

MAMDANI STIFFS CATHOLICS FOR THIRD TIME

Representatives of the clergy from several religions were present at the inauguration of Zohran Mamdani. But no Catholic priest was there.

Representatives of the clergy from several religions were present at Mamdani's Interfaith Breakfast on February 6. But no Catholic priest was there. Significantly, the UJA-Federation of New York, the New York Board of Rabbis and the Anti-Defamation League, all of which had previously sponsored this meeting, declined to do so this year.

The mayor of New York City traditionally attends the installation of the new archbishop of New York, but Mamdani—who was invited—ghosted the event. The installation began a few hours after the Interfaith Breakfast at the New York Public Library; it is a short walk up Fifth Avenue to St. Patrick's Cathedral.

He could easily have been there. Instead, he attended to business as usual.

One in three New Yorkers are Catholic, making them the largest faith community in the city. Mamdani's professed interest in diversity and inclusion obviously hits a brick wall when it comes to Catholics. He wants nothing to do with them.

He is already in trouble with Jewish New Yorkers. He blames Israel, not Hamas, for the terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, and to this day he says Israel has no right to exist. This explains why he wants to cripple the Israeli economy by supporting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. To top it off, he is purging his administration of Jews who are pro-Israel, replacing them with Jews who are anti-Israel.

His animus against Catholics is not as clear cut. But given his rabid support for abortion, gay marriage and transgenderism (including the child abuse inherent in sex-reassignment surgery for minors), it makes sense that he wants nothing to do with Catholics either.

Mamdani has been in office for just over a month, and already he is signaling to Catholics that they are not welcome. He is also telling Jews that either they side with him in bashing Israel, or they, too, can take a walk.

This is shaping up to be something serious, the likes of which New Yorkers have never experienced. Stay tuned.

ST. JOHN'S UNIV. REJECTS TURNING POINT

Turning Point USA, founded by Charlie Kirk, has been denied a chapter status at St. John's University. The student government at the Queens, New York campus did not give any reason, requesting that they reapply. But they have already been denied twice, and without cause.

There is reason to believe that a political bias may be in play. Instead of focusing on whether the club was a good fit at St. John's, attention turned to how it would respond to a potential backlash on campus.

St. John's hosts a LGBTQ+ Center, one that is expressly committed to norms and values that are counter to Catholic teachings. Was anyone worried about a potential backlash when it was instituted? The Vincentian school also features a "Lavender Graduation," which not only sanctions segregation on

campus, it gives succor to students who reject Catholic moral teachings.

Charlie Kirk was an advocate for civil discourse on campus. That was his trademark. Why any school, especially a Catholic one, would find fault with that boggles the mind. St. John's idea of inclusion clearly extends to the LGBTQ cause, but not the cause of free speech.

ROGUE CATHOLIC SHOWN THE GATE

At 9:57 a.m. on February 11, we called for the ouster of Carrie Prejean Boller from President Trump's Religious Liberty Commission. At 10:03 a.m., the chairman of the panel, Dan Patrick, announced she was booted.

What triggered her ouster were her remarks she made on February 9. She told her fellow panelists and the audience that "Catholics do not embrace Zionism, just so you know." She objected to definitions of anti-Semitism that equated opposition to the state of Israel as an expression of anti-Semitism.

It is not a stretch to say that those who are *activists for the anti-Zionist cause* invariably harbor an animus against Jews. And yes, this would include self-hating Jews.

Prejean Boller is a former Miss California and a convert to Catholicism. She does not run a Catholic organization, has no Catholic credentials as an author or instructor, and indeed represents no one but herself. For her to say, without qualification, that "Catholics do not embrace Zionism," is presumptuous and arrogant.

In reply to Prejean Boller, fellow panelist Rabbi Meir Soloveichik said, "This is an incredibly diverse country, and the one thing we should be careful about is speaking on behalf of all members of a religious community, even if one is a member of that religious community. I certainly wouldn't claim to speak for all Jews on all subjects."

He was too kind. Her audacity is stunning. Bill Donohue told the media that he has been running the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization for over three decades, and never once has he said that he represents all Catholics. He always says he represents the Catholic League, period. Hopefully, he says, he also represents many others who share his convictions.

