

# POPE SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*, ignited quite a reaction among fans and foes alike. The irony of seeing traditional enemies of the Catholic Church now hail the pope, even to the point of insisting that Catholic politicians take their marching orders from Rome, was amusing.

The pope painted a bleak picture saying that the earth "is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth." At one point he asked that we reject "doomsday predictions," yet later he said, "Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain."

Bill Donohue defended the right of the pope to address this issue, noting that other popes had also addressed environmental issues, though none were anywhere near as specific. When conservative radio talk-show host Michael Savage called the pope the "Anti-Christ," Donohue called him out for his "disparaging" remarks. Donohue also took aim at those on the left.

The *New York Times*, Donohue said, "normally loves church-state separation," but not this time: it implored governments around the world to adhere to the pope's call. "Sadly," the *Times* said, "the encyclical, compelling as it is, is unlikely to have a similarly positive effect on American politics." Donohue couldn't hold back. "This is a keeper," he said. "Never before have I read an editorial by the *Times* saying how sad it is that agents of the state are not taking their cues from the pope."

Look for this issue to spark more controversy in the fall.

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# FUROR OVER ISLAMIC CARTOONS; INCIVILITY DENOUNCED

Garland, Texas was home to an anti-Islam cartoon event last month that left two gunmen dead and one security guard wounded.

Minutes before Elton Simpson started shooting, one of his supporters tweeted, "If there is no check on the freedom of your speech, then let your hearts be open to the freedom of our actions." Simpson was shot dead quickly thereafter. Neither he nor his ilk ever realized that this plainly irresponsible position—no limits on speech means no limits on conduct—was the proximate cause of his death.

Bill Donohue made it clear that "there is no role for absolutism in a free society." He criticized the staged event orchestrated by Pamela Geller of the American Freedom Defense Initiative for unnecessarily taunting Muslims. It is one thing to condemn ISIS, he said, but it is quite another to deliberately insult people of faith.

In January, Donohue was blasted for saying that the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons could not be defended morally, even if they were entirely legal. He objected to those cartoons not because they depicted Muhammad but because some were pornographic. When Pope Francis took his side, it effectively ended the debate.

The Garland event split members of the PEN American Center, an elite organization that says it defends artistic freedoms: some defended Geller's stunt and others did not. Donohue pointed out how hypocritical both sides were.

On May 5, PEN honored *Charlie Hebdo* in New York City, even though the French magazine was tied to the Paris murders. Officials from the publication received an award for "freedom

of expression courage.” But other PEN members objected, saying that freedom of expression has limits: by depicting Muslims as savages, they said, *Charlie Hebdo* was promoting bigotry.

Both factions of PEN, Donohue said, were phonies. In October 1998, he led 2,000 demonstrators in the street outside the theater that featured “Corpus Christi,” a play that depicted Christ having sex with the apostles. “From the beginning,” he wrote in the November 1998 issue of *Catalyst* “the league has argued that the play should not be censored by the government but that the producers of the play should have cancelled it in the name of common decency.” On that same rainy night there were 300 counter-demonstrators: they came to protest the league’s constitutional right to freedom of speech. Among them was a contingent from the PEN American Center.

The other PEN phonies were the ones who didn’t want to honor *Charlie Hebdo*. They have no problem offending Christians, Donohue noted, but when it comes to bashing Muslims, they are horrified. The entire organization, he concluded, was corrupt.

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## LETTERMAN EXITS

David Letterman’s last appearance on “The Late Show” was May 20. We were delighted to see him exit.

Letterman’s departure was treated by the Hollywood crowd as a signature moment in television history. But no fair-minded person could ever come to that conclusion. Quite simply, the man is an anti-Catholic bigot. If anyone doubts this to be true then let him read p. 13 of this issue.

If this isn’t persuasive enough, question whether Letterman would be regarded as an icon if his “jokes” had been about one

of the protected classes of people. This is exactly the problem: among elites, anti-Catholicism is acceptable, but bigotry aimed at others is seen as offensive. We're different at the Catholic League—we condemn all expressions of bigotry. Just read the lead story on Islamic cartoons.

Letterman's gall is limitless. Consider his obsession ridiculing predatory priests. Yet he is an admitted predator—he preyed on his female staffers. He was also involved in an extortion scandal. To top things off, his own pathologies are what drove him to secure weekly sessions with a psychiatrist.

