

JACKIE MASON R.I.P.

We lost a true American icon on July 24 when Jackie Mason passed away at the age of 93. He was more than a remarkable comedian, he was a strong foe of anti-Catholicism.

On December 14, 2005, journalist Don Feder, who had recently founded Jews Against Anti-Christian Defamation, held a press conference on the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Attending were Jackie Mason and several other prominent Jews; Bill Donohue was also there. Jackie hired limousines that rode down Fifth Avenue with a huge banner declaring, "JEWS SAY IT'S OK TO SAY MERRY CHRISTMAS."

Soon after Jackie and his lawyer friend Raoul Felder wrote a splendid piece explaining why it was important for Jews to speak up about attempts to censor Christmas. They deplored banning "the singing of Christmas carols [and] nativity scenes" in the schools.

"We cannot see how our beliefs are jeopardized by someone else celebrating *his* beliefs—particularly if the celebrations are those consisting, at least in part, of love, family values, spirituality and giving thought to the less fortunate."

Jackie also spoke at a rally we held in 2010 outside the Empire State Building protesting the refusal of the building's owner not to honor Mother Teresa on her centenary by lighting the towers in her colors, blue and white.

Jackie Mason was more than a first-class comedian. He was a first-class person who went against the grain by standing up for the rights of Catholics. May he rest in peace.

VICTORY FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY; HIGH COURT RULES 9-0

On June 17, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Catholic foster care agencies can reject gay couples from adopting children. This was a huge victory for religious liberty and a resounding defeat for LGBTQ activists.

It was these activists who launched a contrived assault on the rights of Catholic social service agencies—no gay or transgender couple had ever complained that they were discriminated against by these Catholic entities—and now their effort to impose their secular beliefs on Catholics has been rejected.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the six members who joined his majority opinion (others offered their own opinions), noted that the Catholic agency named in the lawsuit only sought “an accommodation that will allow it to continue serving the children of Philadelphia in a manner consistent with its religious beliefs; it does not seek to impose those beliefs on anyone else (our italics).”

The First Amendment guarantees religious liberty, and that provision means little if it only means the right to worship. The right to freely exercise one’s religious beliefs in the public square is central to religious liberty, and while that right—like all other constitutional rights—is not absolute, it must be seen as presumptively constitutional.

This decision makes it more difficult for LGBTQ activists to argue that sexual orientation and sexual identity are analogous to race. They are not. Race is an ascribed characteristic, and as such it is an amoral attribute. Sexual orientation (at least when it is behaviorally operative) and sexual identity are achieved, and to that extent they are

normative, thereby making them legitimate categories for moral judgment.

There are some who argue that to deny a gay couple the right to adopt children is morally wrong. This position contends that the only thing that matters to children is love. While love is a necessary element, it is not sufficient. Children need proper formation, and that is difficult to do, at best, when they have two parents of the same sex. Boys and girls need mothers and fathers, and while that is not possible in every situation, it remains the gold standard, departures from which should be discouraged.

Those who support diversity should hail this high court ruling. No one is forced to go to a Catholic foster care agency when seeking to adopt children; we should respect the diversity these places entail.

Naturally, anti-Catholic bigots maintained that we have too many Catholics on the Supreme Court. Guess they didn't notice that two Jews and one Protestant were on the same side as the Catholic justices.

POPE ISSUES REFORMS

Pope Francis recently did the Catholic Church a great service in issuing some much needed changes in the Vatican's Code of Canon Law.

The new reforms provide sanctions against priests who "groom" or "induce" minors to perform sex acts. Similarly, the possession of child pornography is declared a crime deserving of punishment.

The most dramatic changes affect sexual abuse committed by priests against another adult. If a priest “forces someone to perform or submit to sexual acts,” he will be punished. The penalty may include “dismissal from the clerical state if the case so warrants.”

It remains to be seen how the norms that affect adults will be enacted. Will they, for example, be invoked against priests who engage in homosexual acts with other priests?

Another area of controversy is sure to be the norms that provide sanctions for “the attempted ordination of women.” Currently, there are many dissident Catholic organizations that openly reject the Church’s teaching on ordination.