Zionism is a movement that promotes Jewish self-determination in a homeland. There are millions of Catholics who, even if they do not identify themselves as Zionists, recognize the Jewish state of Israel. Prejean Boller apparently does not—she is more comfortable showing up at the Religious Liberty Commission wearing a Palestinian flag pin. So telling.

Prejean Boller asked a witness if we should censor 1 Thessalonians 2:15; it spoke about Jews who killed Christ. No, but that passage, like many biblical passages, needs to be put alongside other biblical references, as well as the teachings of the Catholic Church. Moreover, the quote she cited mentions, "The Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets." It does not say "the Jews killed Christ."

English warriors killed Catholics in Ireland, but no one blames all the English. Indian tribes killed each other, but no one says all Indians are killers. Rapists are typically men who rape women, but not all men are rapists. Careful scholars recognize these differences—they are not nuances. Prejean is not careful and she is certainly not a scholar.

Donohue's good friend Ed Koch, the former mayor of New York,

noted, “It should never be said that Christians were responsible for the Holocaust—Nazis were. Blaming Christians would be as unjustified as holding Jews accountable for the death of Jesus.” Well said.

Just before it was announced that Prejean was shown the gate, here is what we said.

“The Religious Liberty Commission should have nothing to do with those who are publicly undermining its mission, nor should it become a platform for those who want to exploit it as a vehicle to further their own agenda. Trump should kick Carrie Prejean Boller off immediately.”

Kudos to Dan Patrick for doing just that.

CAN BOYS CRASH GIRLS’ SPORTS?

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in January on whether boys can compete in girls’ sports. The very idea that this has to occupy the time of the high court is testimony to the sexual confusion that is widespread not only in America, but in western civilization; the rest of the world is a lot smarter. Adding to the confusion is the Supreme Court itself.

In 2020, Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote the majority opinion in *Bostock v. Clayton County*. He held that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits employees from being fired on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, even though the law only addressed sex. “An individual’s homosexuality or transgender status is not relevant to employment decisions,” he said.

Justice Samuel Alito wrote a dissent in *Bostock*, joined by

Justice Clarence Thomas. He did not take kindly to Gorsuch's dismissive comments. "The Court's brusque refusal to consider the consequences of its reasoning is irresponsible." Indeed, he said, "Before issuing today's radical decision, the Court should have given some thought to where its decision would lead." He got specific.

"The Court may wish to avoid this subject, but it is a matter of concern to many people who are reticent about disrobing or using toilet facilities in the presence of individuals whom they regard as members of the opposite sex. For some, this may simply be a question of modesty, but for others, there is more at stake. For women who have been victimized by sexual assault or abuse, the experience of seeing an unclothed person with the anatomy of a male in a confined and sensitive location such as a bathroom or locker room can cause serious psychological harm."

Again, the fact that such a commonsensical understanding of human nature has to be articulated before the United States Supreme Court shows how ideologically corrupt we have become. It is not the ordinary American who is the problem—it is elite decision makers.

CHRISTIANITY IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Bill Donohue

Bill Donohue, *Christianity in the Crosshairs: Ruling Class and Radicals Find a Common Enemy* (TAN Books, 2026)

The average Joe spends his time at work, and with his family

and friends. He may vote, but politics is not his passion. He basically wants to be left alone. But the ruling class—the decision makers who run our institutions—won't let him. They are interested in getting him to do what they think is in his best interest. They don't need to consult him, and that is because they know better.

Radical intellectuals and activists are just as arrogant, and just as intrusive. They entertain grandiose plans about socially engineering society, and they have all sets of plans on how to steer the average Joe. Just like the ruling class, they feel confident in making decisions for him.

What unites the ruling class and radicals is power. They lust for it. Why? Their goal is to control the average Joe, getting him to dance to their every beat. But he is not easy to control, and that is because his primary allegiances are to his family and religion. If they can pry him away from the grip of his family and religion, there is a good chance he will find a sense of community with them. Then they can proceed to implement their vision of the good society.

Standing in their way, more than any other factor, is the Catholic Church. It is committed to the family and traditional moral values. It is not alone in doing so, but it is the big fish: if it can be weakened, other traditional institutions will follow suit.

