

ARE DEMOCRATS PHOBIC ABOUT RELIGION? NO, IT'S WORSE

[Bill Donohue](#)

A new Pew Research Center survey, "How Americans Feel About Religion's Influence in Government and Public Life," reveals that Republicans and Democrats seriously disagree on the public role of religion. What the survey does not disclose is why. Before addressing this issue, it is important to recognize areas of general agreement.

Most Americans (8-in-10) think churches should not endorse political candidates, and most (54 percent) think government should enforce separation of church and state (only 13 percent want government to *stop* separation of church and state). Despite media reports to the contrary, only 10 percent of Americans have a positive view of "Christian nationalism" (6-in-10 never heard of it).

Is religion's influence gaining or losing influence in America life? The poll found that 37 percent say it is gaining while 61 percent say it is losing. But is it a good thing or a bad thing that 37 percent say it is gaining influence? This matters because this figure is the highest share since 2002.

More than half of Americans (55 percent) have a positive view of religion's influence on American life; the rest are split between those who are neutral and those who are negative. Republicans and Democrats vary considerably: 7-in-10 of the former believe religion has a positive impact while less than 4-in-10 of the latter agree.

Similarly, 7-in-10 Republicans think the Bible should have a great deal, or some, influence on U.S. laws, as compared to only 3-in-10 Democrats. Had respondents been asked if the Bible should have a great deal of influence on American

society, as opposed to its laws, the figure would likely be higher.

It is no secret that Republicans believe that the teachings that mark our Judeo-Christian heritage, e.g., the Ten Commandments, are a positive guide to the good life. Why don't Democrats? Why are they skittish on the question of religion? To be blunt, are they phobic?

The issue of phobia deserves to be raised because we constantly hear about the nefarious influence of "Islamophobia." New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, and many academics, never tire of rolling out this canard. Now if some Americans are wary of the effects of Islam on American society, it is because of the illiberal beliefs and practices of many of its adherents.

What is behind the Democrats negative view of religion, which in America largely means Christianity? Fears of a Christian theocracy may be prevalent among some Democrats, but this concern is not supported by any survey data. So what is it that is bugging them?

If there is one thing that liberals prize (most Democrats are liberals), it is autonomy. "It's my body," "I have my own moral compass," and the like, reflect this value. Accordingly, they regard "Thy Shalt Not" to be violative of their precious embrace of autonomy. Worse still, they reckon, is the fact that the author of these three dreaded words is God. The match has been lit.

A close cousin to autonomy is narcissism, and at the collective level, namely society, it manifests itself as nihilism. That is not a prescription for the good society.

This condition may not be true of all Democrats, but it is true of too many of them. A hostility to Christianity, properly understood, is not in anyone's interest. Unfortunately, that explains what's driving so many Democrats

these days—it is less a phobia than it is an animus.

DO DEMOCRATS NEED DEPROGRAMMING?

[Bill Donohue](#)

There is something seriously wrong with a large swath of self-identified Democrats. If the nutty things they believe were true of others, calls for deprogramming would be everywhere. But the only ones pleading for deprogramming are contemporary Democrats (they are not at all like the Democrats of old).

In October 2021, failed presidential candidate Hillary Clinton said the time had come for a “formal deprogramming” of what she called President Trump’s “cult members.” Two years earlier, “Today” show host Katie Couric rhetorically asked, “How are we going to really almost deprogram these people who have signed up for the cult of Trump?”

In 2020, failed Trump White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci raised the same issue. A few days later, failed CNN host Don Lemon said “a lot” of Trump voters “need to be deprogrammed right now, before they cast their next ballot.” Former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich said the same year, “When this nightmare is over, we need a Truth and Reconciliation Committee.” He was outdone by David Atkins, a prominent California Democrat, who wondered aloud “how ‘do’ you deprogram 75 million people?”

Senator Bernie Sanders insisted, “we need to send all the Republicans to the reeducation camps.” Eugene Robinson, an African American columnist for the *Washington Post*, said,

“There are millions of Americans, almost all white, almost all Republicans, who somehow need to be deprogrammed.” Michael Beller, an attorney for PBS set his sights on kids, imploring Homeland Security to take the children of Republican voters away. “And then we’ll put them in reeducation camps.” He was subsequently fired.

Deprogramming is a staple of totalitarian regimes, perfected by Mao. Given their contempt for conscience rights, it is not surprising that some Democrats want it as part of their arsenal. Ironically, they would make for exemplary candidates.

