

AFFIRMING GENOCIDE

The whole world knows that Christians have been targeted for genocide by radical Muslims, yet we still don't have a congressional resolution, supported by our president, affirming this reality.

A week before Christmas a group of congressmen, from both parties, along with noted scholars and activists, assembled in Washington D.C. to press for a resolution. Specifically, they called on President Obama and Congress to unequivocally call for a public declaration condemning ISIS for waging genocide against Christians.

The best President Obama has done is to acknowledge that Christians are among the victims of genocide. Worse, according to Rep. Chris Smith, reports have surfaced indicating that the White House is considering a statement condemning genocide that would exclude Christians. If we can't get our own country on board, chances are the U.N. will do nothing.

George Mason University professor Gregory Stanton detailed how the ISIS war on Christians and Yazidis fits the U.N. definition of genocide. Nina Shea of the Hudson Institute explained how a rigged levy on Christians, the jizya tax, is nothing but a pretext for murder. Both Stanton and Shea pointed out that because Christians can't afford to pay the tax, and they manifestly refuse to convert, they are beheaded.

We need all the presidential candidates to speak to this issue. If they don't have the courage to call for a formal declaration condemning ISIS for its genocidal campaign against Christians, they are not suited for the job.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT CHALLENGED; WE RESPOND QUICKLY

The animus against Christmas manifests itself in a myriad of ways, and this year is no exception. We took a pass on some trivial issues, but we jumped right into the fray when more serious attacks were launched.

The anti-Christmas bigots from the Freedom From Religion Foundation threatened a lawsuit against a small Minnesota town because it displayed a nativity scene in a public park. For 23 years, no one in Wadena complained about the crèche in Burlington Northern Park, but after the atheist group made public its threat, along came one resident to complain. The town's lawyer agreed that the display was illegal, and the city council obliged by authorizing its removal.

Bill Donohue wrote an open letter to the city council asking them to reconsider their decision. "There is nothing unconstitutional about putting a nativity scene on public property as long as it is considered a public forum," he said. He further observed that this park was a public forum because it hosts all kinds of community activities. He offered by way of example the Catholic League's nativity scene in Central Park: it has never been challenged, and that's because the park is a public forum. While high court rulings on city-owned crèches are more complicated, they can still pass constitutional muster.

A very different type of assault on Catholic sensibilities was launched by *Cosmopolitan* magazine. It drew a quick rebuke from us.

The cover story of the December edition is titled, "Sex Wish List." The article contains 24 sexual suggestions, all of which exploit the Christian and Jewish holidays. Most

conspicuously, it includes a “Sex-Vent Calendar,” a rip-off of the Advent calendar. It features sexually explicit ideas, the kind we are reluctant to publish in *Catalyst*.

We went public with our denunciation of this offensive edition. We noted that *Cosmopolitan* had long since evolved into a “soft-porn publication,” but “up until now it had at least stayed away from trashing Christmas and Jewish holidays.”

The removal of Christmas symbols from malls operated by Simon Property Group generated such a backlash that they were quickly restored. Rick Hinshaw, our director of communications, called the company’s director of public relations to make sure he understood why the initial decision was wrong.

When asked if we were upset about a red Starbucks Christmas coffee cup unadorned by Christmas symbols, we said no. We reserve our resources for serious issues.

We expect that in the next issue of *Catalyst* we will have more to say on anti-Christmas assaults that occurred in December. Meantime, a Merry Christmas to all.

HHS MANDATE UNDER REVIEW

The United States Supreme Court has agreed to hear a challenge to the constitutionality of the Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate that threatens to eviscerate the religious liberties of many Catholic non-profits. Not surprisingly, editorials in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* took the side of the Obama administration.

We pointed out that the newspapers either underplayed or ignored the central issue involved in this case. They both maintain that the accommodations offered by HHS—no direct payment for objectionable services are required—resolve this matter. They do not.

The key issue is whether the federal government has a right to define what constitutes a Catholic organization. The Obama team says that Catholic groups that hire and/or service non-Catholics must forfeit their claim as a Catholic entity. So, for example, because the Little Sisters of the Poor do not discriminate against non-Catholics, they are deemed insufficiently Catholic to qualify for an exemption. This is patently absurd. Worse, it gives an authority to the federal government it should not have.