It used to be that the ruling class and radicals stood in opposition to each other, but something new has been happening. There has been an alignment of large sectors of the ruling class and radicals. They may still clash, but more often than not they have joined hands. There is one big wrinkle—the success of Donald Trump. It is clear that he has punctured the ruling class bubble (which explains why many hate him). But there are still large sectors of elite decision makers who have broken bread with radical thinkers and activists. They have Christianity in the crosshairs.

The ruling class has almost nothing in common with the average Joe. They are wealthy, well educated and are mostly secularists who devalue, if not disparage, Christianity. President Ronald Reagan knew them well. In a famous speech he gave branding the Soviet Union the "evil empire," he quoted from C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*. Lewis warned that the greatest evil in the world was being done by the "quiet men," the clean-cut men who run our institutions.

Yes, it is the "quiet men" who run our institutions that we need to guard against, many of whom have adopted the radical agenda. What they seek was best said by Bill Ivey, a ruling class member who advised Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in 2016. Speaking of elite Democrats, he said, "we've all been quite content to demean government, drop civics and in general conspire to produce an unaware and compliant citizenry."

That is their goal—to establish a "compliant citizenry." To achieve this goal they rely on "soft totalitarianism." Unlike the violence that is practiced by the architects of "hard totalitarianism" (Hitler, Stalin and Mao), they seek to seduce and coax the average Joe to do what they want him to do. Pope Saint John Paul II warned about this development, saying the elites want a subservient population.

Thought control has long been the goal of radicals, and in more recent times members of the ruling class have adopted this goal as well. It has its roots in Communist thought and practice. Pope Francis referred to it as "polite persecution." In doing so he was following the Catholic tradition of respecting conscience rights. Here are a few examples of this phenomenon.

When a Christian baker is sued for not making a wedding cake for two men (no one was refused service because he was a homosexual), and is then told by the attorney for the men that he needs to "correct the errors" of his "thinking," we are

talking about thought control. When presidential candidates, celebrities and media elites recommend that Trump voters need to be “deprogrammed,” we are talking about thought control.

Behavioral control is another goal of the ruling class-radical cause. It was on grand display during Covid. Elites and radicals alike said Covid was “a gift,” a grand opportunity to exercise control of the masses. Their quest to lockdown our institutions was a dream come true.

The lockdowns fell unusually hard on churches, particularly Catholic churches. In one city after another, people could go to Costco and casinos, but not Catholic churches. Catholics had to practice social distancing, but Black Lives Matter protesters were excused. The average Joe had to wear a mask, but Democratic politicians showed up at events without one. They didn't wear one because they knew it was a farce.

The Catholic Church has steadfastly made support for the family a priority, but this goal has never been embraced by left-wing radicals. Indeed, even before Marx, they have sought to destroy it. Typically, they go after the authority exercised by the father. They do this by promoting libertinism and alternatives to the traditional family.

Libertinism means license, or freedom without limits. That's a surefire way to crush the family. Encouraging promiscuity weakens the bond between the spouses, and therefore undermines the family. Similarly, encouraging cohabitation and gay marriage undermines the family. Add to this the LGBTQ agenda—which denies there are two sexes and supports males competing against females in sports—and the chances of crippling the family are enhanced.

It is not just left-wing radical intellectuals and activists who are promoting the mad idea that the sexes are interchangeable, and that boy athletes can shower with girl athletes, many politicians, educators and medical

professionals are on board, as well as their friends in the media. Many in the ruling class are on the side of radicals.

Do children belong to their parents or someone else? The very question is offensive, but it is constantly being asked by ruling class elitists and radical pundits. From federal government workers to local school board members, the notion that children are not the special province of their parents is being questioned and indeed rejected.

It has always been the goal of radicals to raise children communally and thereby deny parents their exclusive right to raise their own children as they see fit. This reflects the need for thought control and behavioral control. Some activists have gone public with the idea that children should not be allowed to accept the values of their parents—they must be taught values that undermine them.

