

POPE AND PRESIDENT CLASH; WAR AND DEPORTATIONS DIVIDE

Pope Leo XIV and President Trump have had their differences before, but now they are at a serious juncture. After weeks of the pope criticizing the president over the war on Iran, Trump took to Truth Social on April 12 saying the pope was “WEAK on Crime, and terrible on Foreign Policy.”

Trump’s recent threats to Iran were stark. “A whole civilisation will die tonight, never to be brought back again.” He said he would target bridges and power plants, thus endangering the lives of innocents. Those reckless comments triggered rebukes worldwide, from the U.N. to the Vatican.

The Holy Father labeled Trump’s statement “totally unacceptable.” He added that to attack infrastructure was a “sign of the hatred, the division, the destruction human beings are capable of, and we all want to work for peace.”

Both the U.N. secretary general and the pope said that if Trump went through with his threats, it would be considered a war crime under international law.

Pope Leo’s desire for peace is understandable. Less understandable was his sweeping statement on March 1 claiming that peace is achieved “only” through “dialogue.” That is simply not true. Historically, war has frequently resulted in peace, an outcome that comes about when dialogue fails. That is why the Catholic Church is not a pacifist religion—it understands the necessity of “just wars.”

Trump’s comment that the pope is weak on crime is no doubt in reference to the pontiff’s criticisms of mass deportations. The U.S. bishops have also been vocal in denouncing the Trump administration on this issue. Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, recently said that “it’s very clear the

American people are saying, 'We really didn't vote for this.'"

In fact, the American people did vote for mass deportations: Trump made this one of his key issues. Moreover, virtually every survey taken on this subject reveals that a majority of Americans approve mass deportations. They do so because they oppose the Biden policy of deliberately allowing 20 million illegal aliens to crash our borders, about which Catholics—55 percent of whom voted for Trump—heard very little from their leaders, either in Rome or at home.

Trump does not help his case by posing as Jesus blessing a bedridden man; he released this Truth Social picture after he criticized Leo. It is offensive and immature.

There will no doubt be occasions where the pope and the president will continue to make public their disagreements. But there are so many other issues, such as religious liberty, where the two share a common interest. Let's pray the latter prove to be controlling.

PRO-LIFERS HIT BY BIDEN

It is well known that the Biden administration treated pro-life Americans as if they were a mortal enemy; this was especially true of Catholics. But we did not know the extent of the misconduct until April when the Department of Justice (DOJ) released a report on more than 700,000 internal records.

The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act puts restrictions on pro-life protesters and abortion-rights protesters. But under Biden, the latter were cut a lot of slack.

Former FBI Director Christopher Wray admitted two years ago that 70 percent of FACE Act offenses were not committed by pro-life protesters; they committed a fraction of them. Moreover, in 2022, the DOJ did not charge a single abortion-rights activist, but it charged 26 pro-life protesters with a FACE violation. Now we know why.

The DOJ under Biden was operating a two-tiered system of justice. It was prosecuting people on the basis of their beliefs. Prosecutors tracked pro-life activists and sought harsher sentences. They even withheld evidence and tried to exclude jurors based on their religion.

On several occasions, the Catholic League contacted federal officials about the way pro-lifers were being treated. Bill Donohue wrote to the House and Senate Homeland Security Committees, Sen. Charles Grassley, Rep. Chip Roy, Attorney General Merrick Garland and FBI Director Wray, imploring them to address this weaponization of justice.

It is up to the Trump DOJ to finish the job. We need justice now.

RELIGIOUS PROFILING IN R.I.; PRIESTS TARGETED

Rhode Island is the latest state to demonstrate its selective interest in combating the sexual abuse of minors. It is *only* interested in probing the Catholic clergy, having zero interest in probing the clergy in every other religion. Furthermore, it has no interest in investigating the on-going crisis in the public schools.

When blacks are subjected to disproportionate stops by the police, it is called racial profiling. What Rhode Island is doing to priests is religious profiling. Yet the media are silent about this egregious injustice. They wouldn't be silent if the Attorney General, Peter Neronha, investigated sexual harassment on the job, selecting *only* reporters to probe.

