

BIG HIGH COURT VICTORY

The U.S. Supreme Court delivered a big win for religious liberty in its June 26 ruling in *Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer*.

At issue was whether the state has a right to deny public funds to a religious entity when the disbursement is for a secular purpose. In other words, is it constitutional to treat a church in a manner that is different from a non-sectarian institution?

The Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that “the exclusion of Trinity Lutheran from a public benefit for which it is otherwise qualified, solely because it is a church, is odious to our Constitution all the same, and cannot stand.”

It did not mince words: “This Court has repeatedly confirmed that denying a generally available benefit solely on account of religious identity imposes a penalty on the free exercise of religion.”

This victory extends way beyond the right of a Lutheran church in Missouri to receive public funding for a playground. Nearly 80 percent of the states have Blaine amendments, provisions that discriminate against houses of worship and religious institutions in the distribution of public aid. These amendments are rooted in nineteenth century nativism, a time when anti-Catholicism flourished.

Defending this bigotry was Americans United for Separation of Church and State, an organization that was itself founded as an anti-Catholic institution in the 1940s.

Big as this win is, many more are needed to restore fidelity to the original purpose of the First Amendment.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AFFIRMED; EXECUTIVE ORDER ISSUED

On May 4th, President Trump signed an executive order affirming his support for religious liberty.

He is to be commended for this initiative, even though the statement lacked the kind of teeth that we expected; the leaked draft that became available in February offered greater detail. Bill Donohue was invited to the White House but a scheduling snafu prevented him from going.

The most specific part of the executive order deals with the Johnson Amendment. This provision allows the IRS to challenge the tax-exempt status of churches and religious non-profit organizations if they endorse candidates for public office, or become directly involved in the political process.

It is up to the Congress to overturn the Johnson Amendment, though what Trump did is hardly meaningless. His initiative makes it clear that his Cabinet will not enforce this IRS code, thus vitiating its essence.

We hasten to add that there is an underside to the repeal of the Johnson Amendment. Many of the faithful do not want to turn their churches into a venue for political theater, nor does the Catholic League want to be lobbied by Republicans and Democrats to get on board. Church should be about worship, not politics.

On the issues most important to Catholics—ensuring conscience rights, and allowing Catholic non-profit organizations to exercise their doctrinal prerogatives with impunity—the executive order did not offer specifics, though the president

did instruct his Cabinet to ensure that religious liberty will be protected.

So while in comparison to the leaked draft version, the final executive order was watered down, it nevertheless sent the right signal to executive agencies: religious liberty must be given a priority status when implementing legislation.

We certainly expect that the Trump administration will ensure that Catholic non-profits, such as the Little Sisters of the Poor, will finally be free of the pernicious pressures brought to bear on them by attorneys out to sunder their mission. The nuns should not have to comply with any mandate that forces them to be complicit in immoral acts.

At the heart of this controversy is something that transcends an executive order. To be exact, no government agency should have the right to strip Catholic organizations of their religious exemption merely because they hire and serve large segments of the population that are not Catholic.

Much more is needed to guarantee religious liberty: the Congress must act, and the federal courts must uphold the First Amendment rights of religious individuals and entities. But we can at least thank President Trump for pointing these branches of government in the right direction.

KATE O'BEIRNE R.I.P.

The Catholic community lost a champion with the passing of Kate O'Beirne; she died April 23rd. She was a smart, courageous pundit and policy analyst who never ducked an opponent.

Kate was featured on the CNN talk show, “The Capital Gang,” for many years. She was polite yet firm: she knew her stuff and delivered her message with alacrity. Pity those who sought to upend her. She was just as devastating with her pen: she wrote for Bill Buckley’s *National Review*, and later worked in an administrative capacity for the magazine.

Bill Donohue first met Kate in the late 1980s when he was a Bradley Resident Scholar at The Heritage Foundation; Kate was a vice president there. He recalls her ability to master public policy issues—on a range of subjects—always knowing how to cut to the quick. But it was her amiable personality that won everyone over.

Kate had a great sense of humor, and while she could be tough, she was never mean. That is why even those who didn’t agree with her came to admire her.

