

2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

The Catholic League's 2024 Year in Review is now available. It contains an overview of some of our most important battles and victories over the last year. To read it, click [here](#).

TRUMP WOULD NOT HAVE WON WITHOUT HIM

Bill Donohue

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's decision in March of 2021 to launch Operation Lone Star—bussing migrants from Texas to cities across the nation—turned out to be one of the most consequential issues affecting the 2024 presidential election. Trump would not have won without him. What he did was to turn a regional issue into a national one. That was a stroke of sociological genius.

Washington D.C. and New York City were targeted in the first wave, with bus after bus arriving in Union Station and Port Authority, respectively. Chicago and points west were next up.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis also played a vital role. His decision to fly migrants to Martha's Vineyard—home to wealthy supporters of President Biden's open border policy—hit a chord: The illegal aliens were moved out of the liberal paradise with dispatch.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey got into the act, bussing migrants to the nation's Capitol. All participants signed a waiver that their free trip was voluntary.

If these governors had not acted, there would have been little sympathy in most parts of the country for their plight. After all, the citizens in most states were never threatened by those who crashed our borders, so they had no reason to take this issue as seriously as those who were impacted.

Gov. Abbott did what he had to do—he had to shock the conscience of the nation. He sent a message to his critics: everyone needs to have some skin in the game.

CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

Michael P. McDonald, Director of Communications

For the PDF version, click [here](#).

2024 will go down in American history as a pivotal year. The people standing for tradition, reason, and faith fought to reclaim their country, and the Catholic League was right there in the thick of it.

By far, the biggest story of 2024 was the presidential election, and as history unfolded, we tirelessly worked to educate Catholics on the critical issues at stake.

To this end, we published a report on the religious liberty policies of Donald Trump and the Biden-Harris administration. We noted how Trump was pro-religious liberty and never supported groups hostile to Catholics. We could not say the same for Biden-Harris and found their record sorely lacking. Our comprehensive report did more to educate Catholics on this

subject than any other document put out by other organizations.

We additionally pointed out Harris' outright hostility to Catholics on several occasions. She stiffed Catholics this year by refusing to go to the Al Smith Dinner. While serving in the Senate, she was openly hostile to judicial nominees who were faithful Catholics. As California Attorney General, she crippled pregnancy resource centers and targeted pro-life activists.

While Harris had problems with Catholics that upheld the teachings of the Church, in her corner was a whole slew of Catholic dissidents. We called out these rogues.

Ultimately, Trump decisively won the election, in large part thanks to him carrying approximately 58 percent of Catholics. Moving forward, the work will turn toward ensuring that the safeguards for religious liberty are as robust as they can be. To that end, Bill Donohue urged Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito to resign early in the new Trump administration so they can be replaced by younger justices who will protect the court's religion friendly majority for years to come. Bill also raised concerns over Robert F. Kennedy's departures from Catholic teachings and the prudence of appointing him as Secretary for Health and Human Services.

While Trump's victory represents a return to tradition and commonsense, the opposition went down swinging. In 2024, we saw a concentrated effort from the federal and state governments targeting Catholics and other people of faith.

We called out the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network after the Federal agency flagged "the purchasing of books (including religious texts)" as a sign of extremism. We also went after the Department of Justice (DOJ) for using the FACE Act to punish peaceful pro-life activists while giving a pass to

violent pro-abortion radicals.

The FBI continued to stall in revealing the truth behind its probe of Catholics from 2023. Even after DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz released a report on the matter, several critical questions remained. For now, it appears that our doggedness to uncover the whole truth has at least curtailed the worst of it. Hopefully, the new administration can definitively put this issue to rest.

Another area we battled with the FBI was the release of Audrey Hale's manifesto. In 2023, Hale, a woman who falsely believed she was a man, attacked the Christian Covenant School in Nashville, killing six people including three children. For over a year, the FBI withheld the manifesto from the public. Normally, such documents are released right away. We hounded them to disseminate the manifesto.

When it was finally released, it was clear why the FBI kept it hidden for so long. The manifesto showed that Hale was a very sick person, and her woes were further compounded by identifying as transgender.

We also pushed back on the Department of Homeland Security after it came to light that an internal advisory board recommended flagging those who served in the military, are religious, and support Trump as potential extremists and domestic terrorists.

We proved Biden's White House and the media were wrong to insist the ban on religious symbols at the annual "egg roll" party was in line with previous administrations. We found evidence to the contrary highlighting their deception.

