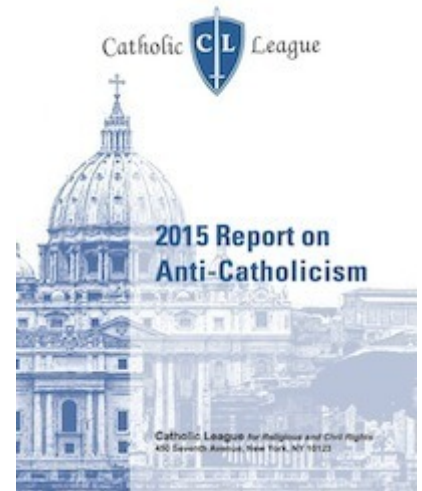


# Executive Summary

The Catholic event of the year—at least for Americans—was also the Catholic League event of the year, namely, the pope's historic visit to Washington, D.C., New York City, and Philadelphia.



Pope Francis electrified the nation, including those who are not Catholic. His spontaneity and authenticity was embraced by tens of millions, and his love of Christ and the Catholic Church was as palpable as it was inspiring. What made his visit so special for the Catholic League was the opportunity for Bernadette Brady-Egan and me to meet him; the invitation was graciously extended by Washington Archbishop Donald Cardinal Wuerl. The meeting took place in the nation's capital on September 23. It was truly a memorable experience.

As to be expected, the Holy Father had millions of Catholics rooting for him. But he needed more than cheerleaders—he needed to be supported when scrutinized and defended when attacked. That was our job. In fact, we went to work months before he arrived in the United States, pushing back against those who had their own agenda, exposing them as political operatives.

One strategy we employed was to get out in front of the pope's critics. For example, we commissioned a scientific survey of Catholics. We chose The Polling Company, astutely run by Kellyanne Conway. We wanted our survey to ask the kinds of questions that most polls neglect to ask, and to dig deeper on the conventional questions. We did this for positioning

purposes: we did not want to be in a reactive mode to media-commissioned surveys.

Almost 7 in 10 Catholics, we found, said their commitment towards their faith had not been altered in any significant way in the recent past. Also, 19 in 20 Catholics—95 percent—said their faith was important in their daily lives. We also learned that 61 percent of Catholics reported that abortion should not be permitted in all or most instances, and 58 percent said marriage should be between a man and a woman. And by a margin of 2-1, Catholics oppose attempts by the government to force private businesses to provide services that violate their beliefs. The figures were much higher for practicing Catholics.

We anticipated that dissident Catholics would come out of the woodwork to make their absurd demands on the pope. We were right. Fortunately, we were more than ready for them: we published a media guide alerting the press corps to phony Catholic groups, entities that support abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage, etc.

When Pope Francis came under fire for meeting Kim Davis, the Kentucky clerk who refused to issue a marriage license to homosexual couples, we rushed to his side. Conscience rights, especially when grounded in religion, are fundamental to a free society, making their dismissal by elites alarming.

Everywhere the pope went—from the White House to the United Nations—he discussed religious liberty. In particular, he implored government leaders to respect it. That he made his appeals with passion made his pronouncements all the more encouraging. While he reached out to everyone, he did not jettison his core principles in the process.

Another issue attendant to the pope's visit was his decision to canonize Father Junípero Serra. We also got out in front of that controversy.

Father Serra not only did more to protect the best interests of American Indians than any other 18th century figure, he made the case that they deserve the same human rights afforded their white colonizers. Still, some bashed the pope for giving Father Serra the plaudits he earned.

Historians who are careful in their scholarship do not make unsupported accusations; they may be critical of legendary figures, but they don't engage in hyperbole or vitriol. Those guilty of slamming Father Serra were, almost to the one, ignorant of his defense of civil rights. Some took the lazy way out and lumped him in with Spanish colonizers, many of whom were guilty of gross injustices. Others were hard-core activists—not a few of whom were virulently anti-American and anti-Catholic. They did not want the truth told about this saintly priest.

I saw this coming early in 2015, which is why I researched and wrote an easy-to-read booklet, *The Noble Legacy of Father Serra*. In a Q&A format, I described his work, and directly confronted the most serious charges against him. It was widely distributed; it was met with acclaim by bishops and the laity.

There was a time over the summer when the California legislature indicated it would vote to remove a statue of Father Serra from the U.S. Capitol. We immediately flooded California Catholics with my booklet, hoping to stem the tide. I was gratified when the vote was put on hold (no vote was ever taken), and was especially happy to learn that John Liston, executive director of Serra International, wrote that my booklet “went a long way in assisting the California legislature to suspend the vote to remove the statue of Fr. Serra from Statuary Hall.”

These are the kinds of things we do at the Catholic League. We are not content to sing the pope's praises in public—we jump into the fray where others dare not go. Even when the pope's visit was over, we took on the *New York Times* for making

unsubstantiated allegations against Father Serra. Researchers and fact-checkers will enjoy reading the exchange, which is reproduced in its entirety.

The tie between Pope Francis and the Catholic League was evident in 2015 even before his September visit. At the beginning of the year, we came down on the same side regarding the controversy over the French newspaper, *Charlie Hebdo*. I laid my anchor down first, taking heat from many sources, including those normally friendly to the Catholic League. So when the pope essentially took my side—I joked with commentator Sean Hannity that I was going to sue the pope for plagiarism—it helped to squash the outcry.

There is much to this story, and that is why we offer a full exposition of it. But it cannot be said too often that my position, which I am proud of, was, from the beginning, not an attempt to exculpate the Muslim barbarians who carried out the massacre; rather, it was a call to common sense. When people intentionally and persistently go out of their way to obscenely portray religious figures who are dear to their followers, they should not be shocked when the offended rebel. This does not excuse the violence. My plea was simply a call for restraint, on both sides.

