, such as the Little Sisters of the Poor.

It is a tribute to his non-partisanship that he was asked to close both the Democratic and the Republican national conventions. But his fairness never stood in the way of being

outspoken about contemporary issues. He was not tied to the politics of the left or the right.

The Catholic League has come to the defense of many priests, bishops and cardinals, but no one has been consistently more grateful than Cardinal Dolan. Always honest, he does not hold back in expressing his appreciation.

I prize the many radio and TV interviews I did with him. Whenever I had a new book published, he invited me to speak with him. There were other occasions, too, such as his greeting of the homeless on Ash Wednesday outside St. Francis of Assisi, near Penn Station—they are given breakfast—that are memorable. I especially recall him giving me a Coors stein (our favorite beer is Coors Light) a few years ago.

In 2023, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Catholic League at the New York Athletic Club. Cardinal Dolan was the keynote speaker, and he did not disappoint. What stood out the most was not so much his formal comments—it was his discussions with those in attendance. He worked the room, meeting virtually everyone, winning them over with his characteristic jovial demeanor.

Running the New York archdiocese is a daunting task, but it is one that suits the new archbishop. Archbishop Ronald Hicks is young and vibrant, and will be able to put his considerable administrative experience to good use. We look forward to working with him.

It did not take long for Cardinal Dolan to win over the hearts of New Yorkers, and it our sincere hope that Archbishop Hicks will do the same.

NORMALIZING TRANSGENDER ABNORMALITIES

The greatest child abuse scandal of our day is the exploitation of minors who want to “transition” to the opposite sex. Genital mutilation, chemical castration, hormonal manipulation—the very stuff of sex-reassignment surgery—are being promoted and carried out by adults who are in it for ideological or financial profit, or both. Seeking to normalize abnormal conditions is cruel and needs to end.

There are lots of parties to this problem, but no one is more responsible for seeking to normalize transgender abnormalities than the Biden administration. To pave the way for acceptance of abnormal sexual expressions, his minions decided to pan normal sexual expressions.

For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs initially banned the iconic photo of a World War II sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square; the couple were celebrating the end of the war with Japan in 1945. The Biden folks branded it “inappropriate behavior,” claiming it no longer fits the “values” of the VA.

The “values” that the Biden team embraced were not the values that most Americans wanted. To take one example, consider Biden’s choice for Assistant Secretary for Health.

Biden chose a man who falsely claimed to be a woman, Richard Levine. He went by the name Rachel, dressed like a woman, and looked like one too. But he could never change his XY chromosomes. So he lived a fictional existence, and the “Catholic” president was proud to promote it.

Policy wise, the Biden team reinterpreted “sex” discrimination in Title IX to include “gender identity.” This meant that it was okay for boys to compete against girls in sports and to

use the same locker rooms and shower facilities. In a more sane time, this would be called misogynistic, but now it was being heralded by modern-day feminists.

Kamala Harris was so enthusiastic about this issue that she said illegal immigrants who were imprisoned, and wanted to “transition” to the opposite sex, should have their procedures funded by the American people. She said that in 2019. When asked in 2025 if she still held to that position, she said yes. In fact, she dedicated a whole chapter to this in her new book.

Everyone knows that only women can get pregnant, but to admit this is to ratify what nature has ordained. There’s the rub: the LGBTQ crowd is angry at nature, and at nature’s God, so they pretend that men can also get pregnant.

The 2024 Democratic Party Platform referred to pregnant women in prison as “pregnant inmates.” The legal and medical elite were already on board: the ACLU and the AMA both referred to “pregnant” people. The same logic led failed VP candidate and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz to put tampons in the boys’ bathrooms.

A Rasmussen survey found that 70 percent of Americans are concerned about school-age children being exposed to sexual material that is not age appropriate. But it is an uphill battle.

“LGBTQ+-inclusive” texts have been assigned to kindergarten students in some schools. Another storybook for the little ones that is being used is about a transgender child who is shown in a sex-neutral or sex-ambiguous bathroom. She boasts, “My friends defend my choices and place.” She makes it plain that she prefers to be referred to as “they/their/them.” Gay marriage is not just discussed in these books—it is celebrated.

Why do homosexual men dressed as women—so-called drag

queens—demand that they perform before children?