A recent survey found that 1 in 3 Democrats believe that the attempted assassination of President Trump at the White House correspondents’ dinner was staged (the figure for Republicans was 1 in 8). Similarly, the attempted assassination of Trump in Butler, Pennsylvania was regarded as a staged event by 42 percent of Democrats (as compared to 7 percent of Republicans).

It would be wrong to write off this insanity to Trump Derangement Syndrome. It’s much deeper than that. Consider the following views that are popular with many Democrats.

- Our sex is not determined by our father—it is assigned at birth
- Men can get pregnant
- Tampons belong in the boys’ restroom at school
- Unborn babies are not human
- It is possible to have two mommies
- It is not easy to decide what a woman is
- Race is a social construct
- All economic disparities are unjust
- White people are inherently racist
- Blacks cannot be racist
- We need to defund the police
- We need to abolish bail
- We need to abolish prisons

Irrationality reigns supreme with those who prioritize feelings over reason. It is also dangerous. It literally plays into the hands of those who, like Hitler, say there are no objective truths.

Deprogramming, for political reasons, is not a viable option in a free society. Indeed, it needs to be condemned. Lucky for many of today's Democrats that more don't agree with their tactics; otherwise, they would be forced fed their own medicine.

TRUMP'S RELIGIOUS LIBERTY PANEL UNDER ATTACK

[Bill Donohue](#)

Ever since President Trump announced on May 1, 2025 that he wanted a Religious Liberty Commission to make recommendations on how to protect our most important freedom, critics have tried to discredit it. The same is true of the Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias; it was created on February 6, 2025, under the aegis of the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The final report of the Religious Liberty Commission will soon be published, but already it is coming under attack, especially by the Associated Press (AP) and the Interfaith Alliance.

On May 9, AP reporter Peter Smith ran a news story on the Commission that teed it up for critics; he did the same thing on May 1 in his story on the Task Force. He listed a series of comments by members of the panel, as well as reported instances of restrictions on religious liberty, followed by

remarks from critics. His reporting deserves closer scrutiny.

One of the Commission's members has called for a Presidential Medal of Freedom for "a baker who refused to create a wedding cake for a same-sex couple."

That's right, Jack Phillips, who never denied selling a cake to homosexuals, refused to personally make a "wedding" cake for two men, citing his Christian objections. He won in the U.S. Supreme Court in 2018 but was bullied and badgered by vindictive gay activists and lawyers who sued him in a civil lawsuit. The case bounced around the courts until he finally won again. His courage was exemplary.

Amish parents in New York asserted their First Amendment right to religious liberty when the state denied them a religious exemption allowing them not to have their children vaccinated. Yet the law allows for medical exemptions. Parental rights are also at stake.

Catholic nuns in Westchester, New York are being told they have to call those who falsely claim to be of the opposite sex "they," and to allow them to use the same room in their care facilities as those of the opposite sex.

The AP reporter notes that "progressive" critics of the Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias claim that accusations against the Biden administration lack documentation. This is false. The Catholic League alone turned over a wealth of documents, and I met personally with one of the DOJ attorneys, offering more information.

It is also noted that one of the members of the panel, Carrie Prejean Boller, was ousted. True. The former Miss California and convert to Catholicism claimed, without evidence, that her critical remarks of Israel were representative of what Catholics think; the Palestinian flag pin that she liked to wear was another expression of her partisanship.

The AP story mentions that some who testified before the panel argued that workplace regulations conflicted with their religious beliefs. Yes, when a nurse is forced by the University of Vermont Medical Center to perform an abortion, despite her religious convictions, that is a serious problem.

A Catholic woman was fired by Blue Cross Blue Shield for refusing the Covid vaccine; she won her court case in 2024. Other instances involve an Hispanic woman who was told to remove a crucifix from her desk at school, and students in Michigan who were told they could not sing a Christian song at a talent show.

The AP piece says the Commission is being sued by the Interfaith Alliance for not having diverse members and viewpoints. That's a keeper. The Interfaith Alliance is one of the least diverse religious associations in the nation: its idea of religious liberty is so narrow as to make it hostile to any honest interpretation of it. To include those of their ilk on this panel would be to sabotage it.

President Trump's policies on religious liberty are in stark contrast to that of his predecessor. He is expanding this foundational freedom while Biden contracted it. The problem his critics have has less to do with him than it does the plain meaning of the First Amendment.

WHY MENTAL HEALTH IS NOT GETTING BETTER

[Bill Donohue](#)

If ever there were a decided secular bias that is evident in

our culture, it's the way elites continue to address mental health and wellbeing. They just don't get it.