Population control has long been the interest of the ruling class. The Rockefellers pioneered birth control, abortion and eugenics, furthering the ambitions of radical thinkers and their allies. To accomplish their end, the activists whom they fund make a living out of lying about their work, fabricating data and exploiting the masses.

Radicals despise religion, in general, harboring a special hatred for Christians. They know that as long as the average Joe lays anchor with his religion, he is not likely to bow to their secular appeals. In some instances, radical activists resort to violence, as in firebombing crisis pregnancy centers. Appeals have also been made by educators and celebrities to shoot Trump supporters.

Their allies in the ruling class are more careful, preferring to unleash the FBI to spy on ordinary Catholics. School officials resort to discriminating against Catholics in hiring, and at the college level they harass those who are vocal about their religion.

Smearing Christians is a useful tool in their armor. The vulgar attacks on Mother Teresa are a case in point. A more subtle way of winning is to condemn those who put religious symbols on public property, even to the point of suing them. Gay radicals have been particularly vicious, invading churches, interrupting Mass and harassing the clergy and parishioners.

Intimidating Catholics in senior positions is a tactic favored by radical members of the ruling class. When Catholics are nominated to serve on the federal bench, they are badgered by senators and opinion-makers about the propriety of having those with "deeply held convictions" from serving in the judiciary. Those with "deeply held *secular* convictions" are never questioned. Protesting in front of the homes of Catholic members of the Supreme Court, which is illegal, is another way of intimidating them.

Calling patriotic Americans "Christian nationalists" is a way of smearing them. There are plenty of professors and radical activists who never tire of making bogus claims about wild-eyed Christians trying to impose a theocracy. This is a scare tactic: by inventing a bogeyman, they hope to frighten the masses, hoping to turn them away from Christianity. It is all so cynical.

Radicals and ruling class members are not above invoking stealth tactics to win. One way to disable Christianity is to float a hoax—disseminate a false story about Christians that will ruin their reputation and weaken their moral voice. For example, many lies have been told about Pope Pius XII, saying he did nothing to help Jews during the Holocaust. More recently, books and movies based on total lies about the Catholic Church have been released to accomplish the same objective.

When the public is told that the Catholic Church in Ireland created mass graves for unwanted children housed by nuns, many

believe it. But it is simply a lie and the facts are not in dispute. Yet some in the media continue to give voice to these libelous claims.

Infiltrating the Catholic Church is another strategy to disable the Church. In the past, Communist operatives succeeded in placing secret agents in the Church, and under the Biden administration the FBI spied on traditional Catholics.

Another way to undermine the Church is to fund dissident Catholic organizations. The goal is to sow doubt and confusion in Catholic quarters, and with the public in general, about Church teachings on controversial moral issues. In some instances, the ruling class has actually created organizations with a Catholic name to undermine Catholicism.

There are good members of the ruling class and there are good intellectuals, professors and activist Americans who seek to make our society better. But there are way too many on the other side, elitists, writers and activists who are working overtime to hurt our country. They have chosen to disable the family and religion because if they succeed in doing so they will be well on their way to securing victory.

The Catholic Church is the most influential institution in America defending traditional moral values. While it has experienced many troubles, some of its own making, it remains our best hope for the future. The current crop of young clergymen is encouraging, and with renewed leadership in Rome, the stage is set to combat the forces that seek to dominate us.

The ruling class and radicals want us to despair. Let's make sure they fail.

MAMDANI LIKES ANTI-RELIGIOUS BIGOTS

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani likes to hire anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic bigots. This is incontestable: see our website for the proof.

Everyone on the list was either on his transition team or served in an advisory capacity. Some are now working in his administration.

Many hate Israel and are trying to weaken its economy through their BDS efforts (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions). Some have defended Al Queda terrorists while others have organized pro-Hamas demonstrations. Anti-Semitic comments abound. Anti-Catholic remarks have also been voiced, and one hire organized an obscene demonstration during Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

None of this is surprising. Mamdani hates Israel and blames it—not Hamas—for the Hamas massacre of Jews in Israel on October 7, 2023. Anyone who harbors that much hostility to Jews obviously wants to surround himself with people just like himself. Moreover, his decision to reward a vile anti-Catholic organizer tells us that he wants people like that working for him, not practicing Catholics.