They went to court over this “right.” Their performances include sexually explicit acts. They sued Tennessee after the state restricted drag performances when children were present (the Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to the law). The drag queens said they were defending free speech, but what they were really defending was the right to engage in lewd acts in front of children. Why is this so important to them? This is one step away from pedophilia. It is not speech.

Harvard used to be a university where serious learning took place. No more. In the spring semester, a class will be offered on drag queens, and next fall there will be one on “Queer Ethnology.” They will be taught by a visiting professor, LaWhore Vagistan, a drag queen star.

The Emmy Awards are given each year to the best TV programming. This year the show featured several drag queens who crashed the red carpet. It had nothing to do with the purpose of the event, but it did have much to do with the kind of moral destitution that Hollywood is known for. The goal was to normalize abnormal behavior.

Those promoting this sick agenda are among the most intolerant people in America. In a recent study of free speech on college campuses, it was revealed that discussions about transgender issues are not welcome; students are afraid to speak about them. That’s because defending normalcy is considered taboo by the guardians of higher education.

Normalizing transgender abnormalities is a dangerous and despicable enterprise. It leads to the sexual exploitation of children, ruining them physically and psychologically. Indeed, it is evil.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TRUTH DOESN'T MATTER

William A. Donohue

When truth doesn't matter, all things are possible, including some very unseemly things.

There was a front-page article in the September 25 edition of the *New York Times* that is as fascinating as it is disturbing. Well researched, it is the story of Amy Griffin, one of the richest women in the country. She is the 49-year-old author of *The Tell*, a best-selling memoir that recounts her recollections of being raped on several occasions by a middle-school teacher in Amarillo, Texas, starting when she was 12.

Her recollections were not of the ordinary kind—they were drug-induced memories. To be specific, she claims that her memory was repressed until she took MDMA, a drug found in Ecstasy and Molly. The allegations she made against the teacher were disclosed during therapy sessions while under the influence of the illegal psychedelic drug.

The newspaper would not have posted a 5,000 word article about Griffin unless she was a VIP. And that she is. The glitterati who came rushing to her side, promoting the book, include Oprah Winfrey, Jenna Bush Hager, Gwyneth Paltrow and Reese Witherspoon. The latter spoke for many when she said, “By opening up her heart, she became a beacon for women everywhere.”

She spoke too soon.

What do we know about the alleged rapist? We know that he has

worked in the school district for 30 years and his record is spotless: there has never been one complaint made about him.

Suspicious about Griffin's account have mushroomed. "Some have questioned the reliability of decades old memories unearthed during drug assisted therapy." Others are questioning why no one knew anything about what allegedly happened. Where are the bruises from her violent experiences? There are many other serious issues with Griffin's story.

She claims that subsequent to her memory being jarred, she believes that one of her childhood friends, "Claudia," was also abused by the same teacher. But when Griffin asked her about this she said no. Griffin also writes about an incident that took place at a church youth group gathering in her house. But her family says they never hosted such an event.

In her book proposal, Griffin said another man had raped her. But she made no mention of it in her memoir. When she reported her claims of abuse to a detective, she never told him her account was a recovered memory, induced by drugs. More important, he says that from his experience, sex crimes against children typically have many victims. Yet no one, other than her, has ever accused the teacher of anything.

When *New York Times* reporters asked Griffin for an interview, she stiffed them for more than three months. To top things off, her lawyer said that by asking her to answer 11- pages of questions, "the mere sending of this document has caused additional trauma and extreme physical and emotional harm to a survivor of sexual assault, which is inexcusable."

Rick Doblin is the nation's biggest advocate of the therapeutic drug MDMA; he also connected her to her therapists. When asked about the reliability of "repressed memories," he said, "Whether it's real or not—meaning whether the incident actually happened—from a therapeutic perspective, it doesn't matter. A lot of times people will develop stories

that help them make sense of their life. In the therapeutic setting, what Amy went through whether it's true or not, it has value because the emotion is real."

This is what happens when the quest for truth is abandoned: falsehoods can be treated as a positive good—even if they ruin someone's life—as long as they bring solace to the complainant.

Why should Catholics care about this story?

Father Gordon MacRae is sitting in a New Hampshire prison today because an ex-con claimed that once his "repressed memory" was unleashed, it allowed him to recall that MacRae abused him many years earlier. And he is not the only priest to have suffered this fate.