It is refreshing to read that the new norms apply to lay leaders in the Church who abuse their office. They will now be held accountable for their own behavior.

Fortunately, the changes, which go into effect on December 8, 2021, will provide improvements in the due process rights of priests.

These reforms by Pope Francis will likely be welcomed by the vast majority of Catholics. Those who are likely to be troubled by them need to engage in some serious self-reflection.

WAR ON CATHOLIC HOSPITALS; COURT BATTLES LOOM

On May 10, the Biden administration announced that it would force doctors who can perform sex transition surgery to do so, regardless of their religious objections. This is a

declaration of war by the Department of Health and Human Services on Catholic doctors and hospitals. It will also be contested in the federal courts.

Title IX of civil rights law bars discrimination based on sex, but says nothing about transgender persons. Yet both the Obama and Biden administrations insist that this provision should cover transgender persons; the Trump administration held to the original understanding.

In a May 10 news story by the Associated Press (AP) on this subject, it said that the Obama administration “relied on a broad understanding of sex shaped by a person’s inner sense of being male, female, neither or a combination.”

Paradoxically, this AP interpretation is both accurate and inaccurate at the same time.

It accurately conveys what both the Obama and Biden administrations believe: being male or female is a subjective judgment, one that allows a man or a woman to deny that they are a man or a woman, or any sex at all, for that matter. Which means they could be an acorn. It is inaccurate because it is a fiction: one’s “inner sense” of what sex one belongs to may be inaccurate. What matters is reality, not tales from “The Twilight Zone.”

This assault on religious liberty began in 2015 when the Obama administration issued a mandate requiring doctors and hospitals to provide for transgender surgeries; it was then tied up in the courts. They made no exemption for those who had religious objections. Neither does the Biden administration. What this means is that Catholic physicians who can perform sex reassignment surgery can be forced to do so; Catholic hospitals are also denied a religious exemption.

Pope Francis has observed that “biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.” The bishops’ conference agrees, saying it opposes

religious organizations “to cover ‘transition’ procedures in their employee health insurance plans...”

It must be noted that Catholic hospitals do not deny routine health care to transgender persons. There is a difference between denying transgender persons treatment for Covid and forcing a Catholic doctor to make anatomical changes on the sexually confused.

The Biden administration’s war on Catholic hospitals is one of many policies it has promoted that endanger religious liberty. That they are being shoved down our throats by a man who professes to be a “devout Catholic” is all the more nauseating.

BAD OMENS IN CALIFORNIA

The California State Senate is moving at full speed to pass the Equitable and Inclusive UC Healthcare Act. This legislation seeks to break existing partnerships between the University of California and hospitals, particularly Catholic ones, that refuse to provide elective abortions, sex reassignment surgeries and sterilizations.

If the Equitable and Inclusive UC Healthcare Act were to become law, UCLA would have to break its contract with Dignity Health that operates several specialty clinics.

UC Davis would also have to terminate its joint run cancer treatment center with Mercy Medical Center in Merced, while St. Mary’s Medical Center could no longer administer San Francisco’s only inpatient adolescent psychiatry program with UC San Francisco.

Ultimately, all of these would leave patients without access to life-saving treatments. “It’s only going to take away [health care] from the poor and vulnerable,” said Lori Dangberg, vice-president of the Alliance of Catholic Health Care.

To further this point, Dr. Carrie Byington, executive vice-president of UC Health, said that “low-income and rural communities and people of color” would bear the brunt of the reduced access to care that could be “life threatening [in some instances] and exacerbate health disparities.”

It is a sad commentary on our society when those who harbor an animus against Catholicism do not care who gets hurt, including the poor. These are bad omens for Californians and beyond.

CIGNA, DISNEY, MLB; CORPORATE WAR ON RELIGION

The attack on Christianity stemming from the corporate world is relatively new, but it is picking up speed. In this issue alone, we detail our response to Cigna, Disney and Major League Baseball (MLB).

Cigna’s employment policy reads like something that was penned by some fanatical dean on a college campus. Asking employees if they are Christian is troubling, and what makes it seriously obnoxious is that it is being done for malicious reasons. Instructing Christian staffers that they are unjustly benefiting from what Cigna calls “religious privilege” is obscene. Being white and male are two other problematic categories.