Shortly after Donohue became president of the Catholic League, Kate joined the league’s board of directors; she would later switch to our advisory board. She was outspoken in her denunciation of Catholic bashing, and was equally vocal in her support for the rights of the unborn.

We need more outspoken women like Kate O’Beirne in the Catholic Church. She will be sorely missed.

ROLLINS COLLEGE YIELDS; RELIGIOUS LIBERTY PREVAILS

The administration and the Board of Trustees of Rollins College, a liberal arts institution outside Orlando, Florida, recently stood by a professor who violated the religious

liberty and free speech rights of one of her students. In a showdown with the Catholic League, it yielded within a week, and reinstated the suspended student.

This was a big victory, but it should never have gotten to the point that it did. An intolerant Muslim professor tried to run roughshod over an innocent Christian student and almost got away with it. The details of this story can be found on pp. 4-5.

It started when we learned that a Christian student confronted his Muslim professor about her contention that Jesus was not crucified. She further said his apostles did not believe he was divine. That is the Islamic interpretation. When the student challenged her, she got vindictive, failing him for “disrupting” her class.

This was just the beginning. Bill Donohue wrote a letter to the college president, Dr. Grant H. Cornwell (see p. 4) outlining his concerns. He called Donohue to defend himself, getting defensive and contentious. Donohue peppered him with questions, which he could not answer.

Then the media got involved, both locally and nationally. This was followed by a couple of emails sent by Allan E. Keen, chairman of the Board of Trustees. He proved to be just as evasive as Cornwell.

We didn’t back down. Donohue issued a pointed refutation of Keen’s argument, citing a news story in the *Orlando Sentinel*. He was told that the student wasn’t suspended for any altercation he had with his professor, but for making threats. Threats against whom? Donohue wanted to know.

The professor then accused the student of stalking her. Next, she contacted the public safety office about him. But when pressured to be specific—citing evidence of a threat—no one involved was able to do so.

Finally, after being pounded by critics, and beaten up in the press, Rollins decided to reinstate the student.

The *Orlando Sentinel* quoted what the president had to say about it. "Cornwell said he, the trustees and deans had received 10,000 emails," most of which he said were "filled with hate."

We have no pity on anyone who defends an indefensible assault on someone's religious liberties and free speech rights, and is then called out for it. Those emails, we are proud to say, were a direct response to our plea: we listed Cornwell's email address on our news releases, asking everyone to contact him. Our side exploded and the administration backed off. Justice was done. Hallelujah!

"REAL O'NEALS" OBIT COMING

Disney/ABC won't come right out and say it, so we will: The obituary for "The Real O'Neals" has been written, and will soon be announced.

On January 18, we noted that over one million viewers who watched the ABC show which precedes the "O'Neals"—"Fresh Off the Boat"—turned to another channel. Thus did we declare, "It's toast."

On March 21, we noted that "Fresh Off the Boat" was slated for 23 episodes, but the plug had been pulled on "O'Neals" after 16 shows: "O'Neals" was replaced with "Blackish." Then it was replaced with a new show, "Imaginary Mary."

If more proof is needed to show that the handwriting is on the wall, consider that two of the "O'Neals" stars, Matt Shively

and Jay R. Ferguson, have been cast for a new series; the former in a NBC pilot and the latter in a CBS pilot.

The obit for the Dan Savage-inspired show is looming, and we are delighted. It would be hard to find a more obscene anti-Catholic in America than Dan Savage, so we can't wait to witness the final nail in this show's coffin. We've seen worse shows, but the fact that "O'Neals" was based on a bigot's life is disturbing enough.

We hope that in the next issue of *Catalyst* we will be able to make it official. We are convinced that Disney/ABC kept the show alive because it didn't want to appear to be giving in to the Catholic League. But now the jig is about up.

IRISH NUNS CONDEMNED; EVIDENCE LACKING

Reports that a "mass grave" was found containing the bodies of 800 children outside a home run by Irish nuns recently dominated the news in Ireland and England, and became a big story in the United States as well. As it turns out, the nuns were unfairly condemned by an array of politicians, pundits, and activists.

It was a lie in 2014 and it is a lie in 2017. There is no evidence of a mass grave outside a home for unmarried women operated by nuns in Tuam [pronounced CHEW-um], near Galway, in the 20th century. The hoax recently surfaced, and an obliging media ran with the story as if it were true.