Spellcheck does not recognize the word Mamdani, offering as a substitute the word "Madman." Looks like it is a lot smarter than the people who voted for him.

MAMDANI ' S ANTI - RELIGIOUS MESSAGING

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani wasted no time sending a message to the city's faith communities: on his first day in office, he said they would not be afforded heightened protection at their houses of worship. Indeed, he rescinded an executive order to this effect signed by his predecessor, Eric Adams.*

Most of the news stories on Mamdani's decisions affecting religious liberty focused on his rulings overturning Adams' executive orders on Israel, but too many neglected to cite his policy on houses of worship.

It is true that he has scratched a definition of anti-Semitism that includes opposition to the existence of the state of Israel, a definition accepted by 40 nations, including the European Union and Canada. It is also true that he has given the green light to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which is designed to cripple Israel's economy. Scurrilous as these two decisions are, his executive order affecting churches, synagogues, mosques and temples hit a wider section of New Yorkers.

Adams did not overreact last month when he directed the New York City Police Department to provide stronger protection for houses of worship. His executive order of December 2, which authorized enhanced protection "of both houses of worship and persons exercising their rights to free assembly and free speech near houses of worship," was occasioned by what happened on November 19.

It was on that evening that a crowd of 200 anti-Jewish protesters assembled outside Manhattan's Park East Synagogue screaming, "Death, death to the IDF" [Israel Defense Forces],

“globalize the intifada,” and “take the settler out.” Others yelled, “We need to make them scared.” And what was Mamdani’s response? A spokesman slammed the synagogue for abusing “these sacred spaces” by “promot[ing] activities in violation of international law.”

This should concern all New Yorkers, not simply Jews. Catholics should be particularly troubled, given all the protests that have taken place during Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in recent years; the cathedral has also been vandalized.

In August 2025, Bill Donohue wrote an 18-page report, “The Inauthenticity of Zohran Mamdani.” Regarding his position on religious liberty, Donohue noted that “a Lexis-Nexis search reveals he has never addressed this subject.” He also mentioned that “He is very protective of Islam, but a search of his remarks objecting to anti-Catholicism, or anti-Christian words or deeds, failed to turn up one comment.”

It should be noted that at his inauguration, clergy from the Muslim, Protestant, Hindu, Jewish and Sikh communities were invited on stage, but there was no Catholic priest in attendance. Typically, the archbishop of New York is in attendance, but Cardinal Timothy Dolan was not invited. This speaks volumes about Mamdani’s purported interest in “diversity.” His idea of “inclusion” apparently stops at the door of Catholics.

In January, the House Appropriations Committee introduced a bill that directs \$5 million in federal funding to protect religious sites and fight hate crimes against people of faith. It is outrageous that New York City has a mayor who finds such a policy morally objectionable.

Be sure to read our “Mamdani Watch” file, regularly updated, that is posted on the front page of our website, www.catholicleague.org

*It was subsequently reported that Mamdani, bowing to pressure, quietly reinstated Adams' executive order on this issue.

ERRATUM

In the last edition of *Catalyst*, it was reported in a book review that Detroit Archbishop Edward J. Weisenburger had "banned" the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM) at the end of June. His Excellency wrote a very kind letter to Bill Donohue that provided detailed information how this account was not accurate. Changes were made before and after he took over as archbishop in Detroit in February 2025, but the bottom line is TLM is not banned. He graciously did not ask for a correction, but he deserves one.

LANGUAGE CONTROL ABETS THOUGHT CONTROL

Orwell warned us about elites who manipulate the masses by manipulating the language, and subsequent events have proven him to be more accurate than previously believed. It is our secular elites, in particular, who seek to control language so as to abet thought control. Before examining some recent examples, it is important to recognize that changes in our lexicon are not always the result of some sinister scheme.

For many years, those with low mental attributes were mostly

called "imbeciles," "morons," and "idiots," but in 1895 a new term was introduced that was considered less stigmatizing, "mental retardation." But the shorthand, calling someone a "retard," was later seen as patently offensive, so by the 1960s terms like "intellectual disability" became more acceptable. There was nothing nefarious about these linguistic transitions.