Cigna has one “diversity” standard for its corporate leaders and another for everyone else. Those who run the insurance company are mostly white men, and no doubt many are Christian. Yet they do not see themselves as unfairly occupying a mantle of privilege. No matter, when we listed the email contact for the head media staffer, our subscribers jumped on it and registered their outrage.

Disney is apologizing for offending everyone from Indians to Pacific Islanders, but it has not said a word about the one demographic group it has offended the most, namely Catholics. There is a racist element at work here as well—it is not just a religious bias that it is exhibiting. Catholics are still largely white and white people carry baggage.

The assaults on Catholics that Disney has launched over the years has come by way of the big screen (e.g., its incestuous relationship with the Weinstein brothers in the movie distribution company, Miramax), and television (its takeover of ABC is a case in point). It has used these platforms to bash Catholics; the few times it crossed the line with others it apologized.

MLB should stick to bringing fans back to the ballpark—attendance is way down. But it gets a large portion of its money from the big sports TV companies, which is why they don’t mind alienating the fans. That explains why the corporate boys—not the players—decided to get involved in politics and move the All-Star game from mostly black Georgia to overwhelmingly white Colorado. Perversely, it did so in the name of racial justice.

The Commissioner of Baseball, Rob Manfred, got belted by our email base. We know this because it got back to us that he was furious with being deluged by angry emails. He was particularly incensed with Bill Donohue and sought reprisals, but his appeal went nowhere.

We are delighted with the vigorous response of Catholics to our requests for action. It is the only way we can win, or at least stop matters from getting worse.

OKLAHOMA HAPPY ENDING

When an Oklahoma lawmaker compared the evil of abortion to the evil of slavery, he was immediately condemned by left-wing activists. After we got involved, his critics were put on their heels and retreated. It turned out to be a happy ending.

In April, during the course of debating pro-life legislation in Oklahoma, state Rep. Jim Olsen made an apt analogy. "None of us would like to be a slave. If I had my choice, I guess I'd be a slave. At least the slave has his life. Once your life is gone, it's gone. And I'm not minimizing slavery."

Pro-abortion activists and politicians exploded. Olsen was accused of using "racist terms" in a "cavalier" fashion. His "insensitive" comments were right out of the "Dark Ages."

Olsen stood his ground. "In the context of history in general, I did compare one evil to another and very frankly I make no apology for it." No matter, some Democrats initially weighed proposals to censure the Republican state lawmaker.

"I never spoke positively of slavery," Olsen said. "One evil at one time was acceptable in our society, and now it's not. I look forward to the time when we stop killing babies."

After we listed Olsen's email address in our news release, our side flooded his office with letters of encouragement. He called Bill Donohue to thank him, saying the scale of his support totally outdid the response of his critics. Thus did

he emerge unscathed.

VATICAN REJECTS GAY UNIONS; DISSIDENTS REBEL

Pope Francis has been under considerable pressure by gay activists, in and out of the Church, to give the green light to gay marriage. On March 15, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith released a statement to queries on this issue that is the most decisive rejection of those efforts ever written. Dissident Catholics were enraged.

The Church's top doctrinal office said, "it is not licit to impart a blessing on relationships, partnerships, even stable, that involve sexual activity outside of marriage (i.e, outside the indissoluble union of a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life), as is the case of the unions between persons of the same sex."

The statement made it clear that this "does not preclude the blessings given to individual persons with homosexual inclinations, who manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God as proposed by Church teaching." It is homosexual unions that are the problem, not homosexuals.

With regard to homosexuality, the Vatican said it cannot "approve and encourage a choice and a way of life" that is "objectively disordered."

God, the document declared, "does not and cannot bless sin." In short, "the Church does not have, and cannot have, the power to bless unions of persons of the same sex." In other words, the Church must follow Scripture.

This did not sit well with those Catholics who have been at war with the Church's teachings on sexuality. The German bishops, in particular, were unhappy; many are prepared to sanction gay unions. In the U.S., so-called progressive Catholics were beside themselves.