Ireland's Mother and Baby Commission recently completed its inquiry into this issue and released a statement on March 3rd

about its findings. The probe was a response to allegations made by a local historian, Catherine Corless, who claimed that 800 babies were buried in a tank outside the former Mother and Baby Home that was operated by the Bon Secours nuns.

The statement issued by the Mother and Baby Commission was disturbing but it never mentioned anything about a mass grave. Having completed a test excavation of the Tuam site, it found "significant quantities of human remains" in most of the underground sewage chambers. "These remains involved a number of individuals with age-at-death ranges from approximately 35 foetal weeks to 2-3 years."

If there were a "mass grave," Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, would have said so. Yet her statement said nothing about any "mass grave." Moreover, when the government's Interim Report was issued in 2016, it also made no mention of a "mass grave."

The "fake news" about a "mass grave" is oddly enough credited to the same person who says there never was one. His name is Barry Sweeney. In 1975, when Sweeney was 10, he was playing with a friend, Frannie Hopkins, 12, on the grounds where the Home was when they stumbled on a hole with skeletons in it.

Sweeney told the *Irish Times* that "there was no way there were 800 skeletons down that hole. Nothing like that number." How many were there? "About 20," he said. He subsequently told the *New York Times* that "People are making out we saw a mass grave. But we can only say what we seen [sic]: maybe 15-20 small skeletons."

This issue of *Catalyst* contains some of the most important statements that Bill Donohue released to the press in March. He was interviewed by several media outlets in Ireland about this matter, challenging the conventional wisdom.

CATHOLIC STALWARTS DIE

The Catholic community lost two great persons in February, Michael Novak and Norma McCorvey. He died on February 17, and she passed away the next day.

“Michael Novak was more than a brilliant and dedicated Catholic, his range of scholarship was astonishing,” said Bill Donohue in his statement to the media. “Theologian, sociologist, economist, political scientist—he was all of these and more.”

Mike was perhaps best known for his work in understanding the relationship between a market economy and freedom. His book, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, was widely credited with changing the minds of many Catholic scholars about the way the economic order affects the political order.

Novak was a member of the board of advisors of the Catholic League. His presence is greatly missed.

Norma McCorvey is known to the public as the person behind the Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in 1973. In Catholic circles, she is remembered as someone who sought forgiveness, converted to Catholicism, and became a champion of the pro-life cause.

McCorvey was used by the pro-abortion industry. She lied about her pregnancy—she was never raped—and she never had the abortion she sought, even though she won in court.

Fox News commentator Alan Colmes died February 23. While not Catholic, Donohue and he were good friends, despite their political differences. Bill said, “His kindness was always evident, as was his great sense of humor.”

May all three rest in peace.

SNAP CRASHES; LEADERS QUIT IN DISGRACE

The two top leaders of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), David Clohessy and Barbara Blaine, quit over the winter, exiting in disgrace. The Catholic League pursued them for decades, offering proof of what a bigoted, lying, scheming fraud they are.

The final nail in the coffin was supplied by a former employee, Gretchen Rachel Hammond. A transgender person, Hammond sued SNAP for taking “kickbacks” from lawyers who represented persons referred by Clohessy and Blaine; the leaders even pressured those who won big money in their lawsuits to divvy up a portion to them. (See pp. 8-11 on this huge development.)

The first to bail was Clohessy, the executive director and face of SNAP; he announced his resignation at the end of January. Next to flee was Barbara Blaine, the founder and president; she threw the towel in at the beginning of February.

Both of them tried to put a happy face on their departure, but no one believes them. Clohessy said he “voluntarily resigned,” but this is an incomplete and dishonest account. Had it not been for a string of lawsuits and bad publicity, he would have stayed for years. Blaine echoed the same line, saying the lawsuit “had absolutely no bearing on my leaving.”

Clohessy listed “fatigue” as his reason for quitting, saying

he wanted to do something “less stressful.” But what could be less stressful than rolling out of bed and answering the phone? After all, he didn’t report to work in Chicago, the venue of SNAP’s office; he elected to stay at home in St. Louis.