Sociologist Richard Ofshe and journalist Ethan Watters studied the issue of "repressed memory" and they noted that "it has never been empirically demonstrated." Dr. Paul McHugh, the renowned Johns Hopkins psychiatrist, has long dismissed this as a dangerous idea that literally manufactures victims. Researchers at Harvard Medical School found that "repressed memory" is a "cultural creation having no basis in science."

William O'Donohue, and other clinical psychologists at the University of Nevada, Reno, studied the literature on this subject and concluded that "there is a large amount of scientific evidence that clearly shows that repressed memories simply do not exist." People do not forget their trauma, they said. "Indeed, traumatic events are actually quite memorable."

The media should ask Oprah, Jenna, Gwyneth and Reese, along with Amy Schumer, Laura Dern, Naomi Watts, Anna Wintour, Savannah Guthrie, and Katie Couric, how they feel now about their heroine.

Assuming that accused men are definitely guilty of sex crimes against women has become so easy, especially for cultural

elites. But as this story reveals, those who rushed to Griffin's side are the ones with egg on their face. Throwing the first stone can be risky.

TWO CHEERS FOR TRUMP'S FLAG BURNING STANCE

William A. Donohue

President Trump's criticism of the 1989 Supreme Court decision, *Texas v. Johnson*, that legalized burning the American flag, is deserving of great respect, notwithstanding some problems with it.

Trump was right to say, "The people in this country don't want to see our American flag burned and spit on." This alone is not sufficient reason to ban flag burning, but it is not irrelevant to the issue. More important, he was right to sneer at the high court when he said, "they called it freedom of speech." This needs to be expanded upon to understand why he is not off-base.

Two cheers for Trump. His reason for sneering, however, is not deserving of a third cheer.

"But there's another reason [besides free speech] which is perhaps much more important," he said, "it's called death. Because what happens when you burn a flag is the area goes crazy." He argued that flag burning "incites riots" and that those who are convicted would face a year in prison.

The problem with this formulation is that it is a recipe for stifling any speech deemed controversial. We've been down this

road before.

In 1949, the Supreme Court exonerated a suspended Catholic priest, Father Arthur Terminiello, after he made an inflammatory speech in Chicago. He was arrested and prosecuted for breaking a Chicago ordinance prohibiting speech deemed to “stir the public to anger” or create a disturbance.

If his conviction had not been overturned, a mob could threaten to riot whenever they learned that someone whom they disagree with was scheduled to speak at a particular venue. This is what legal analyst Harry Kalven called the “heckler’s veto.” It puts the blame on those who want to express themselves.

Ergo, Trump’s rationale for objecting to the Supreme Court’s decision allowing flag burning is a non-starter. But is also wrong to say that he has no basis for objecting to that ruling. Conservative pundit Dana Loesch errs when she says, “the government has no right to control speech or expression.” In fact, it does all the time, without controversy.

We have laws in this country against libel, perjury, obscenity, incitement to riot, infringement on copyright, treasonous speech, bribery, harassing phone calls, false advertising and the like. Someone who lies on his resume cannot seek relief by invoking free speech. Thus, her position holds no water.

Where the Supreme Court erred was in declaring flag burning to be speech. It is not—it is conduct.

Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black considered himself to be a First Amendment absolutist. In 1960, he wrote in a law journal, “It is my belief that there are ‘absolutes’ in our Bill of Rights, and that they were put there on purpose by those who knew what the words meant, and meant their prohibitions to be ‘absolutes’....”

Not only was Black wrong about that, he later proved he was not the absolutist he claimed to be. His dissents in four “free speech” cases proves it. Here’s one of them.

In 1969, twenty years before *Texas v. Johnson*, the Supreme Court took up a flag burning case that overturned the conviction of a man who burned the American flag while also making contemptuous speech about it. In *Street v. New York*, the court ruled that his speech was clearly protected, but it balked on whether flag burning should be considered “action.”

Black, the “absolutist,” dissented, arguing that “It passes my belief that anything in the Federal Constitution bars a State from making the deliberate burning of the American flag an offense. It is immaterial to me that words are spoken in connection with the burning. It is the burning of the flag that the State has set its face against.”

Another liberal, Justice Abe Fortas, agreed with Black in his dissent. “One may not justify burning a house, even if it is his own, on the ground, however sincere, that he does so as a protest.” He also pointed out that the flag is not like any other property.