The same is true for describing the races.

"Colored people" was such a customary term in the early twentieth century that black Americans of African ancestry decided to call a newly established civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Founded in 1909, it goes by the same name today. The United Negro College Fund, founded in 1944, also goes by the same name today, even though "negro," like "colored people," has fallen out of favor.

In the 1960s, "black" became the popular racial descriptive, and in the early 1990s it was replaced by "African American," even though polls showed that the preferred term was still "black." Again, this transition was not done to serve some political agenda.

The politicization of language today is most evident in the way we think about immigrants who have come to the United States illegally. Virtually everyone called such people "illegal aliens," and that is because they were foreigners who entered the country by breaking the law. But in 2010, a "Drop the I-Word" campaign was launched to get rid of "illegal aliens" and replace it with "undocumented immigrant." In 2013, the Associated Press dropped "illegal immigrant" from its stylebook after liberal scholars protested.

In 2014, under Obama, the government adopted more "inclusive" language. But it wasn't until the Biden administration that "illegal aliens" was summarily rejected; this was in keeping

with its “open borders” approach to immigration. Now that Trump is back in the White House, “illegal aliens” is also back. Unfazed, the *New York Times* likes to talk about “noncitizens.”

The best examples of twisting the language to accommodate the politics of elites are found by studying matters sexual.

Anyone doing research on violence committed by people who falsely claim to belong to the opposite sex will notice that what we call today “transgender” people were either called “transsexuals” or “transvestites” in the late 1990s. This can get really confusing. Before this century, reporters accurately referred to Jim, who chose Jane as his “transition” name, as Jim. Today he is called Jane and is falsely referred to as “she/her.”

Megyn Kelly created a firestorm in November when she said it was inaccurate to call Jeffrey Epstein a “pedophile.” She was not dismissing his monstrous acts, only pointing out that most of his victims were not prepubescent. Bill Donohue defended her, pointing out that when homosexual priests were being outed for abusing minors, they were falsely called “pedophiles,” so as to avoid calling them homosexuals. Yet only 3.8 percent of the victims of clergy sexual abuse met the clinical definition of pedophilia. The reaction against him was voluminous and vicious.

Another lexicon game is being played by those who refer to men who have sex with adolescents as “ephebophiles.” It’s a game because heterosexuals who abuse minors are never called “ephebophiles”—it’s selectively invoked to avoid referring to homosexuals when adult men molest teenage males.

Homosexuals began referring to themselves as “gay” in the 1920s, a decade of decadence in the West, and it became routine in the 1960s, another morally debased decade. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the Associated Press ended

their usage of “homosexual” in the 2010s and started using “LGBT,” which by now has taken on a never-ending alphabet of “persons.”

It was left to a New Zealand psychologist, Dr. John Money, to scrap our vocabulary of the term “sexual preference,” substituting “sexual orientation” instead. The Johns Hopkins professor was active in the mid-twentieth century manipulating the language to serve his sexual agenda. “Sexual preference” indicated that our attraction was a matter of choice, and that was taboo; “sexual orientation” accomplished his goal.

Money was not some disinterested “scientist.” He was a pedophile who sought to normalize man-boy sex, lobbied to eliminate the age of consent, and wanted to legalize father-daughter and mother-son sex.

When language is used to obfuscate, to confuse, and to manipulate, it is done to serve a cause, and should be condemned as such. When innocent people are hurt as a result, we are dealing with evil. Such persons—always the elites—do not want to elucidate, they want to dominate.

Language evolves, sometimes for noble purposes. Beware of instances when the motive is corrupt. When the end result is thought control, we are dealing with totalitarians.

THE “WALL OF SEPARATION” MYTH

As America nears its 250th anniversary, fierce disputes over religion in public life increasingly stem from a widely accepted myth: that the First Amendment erected a rigid “wall of separation,” forcing government to shun any cooperation, accommodation, or recognition of religion. This narrative,

pushed by judges, advocacy groups, and cultural lore, treats religion like radioactive waste to be quarantined from civic spaces.