Even if the Supreme Court decided that the accommodations provided by HHS were not deemed to be a “substantial burden” on these Catholic groups, it should rule that the government has no right to invoke such spurious hiring and servicing criteria in deciding which Catholic groups are legitimate and which are bogus.

A decision is expected next spring. At stake are conscience rights, religious liberty, and the very functioning of Catholic non-profits.

NEW YORK TIMES MALIGNS SAINT; NO EVIDENCE PROVIDED

On September 30, when Bill Donohue read a *New York Times* front-page story on Saint Junípero Serra, he could hardly believe his eyes. The 17th century priest, who championed the

rights of Indians, had just been canonized by Pope Francis the week before. So it came as a shock to read that he was accused of torturing Indians.

As Catholic League members know, in anticipation of the expected controversy over Father Serra, Donohue authored a booklet on him a few months ago. He read widely on the Franciscan priest, and published his findings in *The Noble Legacy of Father Serra*; he used a Q&A format to make his research easily accessible to readers. In all his readings, Donohue never found a single scholar who ever accused Father Serra of torturing Indians.

The reporter who wrote this story, Laura M. Holson, offered this remarkable sentence: "Historians agree that he [Serra] forced Native Americans to abandon their tribal culture and convert to Christianity, and that he had them whipped and imprisoned and sometimes worked or tortured to death."

Donohue readily concedes that the Indians were not treated justly. But it was the Spanish conquerors, not the Franciscans, who were responsible for the worst excesses. Indeed, Father Serra's heroism, which led to his canonization, is largely a function of his opposition to Indian maltreatment. It was he who insisted that the Indians should be treated with the dignity afforded all human beings.

On the day the story appeared, Donohue emailed the reporter asking her to provide evidence that "Historians agree" that Father Serra had Indians "tortured to death." [To read his letter, and all the subsequent exchanges he had with *Times* officers, see pp. 4-5; it is laid out in chronological order.]

As you can see, none of the parties at the newspaper were able to answer his one question: Who are these historians? Yet they refused to run a correction.

No one disputes that radical activists, racists, and anti-Catholics have made wild and unsubstantiated accusations

against the Franciscans. But there is a difference between these agenda-ridden ideologues and scholars. The latter would be expected to provide evidence, and that is why the charge that “historians agree” that Father Serra was a barbarian is complete nonsense. If this were true, the *Times* would be able to name them.

Finally, it must be said that Vatican scholars pored over thousands of documents related to Father Serra and released a 1,200 page position paper on him. They would never recommend for sainthood anyone who ever authorized the torturing of innocent persons

SYNOD SHOWS SPUNK

The Synod of Bishops has concluded in Rome. Occasionally contentious, it succeeded in addressing a wide range of issues that touch on the family. Most agree that a lot of spunk was shown. Pope Francis will have the final say.

The Holy Father got the Synod off to a good start with his opening homily. The subject was marriage. Here is an excerpt:

“He [God] made men and women for happiness, to share their journey with someone who complements them, to live the wondrous experience of love: to love and to be loved, and to see their love bear fruit in children, as the Psalm proclaimed today says.” The emphasis on the complementarity of men and women is a clear statement reaffirming marriage as a union between the two sexes; the comment on procreation underscores this point.

“This is God’s dream for his beloved creation: to see it fulfilled in the loving union between a man and a woman, rejoicing in their shared journey, fruitful in their mutual gift of self.” Again, the pope’s clarity on this subject leaves no wiggle room for misinterpretation.

Unfortunately, some commentators evinced an ideological agenda by seeking to spin the proceedings their way. They treated the three-week gathering as if it were a Las Vegas event open to bettors.

There is plenty of time to distill the findings when they become available. Fairness dictates, however, that politics should be put aside.

POPE AND PREZ MEET; OBAMA INVITES CHURCH’S FOES

On September 23, Pope Francis met with President Obama in the White House. The meeting was amicable. Incredibly, those invited by the president to be there were some of the most notorious foes in the Church. It is so fitting that the least friendly administration to religion in history would invite a collection of pro-abortion nuns, Catholic gay activists, assorted dissidents and religious rebels to attend Pope Francis’ visit to the White House.