In the 1989 decision, the four dissenting judges, led by Chief Justice William Rehnquist, agreed with that position by emphasizing the cultural significance of the flag. Rehnquist also took Black’s position by saying flag burning was conduct, not speech.

Much of the confusion over this issue revolves around the difference between “speech” and “expression.” They are not identical, which is why attempts to conflate them are misguided. Speech, as the Founders understood it, was to be protected because it was foundational to freedom. It was political speech—the right to agree or disagree about the makings of the good society—that was their concern.

Expression is a very elastic term, covering conduct that has

nothing to do with what the Founders envisioned. For example, the ACLU considers dwarf-tossing, mud wrestling, sleeping in parks, and the right of demonstrators to stop traffic on bridges, to be protected speech. This trivializes the First Amendment. Indeed, it is insane.

Trump has reintroduced a subject worthy of much discussion, even if his particular stance is problematic.

IRS SHIFT ON NON-PROFITS IS WELCOME

William A. Donohue

The Catholic League welcomes the announcement that the IRS has altered its policy on non-profit organizations and their participation in political campaigns. We know from our own experience that the 1954 stricture, known as the Johnson Amendment, prohibiting 501 (c) (3) organizations from campaign activity, is both rife for mischief and impractical. But the changes will not have any substantial impact on the way we have been operating for decades.

On July 7, the National Religious Broadcasters, an association of Christian communications, and the IRS reached a settlement regarding their dispute over the IRS's authority to stifle the political speech of religious non-profits.

“When a house of worship in good faith speaks to its congregation, through its customary channels of communication on matters of faith in connection with religious services, concerning electoral politics viewed through the lens of religious faith, it neither ‘participate(s)’ nor ‘intervenes’

in a 'political campaign,' within the ordinary meaning of those words."

The motion said "this interpretation of the Johnson Amendment is in keeping with the IRS's treatment of the Johnson Amendment in practice."

That conclusion is way too generous. The IRS did in fact break new ground with its settlement agreement. Here's the evidence.

Just weeks after Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, I was notified by the IRS that the Catholic League was under investigation for violating the IRS Code on political activities as it relates to 501 (c) (3) organizations. What the IRS did not realize is that I knew who triggered the investigation: Catholics United (now defunct), a George Soros-funded phony Catholic organization. We know it was a dummy Catholic group because of the 2016 Wikileaks files on John Podesta (former chief of staff for President Bill Clinton and chairman of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign). He admitted to doing this.

When I received the November 24, 2008 IRS letter notifying me of a probe, I recognized how strikingly similar it was to a leaked copy of the Catholics United complaint. Just before I was scheduled to go on CNN on October 23 (three days after I wrote a news release, "George Soros Funds Catholic Left"), a CNN staffer leaked the complaint to me. She did so because the head of Catholics United, Chris Korzen, tried to stop me from being interviewed—he suggested that one of his allies take my place, claiming I was not "an authentic Catholic commentator." CNN knew better and I went on TV that night.

The "evidence" against me was nothing more than news releases and reports that I had written during the presidential campaign on various issues. In other words, the IRS would not have taken action against the Catholic League if it were faithful to the rules that it now claims were always

operative. In short, the new wording is welcome precisely because it alters its long-standing policy on religious non-profits.

What we went through—it lasted for about a year and a half before we were given a slap on the wrist—proves what I said about the IRS rule being rife for mischief: It allowed the Soros-funded “Catholic” group to persuade the IRS to start its investigation.

Another example of the mischief that the initial rule entailed was the disparate treatment given to African American churches. Not a campaign season goes by without political candidates speaking at black churches. In some cases, they have been endorsed by pastors; there are instances when collections have been taken up for them. If this happened at a Catholic church, the whole world would know about it.

I also said this stricture was impractical. What made it impractical was the enforcement mechanism.

How can a religious non-profit like the Catholic League be expected to combat anti-Catholicism, and fight for religious liberty, without addressing political figures who are responsible for these matters? We have a First Amendment right to freedom of religion and freedom of speech, so any encroachment on those rights is unconstitutional.

The IRS concluded that although the Catholic League had “intervened in a political campaign,” it was “unintentional, isolated, non-egregious and non-recurring,” and therefore our tax exempt status remained in tact. I told the IRS agent who contacted me that they were twice wrong: (a) we did not intervene in a political campaign and (b) what we did was intentional. Therefore, I said, we were not going to change course.