Neronha's report, released on March 4, covers cases of alleged abuse dating back to 1950. It found that 75 accused members of the clergy (66 of whom were priests) were responsible for victimizing 300 minors.

Guess what else Neronha found? What every other investigation has found: 83 percent of the victims were male, and 74 percent of them were postpubescent. This means that homosexuals did most of the damage. Get it straight: When adult males have sex with postpubescent males, it's called homosexuality, not pedophilia. But don't expect Neronha or the media to report on this fact. The cover-up continues.

When did this happen? As always, it was during the sexual revolution. It was in the 1960s and 1970s when the lion's share of the offenses took place.

The last time there was a known instance of the sexual abuse of minors by the Catholic clergy in Rhode Island was 15-years ago in 2011. When was the last time a minor was violated in their public schools? Last year, when a school bus monitor allegedly sexually abused three special needs students. One was in kindergarten.

Is Neronha going to tackle the public schools? He should. Major studies on Rhode Island's public schools reveal that it is consistently ranked among the worst in the nation in dealing with the sexual abuse of minors.

The AG's report reads as though the sexual abuse scandal is ongoing in the Catholic Church and that Neronha's office did yeoman work in uncovering it. Wrong on both counts. We are

talking about old cases where the bad guys are either dead or have been kicked out of ministry. *Not one of the 75 members of the clergy mentioned in the report is in active ministry.* Moreover, it was the Diocese of Providence that did most of the data gathering, without which Neronha could not have issued his report.

We blanketed the Rhode Island media and lawmakers about this injustice. We also contacted approximately 140 parishes in the state.

LOU HOLTZ R.I.P.

University of Notre Dame icon Lou Holtz died on March 4 at the age of 89. He led the football team to an undefeated season in 1988, winning the national championship. But to those who knew him, he was also a model of what a Catholic gentleman should be.

Noted Notre Dame historian Fr. Bill Miscamble said Holtz “loved the Blessed Mother and, as he deemed it, *her* school. The football program was not ancillary to Notre Dame’s Catholic mission but integrated into it.”

He is right. Holtz told his players that “I firmly believe that Our Lady on the Dome will watch out for you. Spend some time at the Grotto, and you’ll discover that this school is special.”

EWTN and Fox News star Raymond Arroyo said the day after Holtz died that “He will not only be missed by his family and friends, but by colleagues, players, the communities and those of us touched by his friendship and leadership.”

Bill Donohue met Holtz at a speaking engagement that they both participated in and came away admiring his positive outlook and deep faith. "This was a man on a mission, and no one was going to stop him."

Holtz spent eleven years at Notre Dame and energized those around him to persevere in the face of adversity and always put their faith in God. There are very few like him today, which is why his legacy needs to be treasured.

CHURCH INVASION IN ST. PAUL; WE RESPOND WITH VIGOR

The church invasion that took place at Cities Church on January 18 in St. Paul, Minnesota was a flagrant violation of constitutional law, federal law and common decency. It is the kind of behavior associated with totalitarian regimes, not democracies. Yet the outcry from all quarters—government, religious, civic, educational, the media—was miniscule.

The purported cause for action was to register disapproval of David Easterwood, one of the pastors of this Southern Baptist church; he heads the local office of ICE.

Nine of the church invaders were charged with entering the church "in a coordinated takeover-style attack," and for engaging in "acts of oppression, intimidation, threats, interference, and physical obstruction." The indictment alleges that "the pastor and the congregation were forced to terminate the Church's worship services," and had to flee out of fear for their safety.

One of the defendants disrupted the church service by

screaming, "This ain't God's house. This is the house of the devil." He got in the face of a mother and her two young children, chiding her for not supporting the church invasion. He said to child congregants, "Do you know your parents are Nazis? They're going to burn in hell."

One of those arrested was Don Lemon. The former journalist and failed CNN pundit claims he was a disinterested observer, and not part of the organized protest.

The indictment says otherwise. Lemon met at a shopping center with all the other defendants to make plans about invading the church. He did not just stumble on the scene of the crime. Instructions were given by the organizers of the invasion; one of those arrested admitted Lemon was in on the planning. Also, he tried to intimidate the pastor and obstructed congregants from leaving the church.

The list of politicians and civil rights organizations that have nothing but contempt for the right to worship is astounding. See p. 4.