The author of the First Amendment, James Madison, knew that freedom could be abused, and he even said it could lead to the death of liberty. He was right. This is why those who push the limits of free speech—in effect abusing it—are not the friends of liberty. Indeed, this is exactly why I criticized *Charlie Hebdo* and its defenders. It is their antics that beckon wild reactions, ranging from censorship to violence. They have never learned that restraint is freedom's friend; it is not its enemy.

The abuse of office, especially by government leaders, is another threat to liberty. That was one major reason why we strongly defended San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore

Cordileone. To be sure, bishops are subject to fair criticism from the faithful, and when they involve themselves in public policy issues, e.g. abortion or school vouchers, they are fair game for outsiders as well. But when outsiders force their way into the internal affairs of the Catholic Church, that is a different story. It gets alarming when the intruders are agents of the state.

Archbishop Cordileone simply wanted to ensure that teachers at the four archdiocesan high schools accepted Catholic teachings. He was not looking to exact a loyalty oath—he was merely seeking to avoid a situation where a wayward teacher might decide to go public with his objections to Church teachings.

What Cordileone wanted was hardly exceptional. Do not all religious institutions expect their employees to exercise fidelity to their teachings?

Do not secular institutions—such as the editorial board of a newspaper—expect that employees will not publicly condemn their work? Why should bishops be any different?

Not only did PR professionals in San Francisco jump into the internal affairs of the archdiocese, lawmakers did as well. That prompted me to contact the legislators in Sacramento, and the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco, registering my objections to government encroachment on religion. The guilty officials knew they had no legal basis to win, but that didn't stop them from practicing the politics of intimidation. When government officials seek to bully religious authorities, they cross a moral line, if not a legal one.

The precariousness of religious liberty was also evident in Indiana. Governor Mike Pence sought to have Indiana adopt a law modeled on the 1993 congressional legislation, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. That law was promoted by liberal Democrats and signed by President Bill Clinton. But

when Pence said he wanted a similar law for Indiana, he was met with fierce opposition, drawing activists from many states.

The heart of the controversy was the concern that those who object to facilitating a same-sex marriage might be penalized for doing so. At issue was refusing to serve gay persons (that would be inexcusable)—it was aiding and abetting a ceremony they could not in good conscience follow. Even more important, the vast majority of those who objected to servicing these ceremonies had religious objections, thereby making the need for a law that respects their religious rights all the more pressing.

We not only defended this law, we took on the NCAA for injecting itself into the controversy. For reasons that were purely political, the NCAA president found it necessary to issue a warning to those who were planning to attend the Men's Final Four basketball tournament in Indianapolis: beware of the draconian aspects of the religious-liberty bill. He never detailed what they were. The hysteria and duplicity over this law was a national disgrace.

Hollywood, ever the friend of Catholics, gave us "Spotlight" in November. The movie was based on the outrageous conditions that were allowed to prevail in the Archdiocese of Boston. We all know the story of molesting priests and their enabling bishops, and "Spotlight" recounted this sad story with great effect. Our problem was not the movie, per se, but the reactions to it, especially from the chattering class. We were also put off by the dishonesty of Tinseltown.

When pundits weighed in on "Spotlight," they invariably tarred the entire Catholic Church and misrepresented what happened. We know that only a small percentage of priests were ever guilty of these crimes, but one would never know this from the commentary. We know that celibacy was not the driving force behind these offenses—it's been a stricture for a thousand

years—yet many uninformed pundits claimed otherwise.

The fact is that 100 percent of the victimizers were male, as were 81 percent of their victims, most of whom (78 percent) were postpubescent. That's called homosexuality. Not surprisingly, researchers at John Jay College of Criminal Justice found that less than 5 percent of the offenders were pedophiles. Sadly, even they dodged the obvious, refusing to call it what it was. That is why I refer to the homosexual scandal, and its cover-up, as Scandal II (Scandal I being the church-driven one).

As I pointed out in our monthly journal, *Catalyst*, there will be no "Spotlight" on Hollywood, though child rape has long been a problem there. Worse, attempts to bring that story to the big screen have been met with resistance. The double standard is all too familiar, and all too sickening.

We ended the year, as we usually do, by going to war with those seeking to deny, or neuter, Christmas celebrations. Our biggest fight, and most rewarding, came by tackling the University of Tennessee (UT).

The director of UT's Office of Diversity and Inclusion warned students not to get too Christmas-friendly. He even warned them not to hold Christmas events "in disguise." This wasn't Castro's Cuba trying to stamp out Christmas—it was a southern state university. That this was being done in the name of tolerance made it all the more unbearable.

When we learned of this authoritarianism, we contacted all members of the Tennessee legislature, asking those who sit on education committees to address it. The response was gratifying: responding to many complaints, including ours, the person responsible was sanctioned by his superiors, and his authority to rule on these matters in the future was stripped from him. Most critical, the offensive guidelines were repealed.

There were other skirmishes as well. Most involved municipalities or schools trying to censor or water-down Christmas celebrations. These attempts, with rare exception, were indefensible; happily, some of the decisions were reversed.

Why do these battles rage every year? The lack of judicial clarity, stemming from the U.S. Supreme Court, is one reason for this condition. Ignorance and cowardice on the part of many government officials play a big role. And, of course, there are the activists who hate Christianity—there is no shortage of them—who pull the trigger.

Regardless of what issue we are fighting, it is immensely satisfying when we win. Even when we don't, we put the offending parties on notice: we will be back. Indeed, we are here to stay, doing what we can to defend religious liberty in general, and Catholicism in particular.

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President