It is now indisputable: the Catholic League did not change—the IRS did.

We will continue to address policy issues that arise during a political campaign that are of interest to our mission. While we have no plans to endorse candidates for public office, we will not hesitate to call out candidates who trespass on religious liberty. Quite frankly, once either the Republicans or the Democrats think they own you, they are free to throw you to the curb. We are happily independent.

So while we will not substantially change our stance, we are glad to know that we won't have the IRS looking over our shoulder for simply doing our job.

POPE LEO XIV STRESSES CHARACTER FORMATION

William A. Donohue

Exactly one week after being elected, Pope Leo XIV spoke to Catholic teachers, making plain that his idea of education transcends the ABC's. He implored them to "dedicate yourselves to the formation of the young with enthusiasm, fidelity and a spirit of sacrifice."

He specifically spoke to the issue of values. "What, in the world of youth today, are the most urgent challenges to be faced? What values are to be promoted?"

From a Catholic perspective, the values that young people adopt must be grounded in obligations to others. This is difficult these days given the cultural emphasis on self-absorption. Indeed, focusing "on the other" is a radical idea in many parts of the world.

The Holy Father nicely summarizes the challenges that await young people. "Think of the isolation caused by rampant relational models increasingly marked by superficiality, individualism and emotional instability; the spread of patterns of thought weakened by relativism; and the prevalence of rhythms and lifestyles in which there is not enough room for listening, reflection and dialogue, at school, in the family, and sometimes among peers themselves, with consequent loneliness."

In sounding the alarms over individualism and relativism, Leo sounds more like Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI than Pope Francis. His statement comes at a time when parents are struggling with the allure that technology has for their children.

A new study of young people and their parents found that "Two-thirds (67%) of parents fear they're losing precious moments with their children due to screen addiction." Indeed, parents spend almost 100 hours fighting with their kids over screen time every year. It is so bad that 41 percent of moms and dads are afraid they're "losing their little ones' childhood to technology completely."

Screen addiction is isolating, resulting in the loneliness that Leo warns about. Social media may bind some people together, but it also causes much consternation, especially for girls.

The pope's comments on the loneliness that so many young people are experiencing is underscored by a survey from Tufts University on the mental status of men and women. It found a significant difference between liberals and conservatives, and much of the gap is explained by the prevalence, or the absence, of religious beliefs and practices.

Almost half (45 percent) of those who describe themselves as politically liberal say their mental health is poor, as compared to less than one-in-five (19 percent) who identify as

conservative. Surely the liberal worldview which sees oppression as ubiquitous has something to do with this dreary outcome. But there is more to this than being angry and forlorn.

We have known for a long time that the more religious a person is, the better that person's mental *and physical* health is. A Pew survey found that 86 percent of conservatives identify with a religion, and religious people are more likely to describe themselves as "very happy." Liberals tend to be secularists and they miss out on the sense of belongingness that religious beliefs and practices afford.

A news story on this subject recorded the sentiments of Fay Dubinsky, a 28-year-old mother of two. "People my age, their life is about them, and serving themselves, and always seeking out more pleasure. I grew up Jewish and religious, and I think that's probably one of the reasons that I'm not depressed or anxious. I have so much meaning in my life, and that's not typical of my generation."

The values-centered approach favored by Pope Leo speaks to the necessity of character formation. There needs to be a national discussion about this issue. Unless parents and teachers pay as much attention to the acquisition of traditional moral values as they do standard pedagogical concerns, they are doing young people a disservice. Developing the right character in young people is not an easy task. It takes work, and plenty of it.

Stanford University professor William Damon faults the public schools for their refusal to provide for citizenship education. He notes that the Obama administration "closed down the Department of Education's character education desk as soon as it took office."

This was a very serious attack on young people. "Although most parents would like to see schools impart values such as

honesty and responsibility to their children,” Damon writes, “character education in public education has been hindered by progressive resistance to instruction that makes claims about right and wrong in the face of cultural variation (even when such claims focus on values such as truth and obligation that virtually all cultures respect).”

Damon is right. The problem is not the parents—it’s the progressive professors and activists who falsely claim that ideas about right and wrong vary widely by culture. In fact, anthropologists have long known that there are hundreds of cultural universals, seminal ideas about morality that are commonly held.