These include gay Catholic blogger Aaron Ledesma; Catholic gay activist and Church critic Nicholas Coppola; and Sister Jeannine Gramick, co-founder of the Catholic dissident group New Ways Ministry, who in 1999 was barred by the Vatican from working in ministry to homosexuals. Coppola and Gramick were

both invited by GLAAD, which said the White House invited it and LGBT leaders to attend.

Vivian Taylor, who identifies as transgender, not only scored an invite, but was told to bring some friends. He did—including members of Dignity, a Catholic dissident group, and other “transgender and intersex people.”

Also attending was Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Episcopal bishop, who left his wife of 14 years for his male partner, then last year “divorced” that partner.

Also on hand was Sister Simone Campbell. She is the leader of the “Nuns on the Bus” who actively campaigned for Obamacare with its blatant pro-abortion provisions. We doubted an invitation would be sent to the Little Sisters of the Poor, the nuns being targeted by the administration for remaining true to their Catholic faith and refusing to comply with the pro-abortion mandate. We didn’t expect to see them there.

Catholic-baiting is nothing new in Washington. Back in 1994, the Clinton administration’s own Ambassador to the Vatican, Ray Flynn, wrote that he was “embarrassed” by the “ugly anti-Catholic bias that is shown by prominent members of Congress and the administration.”

President Obama, however, has taken it to a new level. From inviting an aggressively anti-religious atheist organization to the White House; to trying to force Catholics, like the Little Sisters, to violate Catholic moral teaching; and now, to this attempt to exploit a papal visit to promote an agenda that is offensive to faithful Catholics, he has shown a religious intolerance that is mind-boggling.

President Obama just could not resist using his meeting with the Holy Father to make a political statement.

DONOHUE MEETS POPE

On September 23, Bill Donohue, and vice president Bernadette Brady-Egan, met with Pope Francis following a prayer service at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, D.C. It was an honor they will never forget.

The invitation to meet the pope was extended by Donald Cardinal Wuerl. He also invited them to the canonization Mass at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Timothy Cardinal Dolan invited Bill to the prayer service at St. Patrick's Cathedral, but he elected to stay in D.C. to do TV interviews.

Catholic League members know that we harbor no agenda: our only goal is to allow the Church to have a fair hearing. So it is times like these, when the pope is being exploited by those who clearly have their own agenda, that we can proudly stand on principle.

It is not just those who seek to manipulate the pope who are a problem: it is his "fast friends," those who never go to bat for him when he is being slammed, yet always manage to be there during a papal visit.

As we go to press, the rest of the pope's visit has yet to unfold. We will report in the next *Catalyst* on any controversies that may have happened, and our response to them. Regrettably, no matter what this pope does—the same was true of his predecessors—it will never be enough to stop the Catholic bashers.

There is some consolation in the attacks on our faith: they know we cannot be ignored.

CATHOLICS LARGELY FAITHFUL; SURVEY DEBUNKS MYTHS

The findings of the Catholic League-commissioned survey were made available just before we went to press; a more complete analysis will be offered in the October issue.

In the first week of August, The Polling Company, headed by Kellyanne Conway, conducted a nationwide scientific survey of 1,000 Catholics. They were randomly chosen from telephone sample lists, using both landline and cell phones. Sampling controls ensured proportional demographic representation on key variables. The findings are accurate at the 95% confidence level, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1%.

The survey was undertaken in anticipation of media surveys that will be released prior to Pope Francis' visit to the U.S. In addition to the usual questions, we asked about issues the media never do.

Roughly 68% of Catholics say their commitment towards their faith has not been altered in any significant way in the recent past. Fully 95% say their faith is important to their everyday life. Asked if they approve of the overall job done by Pope Francis, 83% answered yes, and 79% say he has changed things for the better. Most say the bishops should stick to internal issues, but a slight plurality think the pope should address public policy matters.