Read the personal advice column in a newspaper or magazine, and you will quickly learn how to guard against loneliness and depression, and how to ensure happiness. Most of it is bunk. Having written a book on this subject, *The Catholic Advantage: How Health, Happiness and Heaven Await the Faithful*, there are no secrets about what works. It can be explained in one word—bonds. Personal bonds, and bonds with God. But don't look for the "expert therapists" to mention this.

In New York City there is a Center for Wellbeing & Happiness. It is located on the lower east side, serving "Black, Indigenous [and] People of Color." Apparently, no white people need apply, although they have to pay for it (it is taxpayer funded).

Got some head issues? Here's how they are fixing them.

Currently, this center is offering classes on "Fitness & Motion" that "invites you to activate and move with your whole body!" They have a "Tai Chi" class that "promotes healthy bone-density and blood circulation through low-impact conditioning." There are two different "Yoga" classes that "allow us to harness the healing power of our own bodies throughout all stages of life," and that "improve the flow of energy in the body." Lots of movement to these tricks.

"Arts & Creativity" teaches "the beautiful art of Batik." What's that? "Wax Resistance." What's that? Don't ask. There's a "Community Knitting Group" that is taught by "Maureen, the Knitting Mama," so that should work to settle you down. "Nutrition & Environment" focuses on—you guessed it—food. One of the classes is "Rooted in ancestral wisdom & earth-based rituals," emphasizing "gentle movement, storytelling, winter herbs, meditation and soul-warming foods." If that doesn't make you feel good, nothing will.

According to a recent Echelon Poll, 65 percent of Americans believe that our mental health is “getting much/a little worse.” How could it not if the cure is self-indulgence. But don’t expect “Maureen, the Knitting Mama,” to agree.

A Gallup survey published this spring found that 19.1 percent of adults suffer from depression, which is near the highest Gallup ever recorded. Approximately 30 percent of Americans have been treated for depression in their lifetime, which is up by 10 points since 2015. Young people are among those who suffer the most. Loneliness is driving the depression, and it is not going to be alleviated by yoga or winter herbs.

Another survey, released around the same time as the Gallup one, was published by the Institute for Family Studies. It researched happiness. Again, young people scored poorly, but not all of them: unmarried young adults did the worst. Not only are married adults happier than unmarried adults—of all ages—those who attend religious services are the happiest.

Bonds. Married people can bond with each other. Religious people can bond with God. Whom do single people bond with? Whom do non-believers bond with? Moreover, bonds have nothing to do with “the flow of energy in the body.”

Catholic League staffers found that New Hampshire, Vermont and Oregon are the three most secular states. They have at least two things in common: they are almost all white (88, 91 and 72 percent, respectively), and they have among the highest rates of age-adjusted depression rates (all over 25 percent). That won’t be fixed by learning about “Wax Resistance.”

If the ruling class wasn’t so opposed to acknowledging the positive role that religion plays in mental health and wellbeing, they would not hesitate to embrace it. The science cannot be disputed, even by those who make money teaching how to become more self-absorbed.

Bottom line: The key to mental health and wellbeing does not

lie with you. It lies with others, and with God. "Soul-warming foods" may be pleasurable, but they are not a tonic to what ails the lonely and the depressed.

MOTHER'S DAY FOUNDER WAS QUITE A GAL

[Bill Donohue](#)

The founder of Mother's Day was one for the books. The day she founded she later sought to abolish, largely because she disapproved of the way families came to celebrate their mothers.

In 1914, President Woodrow Woodrow signed a bill that made the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. The person who successfully pushed for this special day was Anna Jarvis. She drew inspiration from her mother, Ann Reeves Jarvis, who thought it would be a good idea to have a national holiday that commemorated the sacrifices that mothers made for their children.

Anna was deeply conflicted. She hated the commercialism that capitalism generated, though she liked being bankrolled by capitalists. She certainly had no problem asking capitalists to fund her enterprise—she cozied up to John Wanamaker, founder of one of the nation's first department stores, and H.J. Heinz, the famous Pittsburgh entrepreneur. They laid out the cash she needed to fund her crusade to make Mother's Day a national holiday.

Anna, who had no children, was aghast at how a market economy celebrated Mother's Day. An ungrateful cad, she slammed

Wanamaker and Heinz, blaming them for the way Americans honored their moms.

She ripped into children who bought Mother's Day cards, lecturing them for being "too lazy" to write their own. How hypocritical it was, she said, to give your mom a box of candy and "then eat most of it yourself." She hated FTD flowers so much that she literally sued Florist Telegraph Delivery. She also bashed the Post Office for making a Mother's Day stamp. She even condemned Eleanor Roosevelt for using Mother's Day to help charitable causes.