What Pope Leo XIV told Catholic teachers needs a much bigger audience. All students, in every school, public, private or parochial, need character formation. An educated, but virtue starved, student is no asset to society.

POPE LEO XIV IS NOT FRANCIS II

William A. Donohue

Lots of people are wondering whether Pope Leo XIV is a reformer in the same vein as Pope Francis, or more of a traditionalist like Francis’ two predecessors. It depends on the issue, but to those who think he is a clone of Francis, they are wrong.

No sooner had Cardinal Robert Prevost been elected when some so-called progressives started celebrating what they claimed was a “woke” pope. Ironically, some right-wing firebrands were

bemoaning that he is one. Neither was right—all the alarms that went off were false.

An article published on Alternet started cheering “Our New Woke Pope.” Why? Because our new pope had criticized Vice President J.D. Vance for saying love should begin with loving your family, and then spread outwards to others.

Then Cardinal Prevost said on X that “J.D. Vance is wrong: Jesus doesn’t ask us to rank our love for others.”

It is absurd to conclude from this that the new pontiff is a “woke” pope. Vance was saying love must be set in proper order. Some Catholic theologians agree with him, and others do not. No matter, theological disputes are common in all religious circles, but standing alone they do not make anyone “woke.” This is simply a childish way to politicize matters.

Then we have far-right commentator Laura Loomer. She branded our new pope “woke” and a “Marxist.” She is badly educated.

To show how crazy those on the extreme left and right are, consider what *The Nation* said. It is a left-wing publication that championed Stalin, the genocidal maniac. They began raising the flag for Pope Leo XIV because they saw in him what Pope Leo XIII stood for during his pontificate.

The Nation was right to say our new pope identifies with Leo XIII, but they were wrong to say that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century pope was a social justice warrior in the left-wing tradition. They heralded him for his “sharp critiques of capitalism.” Maybe if they actually read the 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, they wouldn’t have sounded so silly.

Pope Leo XIII wrote this encyclical eight years after Marx’s death in 1883. He foresaw the horrors that Marx’s ideology would deliver. He said that “ideal equality about which they entertain pleasant dreams would be in reality the leveling

down of all to a like condition of misery and degradation.” He also made the case for private property, which is hardly an expression of socialism.

Orthodox Catholics will be happy to learn that Pope Leo XIV is strongly pro-life. He is opposed to abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide. He is also pro-marriage and the family, properly understood.

He has criticized in no uncertain terms the “homosexual lifestyle” and “alternative families comprised of same-sex partners and their adopted children.” This is great news for practicing Catholics—the ones in the pews who actually pay the bills—but not for dissidents. He has also condemned gender ideology being taught in the schools of Peru. As such, he opposes the exploitation of sexually confused young people.

On immigration, Leo is much more in the liberal camp. He is opposed to the Trump policies and has even criticized the president of El Salvador for his crackdown on illegal immigration. How the heads of state are supposed to deal with those who are crashing their borders, causing misery for its citizens, is something he may have to address.

Is Pope Leo XIV a Republican, a Democrat or an independent? He’s a Republican. A registered Republican in Illinois, he pulled the GOP lever in the 2012, 2014 and 2016 elections. But apparently he did not vote in the 2016 general election and chose to vote by absentee ballot in 2024. It appears he is more of a Bush Republican than a Trump Republican. But he is certainly not a “woke” or “Marxist” activist.

Stylistically, Pope XIV is more measured and more traditional than Pope Francis. He is nowhere near as prolific a writer as Pope Benedict XVI, nor does he have the charisma of Saint John Paul II. But he is a thoughtful man who commands the respect of virtually everyone who has come to know him, and his missionary experience makes him a very special man. He is

definitely not an ideologue.

Pope Leo XIV has expressed his gratitude to Pope Francis and will no doubt mimic parts of his legacy. But he is not going to be a rubber stamp for either progressives or traditionalists. He will carve his own legacy.

No one thought that an American cardinal would be elected the next pope. From everything we have learned, he did not lobby for this post. Maybe that's the way the Holy Spirit works.

It looks like practicing Catholics will have in Pope Leo XIV someone they can rally around. As for the dissidents, they are by nature an unhappy bunch, so now they can look forward to more days of glum. That's their natural step.

Congratulations to Pope Leo XIV.