The majority say it is wrong for the media to focus heavily on priestly sexual abuse when a papal visit is made. When asked if they have ever heard of a poll that asks non-Jews and non-Muslims what they think about the teachings of Judaism and Islam, 90% said they never heard of such a survey. Yet non-

Catholics are frequently asked to opine about our religion.

On abortion, marriage, and women priests, the more practicing a Catholic is, the more he accepts the Church's teachings. Overall, 61% are pro-life, meaning that they believe abortion should not be permitted in all or most instances. Almost as many, 58%, believe marriage is between a man and a woman only. The same percent think women should be ordained. However, this last issue is deceiving: When asked if the Church should stick to its founding principles and beliefs, 52% say yes; 38% say it should change. In other words, some are conflicted.

By a margin of 2-1 (63% to 30%), Catholics oppose the government forcing a private business to provide services that violate their beliefs (they were specifically asked about gay marriage ceremonies). Even more, 68%, oppose the federal government forcing Catholic groups to pay for health plans that cover abortion-inducing drugs and contraception.

The results of our survey will be made public. We will put it to good use when the media call, debunking many myths.

HISTORIC PAPAL TRIP

Pope Francis will arrive in the nation's capital from Cuba on Tuesday, September 22. The next morning he meets with President Obama in the White House, followed by a prayer service with the bishops. Later in the day he will canonize Father Junípero Serra at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

On Thursday morning, the pope will address a Joint Session of the Congress. The media is expected to focus on how Catholic lawmakers react to his remarks. In late morning, he will visit

St. Patrick in the City and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington. He departs to JFK later in the day and will lead evening prayers at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Friday morning marks the Holy Father's U.N. address. Expectations will be high as he is likely to push for climate change reforms. Then he will attend an ecumenical service at the World Trade Center. Later in the day, he will visit a church in East Harlem, followed by Mass at Madison Square Garden.

The pope's last stop is Philadelphia on Saturday where he will preside over the World Meeting of Families. He will say Mass, visit Independence Mall, and attend the Festival of Families event. His last day, Sunday, allows him to meet with bishops, visit a prison, offer a concluding Mass, and thank the event's organizers.

Protesters, of course, will be there at every stop, but are likely to draw more yawns than applause.

GAY MARRIAGE LEGALIZED; RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IMPERILED

In a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that gay marriage is a constitutional right that must be observed by all 50 states. Instead of allowing the states the right to make decisions about marriage, these judges elected to impose their will on the nation.

The five justices cited the 14th Amendment as their rationale. But that amendment was passed in 1868, three years after the Civil War ended: it made it illegal to have one law for

whites, and another for blacks. It said absolutely nothing about marriage. The justices reasoned that equal protection under the law, mentioned in the 14th Amendment, was sufficient grounds to legalize the right of two men to marry.

Bill Donohue not only questioned the constitutional basis for this decision, he maintained that the reasoning of Justice Anthony Kennedy, who wrote the majority opinion, was sociologically illiterate. "The idea that marriage is a matter of individual autonomy—and not a social institution—is the most profound flaw in their ruling," he said. "In their mind, society is composed of monads."

Far and away the worst part about this decision is its implications for religious liberty. Indeed, they are ominous. The majority declared that religious Americans "may continue to advocate with utmost, sincere conviction that, by divine precepts, same-sex marriage should not be condoned." But, of course, our First Amendment right to freedom of speech is inalienable, so the justices really weren't giving us anything we didn't already possess.

"The First Amendment," the five justices said, "ensures that religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives...." Donohue questioned, "That's the best they can do?" Justice Clarence Thomas, in his dissent, rightly criticized this genuflection to religious rights. "Religious liberty," he said, "is about freedom of action in matters of religion generally"—it is not confined to advocacy.

Two days after this ruling was reached, Mark Oppenheimer, a columnist for the *New York Times*, called upon the IRS to revoke the tax-exempt status of churches. Look for such demands to mount. It is not likely that lawmakers will introduce legislation to deny the tax-exempt status of religious institutions, but it is likely that the IRS, an

unelected federal agency, will someday take up the cause.

“In order to stop the IRS from revoking the tax-exempt status of religious institutions that refuse to marry two men or two women,” Donohue said, “Congress needs to pass the First Amendment Defense Act. Nothing less is acceptable.”