If you are getting the impression that Anna had gone nuts, you're right (if you didn't get that impression, you're probably a socialist). In 1943, she started a petition drive hoping to collect signatures calling for the abolition of Mother's Day. Penniless, she did not succeed, and in 1948 she was committed to Philadelphia's Marshall Square Sanitarium.

The Catholic League hopes you give your mom a Hallmark Mother's Day card, a box of chocolates, and flowers. Just don't eat all the candy.

ANTI-ISRAEL MOB THREATENS NYC JEWS

[Bill Donohue](#)

On May 5, a mob of 100 anti-Israel protesters showed up outside the same Manhattan synagogue that 200 of them descended upon last November. Many of the radical Muslims hid their faces, wearing scarves and masks. As Jews entered the synagogue, they shouted, and carried signs, saying, "from the

river to the sea," "long live the intifada," "stop the sale of stolen land," and "Israel should not exist."

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani could not unequivocally condemn the "protesters." He allowed that Jews had a right to attend synagogue, but he objected to them going to an event where they could buy property in Israel, noting that some of the real estate that was for sale was in the West Bank.

Mamdani's comment about the West Bank is a ruse. He objects to any sale of land in Israel and that is because he does not recognize its right to even exist. According to the mayor, Israel, which is recognized under international law, has no right to exist "as a Jewish state."

Why not? He says he is against any state with a "hierarchy of citizenship on the basis of religion." That's rich coming from a radical Muslim who never cites this as an objection to Muslim-majority nations that impose sharia law. What could be more hierarchal and objectionable than a legal system that categorically denies elementary human rights?

Mamdani brags that opposition to Israel is "central to my identity." It sure is. That explains why, after the unprovoked slaughter of 1,200 innocent Jews on October 7, 2023, he could not bring himself to condemn it. But he did take the opportunity to accuse Israel of apartheid.

By contrast, Julie Menin, Speaker of the New York City Council, said the mob was guilty of fueling "the flames of antisemitism." She succeeded in getting a law passed (yet to go into effect) restricting protesters outside houses of worship. Mamdani opposed it, but then reluctantly accepted its fate knowing that Menin had secured a veto-proof majority. The Catholic League endorsed it.

Perversely, Mamdani declares New York City to be a "sanctuary city" that welcomes and protects illegal aliens—they are free to avail themselves of the full panoply of city services—but

when it comes to a real sanctuary, e.g., a house of worship, his enthusiasm wanes.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, and to what Mamdani believes, the First Amendment does not protect the right to assemble. It protects “the right of the people *peaceably* to assemble.” Those who threaten Jews by trying to break through police barricades (one of the cops was hospitalized at the incident) are not assembling peacefully. Were it not for the police, these thugs would have assaulted innocent Jews.

When Catholic churches are torched and invaded, the Catholic League never fails to condemn them, demanding accountability for the guilty. It makes no difference which house of worship is targeted, we condemn all such behavior. And unlike Mamdani, we do so without equivocation.

Contact his deputy communications director, Lekha Sunder: Lsunder@cityhall.nyc.gov

Catholic Connection

Bill Donohue talks the DOJ's new report on eradicating anti-Christian bias in federal government on EWTN's "Catholic Connection With Teresa Tomeo." To listen, click [here](#).

TED TURNER, R.I.P.

[Bill Donohue](#)

Ted Turner, founder of CNN, has died at 87. He had been suffering from a form of dementia, a brain disorder, for several years.

He was certainly a titan in the television industry, literally putting cable television news on the map. I enjoyed being a guest on CNN's "Crossfire" and "Larry King Live" in the 1980s, and on many other of its shows for several decades.

Turner and I clashed a few times. But after we did, he acted responsibly.

In 1999, he said that everyone should promise to have no more than two children. He failed to mention that he had five. He was influenced by Paul Ehrlich, the "population explosion" guru who was proven wrong on just about everything he ever predicted. As I pointed out at the time, what made Turner's position so troubling is that he was a big donor to the pro-abortion industry. He made this remark upon receiving an award from an abortion-advocacy group.

Turner was on a roll that night. He opined that the Ten Commandments were "a little out of date," and that "if you're only going to have 10 rules, I don't know if prohibiting adultery should be one of them." He made his pro-adultery quip while married to Jane Fonda.

Next he took on Pope John Paul II. "Ever see a Polish mine detector?" Then he said the pope should "get with it. Welcome to the 20th century."

The day after he made those comments, I slammed him. The day after that he apologized. I said, "Mr. Turner's apology is accepted and thus it brings to a close this incident."