Speaking from the same playbook, Blaine said she left because “I need a break.” A break from what? Telling employees to ignore callers asking for help? That’s what Hammond alleges.

Clohessy and Blaine have shamelessly attacked the Catholic Church for decades, posing as crusaders for justice. All of this and more can be found on the Catholic League website: we have documented the lies and machinations of SNAP for a long time, though the mainstream media have been reluctant to acknowledge it.

The great irony is that after working so incestuously with several unseemly lawyers, not one of them has volunteered to represent SNAP. Barbara Dorris, who now calls herself the managing director, said they are “seeking pro-bono legal help.” One can hardly blame their lawyer buddies for running—they know SNAP is finished, so they have no reason to help.

It is so gratifying to see that justice is finally being done. And this isn’t over—they still have to face the music in court.

THREE HEROES PASS AWAY

We lost three good men in January: Father Michael Scanlon and Nat Hentoff died on January 7, and Steven McDonald passed away three days later. Bill Donohue knew them all and offers the

following remarks.

“Father Scanlon will be remembered for saving the College of Steubenville, turning it into the Franciscan University of Steubenville, a citadel of Catholic higher education. The renaming in 1985 was not a nominal change: Father Scanlon put the school on the map, making it a home for serious Catholic scholars.

“The Catholic League has had no better cheerleader over the years than Nat Hentoff, the prominent jazz critic. An atheist left-wing Jewish writer, he was not the kind of person normally drawn to us. But he was courageously pro-life. For strongly opposing abortion, he was booted from the board of directors of the ACLU and dumped from liberal newspapers as a columnist.

“Steve McDonald is a New York icon, a police officer who was mindlessly shot in Central Park in 1986, leaving him paralyzed from the neck down. A Catholic League member, he was confined to a wheelchair, using a tracheal to breathe. He is most known for his public statements on the need to forgive, a reflection on his own need to forgive his offender.

“It is doubtful these men knew each other; they would have gotten along well. They left their mark on my life, and I am grateful they did.”

CHRISTMAS FOES ON THE RUN; PUSHBACK IS EVIDENT

There was a time when the Christmas haters were on the offensive, but now the pushback is in full gear. Our side is

showing increasing resolve, and becoming more creative, even when we lose a legal battle.

The Catholic League threw down the gauntlet when Oregon's Hillsboro School District censored Santa—not just Jesus—from any public display. Employees were told not to decorate their doors with religious figures or symbols, even going so far as to ban Santa.

The school district said it was responding to complaints made over the years by school employees saying that Christmas decorations made them feel “uncomfortable.” We decided it was time to make these school officials feel “uncomfortable.”

We bombarded the Portland media with a news release by Bill Donohue that told it like it is. “After telling employees to ‘refrain’ from using Santa to decorate their doors—in the name of being ‘respectful and sensitive to diverse perspectives and beliefs’—school officials then lied to the community, saying, ‘We [are] NOT banning Santa.’ But that is exactly what they did.”

It didn't take long before Donohue received an apology from the Hillsboro School District, saying it was all a misunderstanding. Santa was back, and “Christmas-related decorations” were allowed to be displayed.

Another victory was notched when a Texas judge overruled a school district that had banned a poster depicting a scene from “A Charlie Brown Christmas.” The Christmas haters said it had a Christian message, and had to be censored.

A Christmas hater in Knightstown, Indiana, filed a federal lawsuit to get town officials to remove a cross from atop their Christmas tree. The victory was marred when townspeople responded by putting crosses everywhere—they adorned businesses, yards, parks—places where crosses were never seen.

The most active Christmas haters this season were the ACLU,

Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF), American Atheists, and the Satanic Temple. The ACLU filed suit over religious symbols on public property; FFRF erected anti-Christmas displays next to nativity scenes; American Atheists paid for billboards mocking Christmas; and the Satanists placed their symbols on public grounds.

“Trees of Diversity” were exhibited in parts of Utah, Marquette University would not allow a Christmas tree event—it held an “Igniting Hope” tree ceremony—and a “Winter Concert” in Mesa, Arizona censored the singing of “Silent Night.”

These examples show that the Christmas wars are far from over. But compared to where we were a decade ago, there are encouraging signs. The nation is increasingly fed up with political correctness, and that is a very good thing.