The statement simply reaffirmed the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage. Nonetheless, it was seen as controversial in some quarters, and that is because Pope Francis has been welcoming to homosexuals. In fairness to the pope, it is not his fault that some interpret his friendly approach as signifying an interest in changing Church doctrine. That's their problem.

To put it differently, it is one thing to say all persons possess equal dignity in the eyes of God; it is quite another to say that whatever they do is acceptable to God. Human status and human behavior are not identical.

Also, this document applies equally to heterosexuals. According to Catholic sexual ethics, cohabiting men and women are involved in an illicit relationship, and this statement is very clear about their status. Yet the media missed this point, so absorbed were they with gay rights.

Whatever previous confusion there was is now gone. The Vatican left nothing on the table. The door has been slammed shut on the gay agenda.

USCCB REJECTS COVID BILL

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) formally opposed the American Rescue Plan Act, more commonly known as the "Stimulus Bill" or the "Covid Relief Bill."

USCCB president José Gomez wrote a letter on March 6 to all U.S. Senators urging them to vote against the bill; several USCCB committee chairmen co-signed the letter.

This came the day after the USCCB released a letter by Gomez (and the committee chairmen) stating they could not support the bill unless it prohibited funding for abortions. The sponsors of the bill refused to accede to the bishops' request.

The bishops were unequivocal in their opposition to the bill. "This grievous result gives us heavy hearts because it leaves us with no choice but to urge you to oppose final passage of the American Rescue Plan Act."

The big story here is the decision of the bishops to make good on their promise that abortion is their "preeminent issue." For those Catholics who prioritize social justice issues, this is a stunning loss. After all, this was their dream bill, packed with money for all their favorite programs.

There are many elements of the bill that are very appealing to the bishops, and to Catholics in general. But to ask Catholics to support legislation that helps the needy while denying the unborn the right to life is offensive. The most basic human right is the right to life, not income assistance.

VICTORY IN NORTH DAKOTA; BILL TO BUST CONFESSIONAL PULLED

Once again state lawmakers attempted to bust the seal of the confessional, and once again they withdrew their bill under pressure from the Catholic League.

Two years ago it was California lawmakers who tried to violate our sacramental right. Last year it was Utah. This year it was North Dakota. All three bills were introduced citing the need

to uncover information about the sexual abuse of minors allegedly learned in the confessional.

The bill's co-sponsor, Sen. Judy Lee, asked that the legislation be withdrawn. Inforum, a media outlet that covers the Fargo-Moorhead area, took note of the role of the Catholic League.

"In a Jan. 20 letter, William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, said that legislation to break the seal of the confessional was a 'direct assault on our faith.'" Grand Forks Herald also cited our campaign, as did other North Dakota media outlets.

In the letter that the reporter referenced, Donohue raised three questions.

"Can you identify a single instance—just one will do—where it was later learned that a grave injustice was done to a victim of clergy sexual abuse owing to the failure of a priest to disclose what he learned in the confessional?"

"Can you identify anything learned by the recent 18-month investigation of the Catholic Church by the Attorney General of North Dakota that justifies such an egregious violation of the First Amendment rights of the Catholic clergy and the Catholic laity."

"Can you explain why you have given a pass to the lawyer-client privilege and the exemption afforded psychologists and their patients?

Do they not learn of sexual abuse behind closed doors?"

Here is how we won. We enlisted the support of our email base of supporters [see our website on how to join] and they contacted Sen. Lee asking her to pull her bill. We also contacted all North Dakota lawmakers.

There is no evidence that victims of sexual abuse are being

ignored by lawmakers—anywhere in the nation—because of the Catholic sacrament of Reconciliation.

Therefore, bills that target the confessional are not only unconstitutional—a clear violation of the free exercise of religion encoded in the First Amendment—they do nothing to bring justice to minors who have been abused.

We are proud of this important victory. When the state seeks to sabotage our sacraments—on wholly contrived charges no less—the religious liberty implications cannot be more serious. As such, this is a win for all religions.

Thanks to those who contacted the North Dakota lawmakers. They got the message, loud and clear.