Two years later, in 2001, Turner insulted Catholics again. On Ash Wednesday, he stunned CNN employees in Washington. After seeing ashes on the forehead of some workers, he said, "What are you? A bunch of Jesus freaks? You ought to be working at Fox."

I jumped all over him again, bringing up some of his more recent offensive remarks. For example, he said, "Christianity is for losers," pro-life Christians were "Bozos," Christianity is "very intolerant," etc.

Within 48 hours of complaining about the Ash Wednesday incident, Turner said, "I apologize to all Christians for my comment about Catholics wearing ashes on their foreheads on Ash Wednesday. I do not believe in any form of prejudice or discrimination, especially religious intolerance."

I accepted his apology, saying, "We hope this is the last time we have to press Turner for an apology." It was.

May Ted Turner rest in peace. When he erred, he apologized, and that matters. Forgiveness has a special place in Catholicism.

Knock and the Door Will Open: The Long Road to Bangkok Thailand

[Fr. Gordon J. MacRae](#)

(This story originally appeared on [Beyond These Stone Walls](#))

I wrote a post recently entitled "[Book of Tobit: The Angel](#)

[Raphael on the Road with Pornchai Moontri.](#)” It was an allegory, like the Book of Tobit itself. An allegory is a sort of genre of Sacred Scripture in which a story is told more for its meaning than for its historical value. Every parable of Jesus falls into this same genre. A part of the story of Tobit, and his son Tobias and their interactions with the Archangel Raphael in disguise were all part of the allegory. That does not mean the allegory did not happen. It means only that the truth of the story does not depend upon someone believing it. There was one aspect of the Book of Tobit story that became a centerpiece of my blog linked above. At the beginning and the end of the Book of Tobit there is a mysterious dog whose presence, meaning and purpose remain a mystery.

My friend Pornchai Max and his grueling assimilation to his native Thailand after a forced absence of 36 years and all the torment he endured in that time, also included the presence of a mysterious dog named Hill. When that post was published on April 29 this year, a number of our readers wanted to know what became of Hill. So I went back this week and added an important addendum, which you can read for yourselves by clicking on it at the end of this post.

Now I want to back up about 19 years, in 2007 when Max learned that he would be deported to Thailand at the end of his sentence. He would be taken to Bangkok and left there. ICE would have no further responsibility for him.

Bangkok, the Capitol of the Kingdom of Thailand, is a massive city of about 9.5 million people. In Thai, the great city’s name is almost unpronounceable to the Western World, and the longest name of any city on Earth at 156 characters. I don’t expect you to memorize it, but in the Thai language Bangkok’s name is: Krungthepmahanakorn Amornrattanakosin Mahinrayuthaya Mahadilokpob Noparat Rajataniburirom Udomrajanivej Mahasatharn Amornpimarn Awatarnsat Sakatadtiya Wisanukamprasit. For daily use in Thai, the name is simply abbreviated to “Bangkok Krung

Thep” which in English means “City of Angels.” When Max first told me of this in a phone call, he said, “I’m not kidding. They called it that even before I got here!”

This is a complicated but amazing story that meanders down a long and winding road. Our presentation of it begins in 2006 in a New Hampshire prison cell and threads its mysterious connections all the way around the globe. In the end you may find any lingering doubts about Divine Mercy falling away. Divine Mercy has opened impenetrable doors for Pornchai Moontri, many of them in otherwise unreachable places.

If you have read my post, “[The Parable of a Priest and the Parable of a Prisoner](#)” then you know that Max had been in prison for 29 years, more than half his life, for a crime committed as a teenager, a crime that was set in motion by someone else. You also know that Max was moved from a maximum security solitary confinement unit in Maine to the New Hampshire Prison where we met and became friends late in 2006. That story is told powerfully at the link above.

I had another friend in this prison from Cambodia whom I had helped with the deportation process. He was brought to this country as a child of two, and committed a petty crime at age 18. After a long failed process of appeals, he was deported at age 25 to Cambodia, but spoke not a word of Khmer. One year after his deportation, I received a note from his sister telling me that he disappeared in the capital city of Phnom Penh. He had never been seen or heard from again.

We learned an important but scary lesson from what happened to my Cambodian friend. Since Max was brought to the U.S. as a young child, and has no known family or contacts in Thailand other than distance cousins, the experience of our friend in Cambodia chilled me to the core. I became determined that Max would be ready to live and cope somehow in the immense City of Bangkok when the time came. We had a few years to prepare, but I did not even know where to begin.