Consider Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU), the nation's leading advocate for strict church-state separation and a group with anti-Catholic roots. It goes beyond opposing an official state church, demanding a "naked public square" where religion is limited to private beliefs. When faith enters the public realm via equal access to government programs for religious schools, accommodations for believers, or government officials using religious language, AU and its allies raise alarms. They insist this "wall" reflects the Constitution's original meaning: essentially, freedom *from* religion. But that's a modern secularist invention—a constitutional canard grafted onto the First Amendment—not what the Founders intended in 1791.

The Constitution's text mentions no "wall of separation." The First Amendment states simply: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The phrase "wall of separation" originates in Thomas Jefferson's 1801 letter to the Danbury Baptists, penned fourteen years after ratification. Jefferson wasn't even present for the drafting; he was in Paris. His letter is an interesting bit of history, but not an authoritative constitutional hermeneutic. Courts largely ignored it for decades. Even Chief Justice William Rehnquist deemed Jefferson a "less than ideal source" for the clause's original meaning.

Catholics have particular cause for wariness of Jefferson; he scorned biblical miracles as a "dunghill" and called priests "enemies of liberty." More crucially, the First Amendment's meaning shouldn't hinge on a belated metaphor from someone absent from its drafting and ratification.

To understand the Establishment Clause properly, examine its

text and Founding-era context. At the time, nine states had established or state-supported churches; Massachusetts retained its established church until 1833. The clause served mainly as a federalism safeguard: It barred *Congress* from creating a national church or interfering with state religious establishments. Religion remained in the domain of the states, permitting public acknowledgment and collaboration; a far cry from today's supposed blanket prohibitions.

James Madison, who actually drafted the First Amendment, viewed it this way. Scholars from diverse perspectives—Robert P. George, Akhil Reed Amar, Steven D. Smith, Kurt T. Lash, Carl H. Esbeck, Daniel L. Dreisbach—and Supreme Court justices like Clarence Thomas and Potter Stewart concur: It was a federalism provision, not a mandate to purge religion from public life.

Aggressive “no-contact” separationism arose later, driven by anti-Catholic sentiments. As law professor Philip Hamburger explains in *Separation of Church and State*, post-Civil War theological liberals and American nativists saw Catholic immigration and hierarchy as dangers to American individualism. They repurposed “separation” as a weapon against “popery,” fighting funds for Catholic schools and churches’ public influence. This prejudice, later echoed by groups like the Ku Klux Klan in the name of American “liberty” and “rights,” elevated Jefferson’s phrase into a patriotic sword and shield.

By the 20th century, this ideology had infiltrated the law. In 1947’s *Everson v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court applied the Establishment Clause to state and local governments for one of the first times, embedding Jefferson’s “wall of separation” in legal precedent. Justice Hugo Black—a former Klansman—proclaimed it “high and impregnable,” forbidding direct government support for religion. Justice Wiley Rutledge’s private notes and correspondence, written after the justices met to discuss the case, exposed the true

agenda: keeping Catholic influence out of public schools. *Everson* entrenched separationism, fueling decades of rulings that disadvantaged Catholic and other religious institutions.

AU, founded that year as "Protestants and Other Americans United" in response to *Everson*, claimed the Court hadn't discriminated enough against Catholics. It pushed an even more extreme "no-aid" policy: no generally available government benefits for religious groups, even basics like police or fire protection.

This "wall of separation" dogma isn't a timeless constitutional truth; it's a modern secularist fabrication, forged in anti-Catholic bias. It inverts the First Amendment, pitting the Establishment Clause against the Free Exercise Clause. As Professor Mary Ann Glendon notes, these clauses "were meant to work together in support of a single value: religious freedom. The framers of the Constitution considered religion to be a great public good to be carefully protected." By reclaiming the First Amendment's original federalist meaning, we can return to what Professor Richard Garnett calls "freedom for religion": a public square where faith is valued, accommodated, and even supported.

The Catholic Church itself echoes this vision of religious liberty in *Dignitatis Humanae*. It was further endorsed by Pope Benedict XVI during his 2008 visit to the United States, where he praised the Founders' model as a "healthy secularism." Ultimately, "freedom for religion," not "freedom from religion," remains true to the Founding era's intent, offering a framework that Catholics can embrace and promote in public life.