Notice that none of them even give a nod to the egregious violation of the "free exercise of religion." They are framing this as purely a free speech issue.

In response to this incredible assault on religious liberty, the Catholic League embarked on a four-prong campaign: we asked the public to support Rep. Buddy Carter's House Resolution condemning the church invasion; we contacted President Trump's Religious Freedom Commission; we contacted the Department of Justice; we asked President Trump to support funding for enhanced police protection of Christian churches (97% of the deadly incidents in a house of worship that occurred between 2000 and 2024 were in Christian churches).

The timid response to the church invasion is troubling. We responded with vigor.

RUSSELL SHAW R.I.P.

Russell Shaw, a prolific Catholic spokesman and author, has died at the age of 90. He was the former Secretary for Public Affairs of the National Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference.

Last year he told Bill Donohue he was not doing well, and asked if he would still promote his latest book, *Turning Points: How Thirteen Remarkable Men and Women Heard God's Call and Responded to It*. He was delighted to endorse it.

Russ served on the board of directors of the Catholic League in the 1990s, and then moved to our board of advisors. Donohue used to joke with him that he is a "walking encyclopedia of Catholicism." It wasn't much of a stretch.

Russ had a reserved manner, but it belied a fierce devotion to his calling, namely to accurately and passionately discuss the affairs of the Catholic Church, past and present. His commitment to the mission of the Catholic League—fighting anti-Catholicism—was never in question.

When the notorious ABC-TV show, "Nothing Sacred," aired in the late 1990s, some on our board of directors questioned whether we should be hammering away at it. Not Russ. He stood by Donohue's side, knowing how pernicious this dissident-happy portrait of Catholicism was. ABC, a Disney product, tried to stop our attacks on the show, but did not prevail. We eventually won and the show was withdrawn.

Russ will be missed. His legacy is secure and the Catholic Church is its beneficiary.

BID TO DISCRIMINATE FAILS; QUICK VICTORY

The attempt to discriminate against Christians at a cooperative apartment complex in Westchester County, New York failed. Those who run the cooperative allowed the display of a menorah in the common area, but not a nativity scene. They failed because we intervened.

What makes this story so bizarre is that the same issue took place last Christmas, and in the same building in Larchmont, New York! The only difference is that the building management company is new and the resident who complained is new. But the facts are the same.

Bill Donohue wrote to the new Property Manager company, recounting the story from last year. He said the display of a menorah was "commendable." But he hastened to add, "What is not commendable is the refusal to display a nativity scene. Indeed, it is illegal."

Donohue's letter was dated December 10 and we gave them until December 15 to either display the nativity scene, along with the menorah, or take down the menorah. The letter was emailed to them in the morning of December 10 (and sent in the overnight mail) and that very afternoon they removed the menorah, and a Christmas tree.

They could have settled this issue by simply displaying the crèche, but their idea of neutrality was to ban both the menorah and the manger scene. We prefer the tolerant alternative; they prefer the intolerant option.

"The menorah, like the crèche," Donohue wrote, "is a religious

symbol; the Christmas tree is a secular symbol. This is not my opinion—this is the interpretation afforded by the U.S. Supreme Court. So you can either allow all religious symbols to be displayed, or you can deny both of them: You cannot chose one and deny the other.”

Ironically, it was last year’s confrontation with a different management group that ran this cooperative that led us to contact over 2,000 Homeowner Associations (HOA) in November, alerting them to the religious rights of their residents. We never thought we would have to swing into action again to stop discrimination against Christians in the same cooperative.

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 makes is clear that if one religious symbol is displayed in a common area, others must also be allowed. Supreme Court decisions on the display of religious symbols on public property are also accommodating. This is a serious religious liberty issue.

It is a sad commentary on the co-op board of this property that they thought they could get away with their bigoted stunt two years in a row. But their determination to discriminate was met with our equally determined decision to stop them.

CRÈCHE TAMPERED WITH

In early December, before we erected our nativity scene in Central Park, Bill Donohue told the staff that this was the first time in 30 years that we have displayed our crèche that he was concerned it may not be safe. Regrettably, he was right.