How could two men living in a prison cell in New Hampshire with no resources, no online access, and a severely limited budget find and connect with people on the other side of the world? How could I interest anyone in Thailand with the plight of a young man taken from there at age 11, his mother murdered, only to come to the United States to end up homeless and in prison as a teenager? This was not a good place from which to start.

THE SILENCE

“I don’t even know where to begin,” Max told me dismally. “I don’t even know how to learn about Thailand.” I knew I had to start writing, but this was two years before even the idea of this blog was conceived. A day in the prison library produced some addresses. First, I wrote of Max’s situation to Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Manchester (NH). They are, after all, a global network. No response, but no real surprise there. Then I wrote to the national office of Catholic Charities. No response. Then I wrote to the Office of Immigration and Refugee Assistance sponsored by my Diocese. No response. Then I wrote to the Catholic Legal Immigration Network at Boston College. No response. I knocked at the door of every official Catholic agency I could find. No one answered. I knocked, and I waited, and I knocked some more.

I cannot convey in words the utter frustration of writing repeatedly only to have my overtures met with silence. I decided that the problem was not Pornchai’s plight, but rather mine. I told Max that we will have to write all these letters again, but coming directly from him. So we redrafted all the letters under his name. More knocking; more waiting. More silence.

When all of our letters from prison were relegated to the netherworld without responses, I took it personally. I knew we needed a different approach. I asked Max to candidly write his life story – which is an amazing story in and of itself – in

as few pages as possible, and let me send it to the few Catholic contacts I had who did not ignore our plight. One of them was Bill Donohue, President of the [Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights](#). Once he read “**Pornchai’s Story**,” he wrote back immediately asking if he could publish it on the Catholic League website. From there, it slowly made its way around the world. We knocked and knocked, and waited some more.

The late Father Richard John Neuhaus – a courageous Catholic writer and editor of *First Things* magazine – sent Max a personal letter to tell him how very important his story is, not only for Max, but for the Church. Father Neuhaus promised to pass the story along to others. This was a year before Father Neuhaus faced his own untimely death from cancer in January, 2009. More knocking, and more waiting.

Max started receiving letters from other important figures in the Church. One came from His Eminence Cardinal Kitbunchu, Archbishop Emeritus of Bangkok. Max was bowled over by that letter. Another came from the Rome Office of Ambassador Mary Ann Glendon, who had been appointed by President George W. Bush as U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See.

Bill Donohue extending to Max honorary membership in the Catholic League and promised to promised to promote his story. My article for *Catalyst* appeared at the same time, in the July/August 2009 issue. It was “[Due Process for Accused Priests](#).” As an unintended consequence, Pornchai’s story and mine became linked together.

Pornchai’s Story

Here is Pornchai’s Story:

[From Dr. Bill Donohue:] *As we begin the New Year, we’d like to share with you this moving account of one young man’s conversion story.*

My name is Pornchai Moontri, and as I write this I am prisoner #77948 in the New Hampshire State Prison. I come to the Catholic faith after a painful journey in darkness that my friend, Father Gordon MacRae, has asked me to write candidly. This is not something I do easily, but I trust my friend.

I was born in Bua Nong Lamphu, in a small village in the north of Thailand near Khon Kaen on September 10, 1973. At the age of two, I was abandoned by my mother and a stranger tried to sell me. A distant teenaged relative rescued me. He walked many miles to carry me away to his family farm where I worked throughout my childhood raising water buffalo, rice, and sugar cane. I never attended school, however, and never learned to read and write in Thai. Though my childhood involved hard work, I was safe and happy.

When I was 11 years old, my mother re-emerged in Thailand with a new husband – an American air traffic controller from Bangor, Maine. I was taken from Thailand by them against my will, and brought to the United States. This transition was a trauma to be endured. A month after my arrival in Bangor, my new stepfather's motive for importing a ready-made Thai family became clear. I was forcibly raped by him at age 11, an event that was to be repeated with regularity over the next three years. I was a prisoner in his house, and resistance was only met with violence against me and against my mother. I was all of 100 pounds. I cannot describe this further. Welcome to America!

Being one of only three Asians in 1985 Bangor, and speaking little English, I did not readily comprehend my new names. "Gook," "V.C." and "Charlie" meant nothing to me, but I could sense the scorn with which such names were delivered. Because my English was poor, I was treated as though I was stupid. Part of my humiliation was that I had to get a paper route at age 12, and my earnings were taken from me to pay for the "privilege" of living in my captor's house. Stephen King's home was on my paper route. Mr. King once gave me a Christmas

bonus of 25¢ for delivering his newspaper all year. The horror stories he wrote about Maine are all true. Remember the one with the evil clown? It's true.