When the hosts of the "Opie and Anthony" radio show staged an event in St. Patrick's Cathedral in 2002—a couple had sex in the pews during the day—Letterman took the occasion to mock Catholicism again. In fact, he joked about a priest molesting an altar boy.

Letterman was no Johnny Carson, and he is no American hero.

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## **RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ATTACKED; SMEAR CAMPAIGN UNFURLS**

Holy Week will be remembered not for religious observances in 2015, but for an assault on religious liberty. It was ignited by social media, and quickly took on a life of its own, bringing in gay activists, left-wing non-profit groups, the media, the entertainment industry, academia, the clergy, and big corporations. The cultural ramifications will be felt for years.

The Catholic League wasted no time coming to the defense of

Indiana Governor Mike Pence. On March 26, he signed a law that was based on a federal law passed in 1993, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Not only had there been no controversy when the federal law was introduced by liberal Democrats, it was signed by President Bill Clinton. Subsequent to that time, 30 states adopted their own RFRA, without a fuss. So what broke?

The 1993 law was passed to rectify a 1990 Supreme Court decision, *Employment Division v. Smith*, that nullified religious exemptions from otherwise valid laws. Under RFRA, the government could not substantially burden religious exercise without compelling justification, and even then it had to be done in the least restrictive way. In 1997, the high court said that RFRA applied only to states that had their own religious liberty acts.

Governor Pence signed the Indiana RFRA because he did not want his state to be without the protections afforded by federal law. What broke this time around is that by 2015 the gay lobby had become more powerful than ever before: it succeeded in convincing many elites that RFRA could be used to discriminate against gays. Never mind that none of these laws say anything about sexual orientation.

No sooner had Governor Pence signed the law when he was attacked by the president of the NCAA. The Indiana-headquartered collegiate sports organization threatened to pull future events from the state because the law allegedly permits discrimination. Bill Donohue immediately wrote a stinging reply (click [here](#)).

The hysteria, dishonesty, and hypocrisy that marked the anti-RFRA campaign was mind-boggling. The critics made it sound as if Christians were going to seek out gays for punishment; they lied about the contents of the bill; and they were downright two-faced in their opposition. The hostility of this campaign forced the bill to be amended.

Regarding the hypocrisy, Apple CEO Tim Cook exploded in rage at the bill, yet he invests heavily in Muslim-run nations that murder gays for being gay. Moreover, it was RFRA's critics who threatened violence—not its supporters (the owners of a pizza store who said they would not service a gay wedding received death threats).

It is a sad day when those who support religious liberty are demonized, especially during Holy Week.

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## **APOLOGY SETTLES ISSUE**

It was a bad start but it had a good ending. It was also bizarre.

Jewishbusinessnews.com posted an article in April about anti-Catholic remarks allegedly made by a businessman. Amazingly, the reporter who wrote it made patently anti-Catholic remarks himself. We protested and secured a sincere and extensive apology from the media outlet's president.

According to the accuser, the businessman said, "You don't really believe Jesus was born to a Virgin Mother, or are you that big of a moron?" He is also accused of saying, "Is it that stupid Ash Wednesday again? You better not come to work with ashes on your head." The victim sued for \$5 million for harassment that led to a hospitalized panic attack.

Jewishbusinessnews.com wrote about this story, mistaking the virgin birth for Immaculate Conception. Worse, the reporter wrote the following:

"To be fair, generations of Jews have found that story hard to swallow, but, hey, if old man Joseph the carpenter took her

word for it, who are we to argue. Still, to us Jews it always sounded like a good recovery line when you start showing. Certainly better than the classic, 'I fell for it' folks use in emergency rooms. 'God put it there' is much classier."

Sima Ella, who issued the apology, elicited Donohue to say, "Rarely have I seen a quicker and more sincere apology than this. All is forgiven. It is important that Catholic-Jewish relations remain good, especially these days. Case Closed."

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## **CORDILEONE UNDER FIRE; OUTSIDERS INTRUDE**

An array of persons not affiliated with the Archdiocese of San Francisco have joined some parishioners to wage war on Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone. At issue is a proposed contract for teachers at the four archdiocesan high schools. It seeks to assure fidelity to Church teachings.

Dissident Catholic organizations such as Call to Action, Dignity, and Catholics for Choice were among the first to condemn the archbishop. All three reject Church teachings, especially on sexual issues, and have been criticized by many bishops; the latter has been condemned twice by the bishops' conference.