On December 26, a video was posted on Instagram showing a man (assisted by two others) draping a large keffiyeh, a symbol of

Palestinian nationalism, on the shoulders of the statue of Our Blessed Mother; he tried to place a Palestinian flag in the hands of Joseph, but failed.

We contacted the New York City Parks Department, which granted us the permit; we also reported this to the police. We did not make a public statement until January 5, the day it was taken down.

What happened is in stark contrast to what happened in 1995. Here is what Donohue wrote in 2015 about that day.

“In 1995, when we displayed our first nativity scene in Central Park, Monsignor John G. Woolsey blessed it in front of our staff. Just as we were about to walk away, a beautiful rainbow appeared above. But it didn’t shine everywhere—it shone directly on our crèche. We take that as a sign that more than the public approves of our display.”

We take that as a sign that we are doing the right thing. That is why what happened this year will not intimidate us one bit.

DURBIN DECLINES AWARD; YIELDS TO PRESSURE

One day after the Catholic League asked its email subscribers to contact Sen. Dick Durbin to decline the “Lifetime Achievement Award” that he was scheduled to receive from the Archdiocese of Chicago, he did just that.

The first person to raise a red flag over this issue was Thomas Paprocki, Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield. He honed in on Durbin’s pro-abortion voting record. He quickly

received the support of San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone; eight other bishops followed. We chose to direct our attention to Sen. Durbin, allowing the clergy to deal with the clergy.

The Catholic League was the only lay Catholic organization in the nation to press Sen. Durbin to decline the award.

On September 23, Bill Donohue sent a letter to Sen. Durbin in the overnight mail—it was received the next morning—asking him to decline the award. He explained that when the news broke that he was to receive the award, it “created a firestorm in the Catholic community, involving both the clergy and the laity.” He stressed that by declining the award “you will help ameliorate Catholic discord,” and that “by putting the interests of the Catholic community above your own interests, it will only redound to your benefit.”

When it appeared that Durbin was not giving in, we asked our supporters to petition him to do so. On September 29, we listed the email of his chief of staff in a news release, asking our subscribers to pound away. They did. One day later, Durbin yielded. We commended Sen. Durbin for doing the right thing.

In Donohue’s letter to Durbin, he said that “the proximate cause of the backlash is your voting record on abortion,” but he hastened to add, “Your support for same-sex marriage, and your probing of the religious convictions of Catholic nominees for the federal bench, have also elicited much criticism.”

Regarding the latter issue, on September 23, prior to posting Donohue’s open letter to Durbin, he detailed the senator’s longstanding assaults on Catholics seeking a seat on the federal bench.

His opposition to Circuit Court nominee William Pryor (2003), Supreme Court nominee John Roberts (2005), and Circuit Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett (2017), were all unseemly. He probed

them on their Catholic convictions, effectively promoting a religious test. Unlike other lay Catholic groups, we protested what Durbin did in each of these cases when they occurred.

The media made it sound as if it was just Durbin's pro-abortion stance that was a problem, which was not true.

We are delighted with this victory. Thanks to our base for contacting Durbin—they made it happen!

CONFESSIONAL VICTORY

After many months of wrangling, the confessional seal remains intact in Washington state. State officials have given up their quest to force Catholic priests to divulge what they learn in the confessional. It took an array of organizations and specialists to exact this outcome.

The Catholic League was the first lay Catholic group in the nation to write to Washington legislators about this issue, and the first to draw media attention to it.

Back in February, Bill Donohue asked the state's lawmakers to explain, "What broke?" He pointedly asked, "where is the evidence that child molesters—in any state—report their crimes to priests in the confessional?" He noted that there is not a single instance where this has happened. He closed by saying, "If any lawmaker has evidence to the contrary, you have an obligation to make it public." No one did.

We brought this issue to the attention of the Civil Rights Division in the U.S. Attorney General's office. Harmeet K. Dhillon, the Deputy Assistant Attorney General, took it from there, suing Washington. Meanwhile, we continued to press

public officials, and law firms filed suit in behalf of the Catholic clergy.

A District Court judge blocked the discriminatory state law that singled out priests in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, allowing other professionals, such as counselors and therapists, to be exempt from the reporting law.

The pressure was coming at public officials from all sides. They finally yielded in October.