When I was 14, my English was better. I was a little bigger, and a lot stronger – and nothing but angry. Anger was all I had. So with it I fled that house and became a homeless teenager in and around Bangor. One day the Bangor police actually picked me up and forced me to go “home.” I would rather have gone to one of the ones Stephen King wrote about. I just fled again and again, and ended up at the Good Will Hinckley School for people like me. I was there for a year and got kicked out for fighting. I was always fighting. I fought everyone.

Back on the streets of Bangor, I began to carry a knife. At 17 and 18, a lot of people were after me. I lived under a bridge for a while and sometimes my mother would bring me things. I tried to climb out of the deep hole I was in by signing up for night classes at age 18 to finish my high school diploma. I was kicked out of Bangor High School for punching the principal.

One night, at age 18, something that lived in me got out. I got very drunk with friends, and we walked into a Bangor Shop & Save supermarket to buy cigarettes. I barely remember this. In my drunken state, I opened a bottle of beer from a case and started to drink it. The manager confronted me and ordered me to leave. I tried to flee the store, but the manager and other employees then tried to keep me there. I tried to fight them off to flee. When I got outside, a manager from another Shop & Save had witnessed the incident and pounced on me. I was 130 pounds and was pinned to the ground by this 190-pound man. I think something snapped in my mind. IT was happening again. I fought, but his dead weight was suffocating me. The newspapers would later tell a different story, but this was the truth, and it is all I remember.

In jail that night, I was questioned for three hours. I was told that I had stabbed a man and was charged with attempted murder. I have no memory, to this day, of stabbing the man. The next morning, I awoke in a jail cell and was told that I was charged with Class A murder. The man had died during the night. I was told that I blew a .25 on the Breathalyzer, but the result was so high it was discarded as an error.

My stepfather could have hired expert counsel, but it was clearly not in his best interest that my life be evaluated, so I was left in the care of a public defender who wanted this high profile case off his desk. There was talk about the Breathalyzer, and "level of culpability," and things like "defensive vs. offensive wounds," but in the end there were no theories, no experts and no defense. I was terrified of being abandoned. My mother came to me in jail and pleaded with me to protect her and "the family" by not revealing what happened in my life. So I remained silent. I offered no defense at all. My co-defendant told the truth of my being pinned down, but he was not believed. I was convicted of "Class A murder with deliberate indifference" and sentenced, at age 18, to 45 years in a Maine Prison. Maine has no parole.

I was also sentenced with the soul of the innocent man whose life I took – despite my being unable to remember taking it. The mix of remorse and anger was toxic in prison, and I gave up. Prison became just an extension of where I had already been. My anger raged on and on, and I spent 13 of my 15 years in prison in Maine's "supermax" facility for those who can't be trusted in the light of day.

Five years into my imprisonment, I learned one night in my supermax cell that my mother and stepfather had relocated to the Island of Guam where my mother was murdered. She was pushed from a cliff. [The story that was told to Pornchai, but it was false.] The only suspect was her husband but there was no evidence. I was now alone in my rage.

After 14 years of this, the Maine prison decided to send me to an out-of-state prison. I had no idea where I was to be sent. I arrived in the New Hampshire State Prison on October 18, 2005 dragging behind me the Titanic in which I stored all my anger and hurt and loss and loss and loss – and guilt.

I started my time in a new prison by getting into a fight and ended up in the same old place – the hole. When some months went by, I was given another chance. I was sent to H-Building where I met my friend JJ, an Indonesian who was waiting to be deported. JJ introduced me one day to Gordon, who he said was helping him and some others with appealing their INS removal orders or with preparing themselves to be deported. He seemed to be the only person who even cared. JJ trusted Gordon, so I had several conversations with him. A few months later, I was moved to the same unit in which he lives in this prison. We became friends.

By patience and especially by example, Gordon helped me change the course of my life. He is my best friend, and the person I trust most in this world. It is the strangest irony that he has been in prison for 13 years accused fictionally of the same behaviors visited upon me in the real world by the man who took me from Thailand. I read the articles about Gordon in *The Wall Street Journal* last year. I know him better, I think, than just about anyone. I know only too well the person who does what Gordon is wrongly accused of. Gordon is not that person. Far from it. It is hard for me to accept that laws and public sentiment allow men to demand and receive huge financial settlements from the Catholic Church years or decades after claimed abuse while all that happened to me has gone without even casual notice by anyone – except, ironically, Gordon MacRae.