Another disturbing trend was how the Biden administration used Orwellian language to influence public thought and sideline traditional Catholic values. We issued a report examining this.

On the state level, perhaps the greatest display of anti-Catholicism came from Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. While wearing a "Harris Walz" hat, Whitmer mocked the Eucharist by placing a Dorito on the tongue of a kneeling Liz Plank, a podcaster. We led the charge against Whitmer, alerting all Catholic parishes in Michigan of her horrendous act. We created such a media firestorm that she was compelled to put out a statement.

In the statement, Whitmer tried to say she was not mocking the Eucharist. Instead, she was championing the CHIP Act also insisting that no one was kneeling. Of course, this was a flimsy excuse and photographic evidence quickly proved she was lying. We did not fall for it and jumped back into the fray to confront her dishonesty.

We also called out a dangerous ballot initiative in New York that would trample parental rights and religious liberty. We mobilized Catholics across the state to vote no on Proposition 1. Bill wrote an excellent booklet highlighting the adverse impact the initiative would have, and we sent the booklet to important stakeholders in the Empire State. Unfortunately, New York is too far gone, and Proposition 1 passed.

Joining the government in targeting Catholics came a large swath of characters from all walks of life.

Twice in 2024, anti-Catholic activists defiled St. Patrick's Cathedral. In the first instance, LGBT radicals hijacked the cathedral to stage a funeral mocking Catholic traditions for a man who falsely claimed to be a woman. Then again, during the Easter Vigil Mass, protesters invaded the cathedral screaming "Free Palestine" and holding a banner that read "SILENCE = DEATH." In both instances, we called out the crashers and the media, which either ignored the story or tried to frame the radicals as the victims.

After Harrison Butker, the kicker for the Kansas City Chiefs,

spoke in defense of traditional Catholic values at Benedictine College, he was criticized by the NFL and slammed on social media. We happily came to Butker's defense with greater effect than any other Catholic organization.

The Olympics' opening ceremony featured a skit mocking the Last Supper starring transgenders. We wasted no time in contacting International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach and other officials around the world, targeting the Olympics' sponsors, and calling out those telling us it was not intended as an insult to Catholics.

Additionally, we called out the NBA for its selective interest in "human rights." While the league claims to promote social justice in America, it partners with China, one of the worst persecutors of Christians.

We also confronted the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) after they tried to intimidate us. The atheists complained to the IRS that we "engaged in unlawful political campaigning." We were undeterred, because we did nothing wrong, and promised to continue to publicly hammer anti-Catholic bigots.

Meanwhile, a coordinated effort by Christian bashers attempted to discredit Trump nominees Pete Hegseth and Mike Huckabee. We exposed the bigots targeting these men for their faith.

All of these attacks were not just acts of random bigotry. The secular left needs to weaken the power of the Church and the resolve of individual Catholics to advance their agenda, particularly on the issues of abortion and transgenderism.

In 2024, the media covered for the pro-abortion extremists in the Democratic Party. Repeatedly, we were told there was no such thing as late-term abortions by the "fact checkers" and the talking heads.

Even during the presidential debate between Trump and Harris, and again during the vice presidential debate between JD Vance

and Tim Walz, who as governor of Minnesota signed a law which repealed protections for infants born alive following a botched abortion, the pundits lied saying that late term abortions are “misinformation” and babies born alive receive lifesaving care following an abortion.

The worst was the *New York Times*, which omitted the relevant portion of the sentence that proved Walz repealed safeguards for newborn babies.

We routinely pointed out the truth to correct these false narratives.

There was also a lot of action on transgenderism. The secularists went on a tear trying to advance this cause. Across the country parents and religious people saw their rights eroded so that men and women can pretend to be the opposite sex. In several instances, parents lost custody of their children or children were permitted to “transition” without parental consent. Additionally, faithful Catholics and Christians were denied the opportunity to provide loving homes to children in need.

Fortunately, we may have reached a tipping point on this issue. Across Europe, many nations have pulled back on their support for transgenderism. Closer to home polls throughout the year showed people rejecting this anti-scientific ideology.

We struck while the iron was hot with an ad blitz at both the Republican and Democratic conventions calling on both parties to commit to protecting children from this insanity. We also showed our support for those who realized they were hoodwinked by transgenderism and have decided to “detransition.” Look for more of these people in the year to come.

We also fought back on several other key issues and scored critical victories in the process.