Showing nothing but contempt for the First Amendment, lawmakers from Sacramento and San Francisco injected themselves into the dispute. The internal affairs of the archdiocese is none of their business. The media, led by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, predictably took the side of Cordileone's critics.

Joining the fray is Sam Singer, the self-described “half Catholic, half Jewish” public relations giant who has been accused of having a problem with the truth. He falsely claimed that Cordileone was going to “purge gay, lesbian and pro-choice teachers.” He also called on Pope Francis to have him removed.

Catholics also worked against the archbishop. The University of San Francisco, a Jesuit-run school, hosted a forum for those opposed to Cordileone. Speaking at the event was the former head of the archdiocese’s Catholic Charities and a lawyer from a radical pro-abortion group. The *National Catholic Reporter* allowed San Francisco’s elected city attorney space to criticize the archbishop. Their input led many staff and teachers to protest the faculty handbook.

The Catholic League is proud to stand up to these activists (see pp. 4-7) and defend Archbishop Cordileone. This well-orchestrated attack would never have gotten off the ground had it not been for those who are wholly unaffiliated with the archdiocese. As such, it represents one of the most brazen attempts by Catholic dissidents and Catholic haters to manipulate public opinion against the Catholic Church.

Some of the accusations that have been made are so totally untrue that those making them either did not read the relevant documents or decided to ignore their plain wording. Demagoguery abounds. Make no mistake about it, this is a despicable campaign launched against a loyal son of the Church, Archbishop Cordileone.

It is particularly galling to read statements made by lawmakers bragging how San Francisco is known all over the world for its tolerance. It is nothing of the sort. To wit: the Catholic League, represented by the Thomas More Law Center, once sued the city for its religious hostility to Catholics.



This fight isn't over. Bet on it.

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## **LIBEL SUIT TOSSED**

In 2013, Rebecca Randles, an attorney who works with supreme Catholic-suing lawyer Jeffrey Anderson, sued Bill Donohue and the Catholic League for allegedly libeling a man who had made accusations against a priest in 2011. There was nothing libelous about anything Donohue said, and in January 2015 the suit was dismissed on all counts.

When a Missouri man made allegations against a priest who allegedly molested him and three other altar boys in the early 1980s, Donohue investigated the accuser and found that he had been implicated in a murder. While another man was convicted, it was public record that the priest accuser had “motive to commit the murder and the opportunity to do so.”

Donohue took the information from court records—he did not make it up. Moreover, two of the three altar boys were dead, and the one living man said that none of the abuse ever occurred.

The man who sued Donohue and the Catholic League was riding high when he hired Randles: he had just won a multi-million dollar lawsuit against the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese. But Randles proved no match for Erin Mersino, who represented the Catholic League; she works at the Thomas More Law Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The judge dismissed the case mostly on technicalities—the defamation suit was time barred by New York’s statute of limitations (almost two years had elapsed before the suit was filed)—and on other matters.

Thus, attempts to intimidate us failed.

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## PARIS CARTOONISTS SHOT; POPE VINDICATES OUR POSITION

A week into the new year saw the horrible death of 12 people, most of whom worked at the Paris office of *Charlie Hebdo*; a police officer was among the dead. The weekly publication is known for its coarse content and vulgar cartoons. Muslim terrorists, upset with depictions of Muhammad, were responsible for the carnage.

Bill Donohue quickly became part of the story when he issued a news release saying that Muslims had a right to be angry, though they were wrong to react with violence. "Killing in response to insult, no matter how gross," he said, "must be unequivocally condemned." He made several similar statements over the course of two weeks, but many in the media focused exclusively on his comment that Muslims were justified in their anger.

Donohue called the paper's publisher, Stephane Charbonnier, a "narcissist" who "didn't understand the role he played in his tragic death." The Catholic League president drew attention to Charbonnier's comment, "Muhammad isn't sacred to me"; the French journalist dropped that line as justification for his obscene depictions. "Muhammad isn't sacred to me, either," said Donohue, "but it would never occur to me to deliberately insult Muslims by trashing him."

Non-violent offenses, Donohue stressed, must be met with a non-violent response. This was uncontroversial, but what many criticized Donohue for was his insistence that Muslims were

unnecessarily provoked. He was simply asking all parties to the controversy to exercise restraint: the cartoonists should not intentionally offend Muslim sensibilities and Muslims should not overreact by taking up arms.