On September 10, I will be 34 years old. I have been in prison now for nearly half of my life, but in the last year I have begun to know what freedom is. My anger is still with me and it always lurks just below the surface, but my friend is also

with me. We both recently signed up for an intense 15-week course in personal violence. He is doing this for me. I spend my days in school instead of in lock-up now, and I will soon complete my High School diploma. Gordon helped me obtain a scholarship for a series of non-credit courses in Catholic studies at Catholic Distance University. In the last year, with help and understanding, I have completed programs offered in the New Hampshire prison. One day I felt strangely light so I looked behind me, and the Titanic was not there. I parked it somewhere along the way. I have put my childhood aside. Now I am a man.

In March of this year, after 15 years in prison, I was ordered by an INS court to be removed from the United States and deported to Thailand at the end of my sentence in 17 to 20 years or so. Gordon hopes that I can seek a sentence reduction so that I can return to Thailand at an age at which I may still build a life. There are many obstacles. The largest is that I do not speak Thai any longer and I never had an opportunity to learn and to read and write in Thai. We are working hard to prepare me for this. Though years away, it is a very frightening thing to go to a country only vaguely familiar. I have not heard Thai spoken since age 11, 23 years ago. There is no one I know there and no place for me to go. I have no home anywhere.

Along this steep path, I have made a decision to become Catholic. The priest in my friend has not been extinguished by 13 years in prison. It is still the part of him that shines the brightest. Gordon never asked me to become Catholic. He never even brought it up. It is the path he is on and I was pulled to it by the force of grace, and the hope that one day I could do good for others. Gordon showed me a book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, in which Pope Benedict wrote: "The true 'exodus'...consists in this: Among all the paths of history, the path to God is the true direction that we must seek and find."

I am taking a correspondence course in Catholic studies

through the Knights of Columbus and I look forward to the studies through Catholic Distance University. I go to Mass with Gordon when it is offered in the prison, and our faith is always a part of every day. When I return to the place I haven't seen since age 11, I want to go there as a committed Catholic open to God's call to live a life in service to others. It is what someone very special to me has done for me, and I must do the same.

My friend asked me to sit down today and type the story of my life and where I am now. He asked me to let him send this to a few friends who he says may play some role – directly or indirectly – in my life some day. The account is my own. What Father Gordon added was hope, and somehow faith has also taken root. In prison, hope and faith are everything. Everything!

[Written by Pornchai Moontri in 2008 and published by the Catholic League.]

Thanks to Bill Donohue and the Catholic League, "Pornchai's Story" made its way around the world and was read to Catholics in Thailand. Pornchai Moontri's Divine Mercy Bridge to Thailand was built despite many obstacles.

SEXUAL ABUSE IN NYC SCHOOLS v. CATHOLIC CHURCH

[Bill Donohue](#)

No institution today has a better record handling the sexual abuse of minors than the Catholic Church. Its record from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s was bad, but given the reforms initiated in 2002, it has all but eradicated this offense. The

same is not true of other institutions, and none has made less progress than the public schools.

Recently, New York City has made a good effort to check this problem, but serious issues remain. Legislation passed on January 29, 2026 allows victims of sexual misconduct to file a civil claim against perpetrators; an 18-month lookback window exists until July 29, 2027. It applies to any form of "gender-motivated violence." Survivors can also bring claims against institutions that enabled these offenses.

While this should have been done decades ago, it is a step in the right direction. Still, there is cause for concern.

The Office of the Special Commissioner of Investigations for the New York City School District recently issued its annual report for 2025. There were 11,775 complaints, 897 of which were for sexual misconduct or inappropriate behavior. A total of 157 were investigated, 62 of which were substantiated.

This means that only 17.5 percent of the complaints for sexual abuse were investigated. In the Catholic Church, 100 percent of these complaints are investigated.

Following the Catholic Church, New York City public schools have a training course on sexual harassment. In the academic year that ended in August 2022, 62 percent of those who were required to take the course did so; this is down from 79 percent the previous year. In the Catholic Church, 100 percent regularly do so.

It took until May 2025 before New York State had a rule suspending teaching licenses over sexual abuse claims; before that school districts had to file charges with the state to have a tenured educator fired, and that took forever. In the Catholic Church, a priest is removed from ministry once an accusation has been deemed credible.

We need public data on the fate of public school employees who

refuse to participate in training programs. In the Catholic Church, there is no tolerance for failing to comply.

If the Catholic Church sported these abysmal numbers, the media would be all over it. But because New York City public schools are the guilty ones, there is little interest in reporting on this story.

It has been clear for a long time that the most vocal critics of the Catholic Church have never really been interested in protecting minors from predators. No, their primary interest all along has been "getting the Church." This would make for a great news story, but don't hold your breath waiting for it.