After being pounded by many pundits and talk-show hosts on radio and TV for his comments, Donohue found welcome relief in statements made by Pope Francis. "You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith." The Holy Father insisted that "We cannot make a toy out of the religion of others. These people provoke and then [something can happen]. In freedom of expression there are limits."

If this wasn't vindication enough, the pope, after denouncing the violence, quipped that if his friend, Dr. Alberto Gasparri, the organizer of papal trips, were "to use a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. It's normal." This effectively closed the debate on Donohue: the pope had taken his side.

There is much more to this story; it is recounted in the pages that follow. In his "President's Desk" piece, Donohue discusses some behind the scenes issues that are attendant to this issue. While the Catholic League emerged on top, an awful lot of shots were fired at us, and some were utterly irresponsible.

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## **OBAMA'S BIG INSULT**

President Obama offended Catholics at this year's National Prayer Breakfast. "Unless we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place," he said, "remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed

terrible deeds in the name of Christ.”

Bill Donohue said, “Obama’s ignorance is astounding and his comparison is pernicious,” adding that it was done to “deflect guilt from Muslim madmen.”

The Crusades, Donohue pointed out, were a defensive Christian reaction against Muslim barbarians of the Middle Ages. He quoted Princeton scholar and Islamic expert Bernard Lewis: “The Crusade was a delayed response to the jihad, the holy war for Islam, and its purpose was to recover by war what had been lost by war—to free the holy places of Christendom and open them once again, without impediment, to Christian pilgrimage.”

Regarding the other fable, the Inquisition, the Catholic Church had almost nothing to do with it. Secular authorities saw heresy as treason; anyone who questioned royal authority, or who challenged the idea that kingship was God-given, was guilty of a capital offense. It was they—not the Church—who burned the heretics.

According to St. Louis University professor Thomas Madden, “All the Crusades met the criteria of just wars.” Donohue questioned, “How many ISIS atrocities, Mr. President, have met the criteria of just wars? The ones where they buried people alive, stoned children, raped women, and crucified men?” He called on Obama to apologize.

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## **CHRISTMAS WAR STALEMATE; VICTORIES ON BOTH SIDES**

The annual “War on Christmas” continued in 2014 with both sides having achieved roughly the same number of wins and

losses. This is certainly an improvement over the days when the anti-Christmas side appeared to be winning this battle in the culture war. The good news is that the pro-Christmas side has been pushing back, even reversing previous losses.

When it comes to putting a nativity scene on public property, the pro-Christmas activists claimed victories in North Augusta, South Carolina; Grand Haven, Michigan; Cherokee County, Texas; Baxter County, Arkansas; Brookville, Indiana; Ogden City, Utah; Austin, Texas; Utica, New York; and New York City.

The presence of the Catholic League was felt in New York City where a record number of people commented on our nativity scene in Central Park; this year it was displayed right in front of the Plaza Hotel.

The anti-Christmas forces won in Maury County, Tennessee; Portsmouth, Virginia; Jay City, Florida; Orange County, Florida; Piedmont, Alabama; and Dallas, North Carolina.

Freedom from Religion Foundation was active in many of the attacks, as were American Atheists, the ACLU, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State; the latter advised Satanists of their rights, thus proving that their real agenda is to attack Christianity. American Atheists erected anti-Christmas billboards in some cities, mocking the holiday.

The Catholic League made a splash in Los Angeles with its billboard: we called attention to hate speech directed at Christians at home and abroad. From the media response, we know we provoked a discussion.

We also drew attention to the extent that militant secularists are terrified about Christmas. For example, their censorial response reached absurd heights when some sought to ban candy canes. That was the initial response of the University of Maine; it changed its policy once the media exposed its madness. Why did it seek to censor candy canes? Because, they

said, the candy canes reminded people of Christmas. Evidently, that is not something that an institution of higher learning should be expected to tolerate.

Cambridge, Massachusetts, we pointed out, wouldn't blink an eye about welcoming terrorists to speak at any venue, but when it came to having Santa appear at a local school winter concert, the open-minded bigots decided to disinvite him.

It never ceases to amaze us that *all* of those seeking to silence the Christian voice at Christmastime boast of their unwavering commitment to freedom of speech, diversity, and tolerance. Their real political stripes are totalitarian; they are a menace to freedom. But the good news is that they keep running up against people like us.