We exposed the myth of “Christian nationalist” violence comprehensively showing that the “violence” often cited has almost nothing to do with Christianity. It is just a fraudulent attempt to silence Catholics.

We set the record straight after the *Washington Post* published a report on abuse at Catholic-run Indian boarding schools in the United States. We thoroughly tore apart the erroneous conclusions.

When the media was totally silent about a report by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops noting the almost complete eradication of clergy sexual abuse, we highlighted this good news.

Bill also released his new book *Cultural Meltdown: The Secular Roots of Our Moral Crisis*, and our documentary “Walt’s Disenchanted Kingdom” won its ninth award.

We continued displaying our life-sized nativity scene in Central Park. Additionally, we arranged for a billboard this year in Madison, Wisconsin, home to FFRF. Our ad took aim at them for their mockery of Christmas with their Winter Solstice exhibit. We also defended a Catholic League member who wanted to display a Nativity alongside a menorah but was denied. The building decided to do the equal but intolerant thing and removed all displays. Meanwhile, around the country, atheist and satanic groups tried to dilute Christmas, but we pushed back.

We achieved great things this year, but it is only the beginning. It will take time to utterly route the secularists that maligned and marginalized Catholics in the last few years. The cultural forces that engendered these attacks remain potent and will attempt to corrode our values in the future. The culture war cannot be won in a single election cycle. It takes years of dedicated effort. The forecast for 2025 looks brighter. However, there is still work to be done,

and the Catholic League will be there to see it through.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT—DISNEY IS WISING UP

[Bill Donohue](#)

We'll take a slow learner over one who never learns, which is why we are happy to report that Disney continues to move away from its offensive fare. Are they family-friendly again? Not quite. But they are moving in the right direction.

“Win or Lose” is a forthcoming Pixar animated miniseries set to premiere on Disney+ in February of next year. Disney has reworked a story arc featuring a “transgender” youth that plays on a co-ed softball team. Initially the miniseries was set to explore this character’s backstory and perspective, like it does with several other characters. However, Disney ultimately decided that this controversial topic should be omitted from the show.

A spokesperson for Disney said, “When it comes to animated content for a younger audience, we recognize that many parents would prefer to discuss certain subjects with their children on their own terms and timeline.” Considering that Disney became the epitome of woke corporate politics by leading the

charge against Florida's "Parental Bill of Rights" in 2022, this is a massive reversal of the entertainment giant's position.

This pivot reflects the thinking coming from the top.

During a Q&A with Disney shareholders in April of 2024, Disney CEO Bob Iger stated he believed it was Disney's job to "entertain, first and foremost." He went on to say, "I've always believed that we have a responsibility to do good in the world, but we know our job is not to advance any kind of agenda." This builds on previous comments Iger made since retaking the helm of Disney in 2023.

The change in direction is evident in other Disney fare.

"Inside Out 2" premiered in theaters in June and quickly became the top-grossing animated film of all time, raking in a total of \$1.7 billion globally. A huge part of this success stemmed from efforts undertaken by Disney executives to ensure that the Pixar film had no LGBT content. Throughout its production, executives went to great lengths to portray the characters as normal. Many scenes were reworked to remove any suggestions that any characters were LGBT.

In August, Disney announced "The Acolyte" would be cancelled after streaming for a single season on Disney+. Even with the media loudly cheering on the series and bashing anyone complaining about its weak characters or poor writing, it was largely panned by fans for sacrificing quality storytelling in favor of promoting woke content. The series leaned heavily into LGBT themes and also saw the debut of Disney's first openly "transgender" actor Abigail Thorn (a man pretending to be a woman) in a supporting role.

"Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur" is an animated series that airs on Disney+.

One episode revolved around Brooklyn, the captain of the girls

volleyball team. He is a male who falsely claims to be a female. When a rival coach finds out that Brooklyn played on the boys soccer team, the coach moves to have Brooklyn disqualified. The showrunners present this coach as motivated by bigotry and partially interested in giving the opposing team an unfair advantage.

As the title "Gatekeeper" suggests, it is strongly implied that anyone opposed to letting boys compete in girls sports is a bigot and concerns over fairness and safety are just a ruse by weaker teams trying to eliminate better athletes from competition.

Disney pulled the episode "Gatekeeper" featuring a transgender storyline. "Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur" was cancelled in October; ten more episodes are slated to air in 2025.

This turn about would not have happened without considerable pressure being applied to Disney executives.

We take pride in helping to mount that pressure. In January of 2023, we released "Walt's Disenchanted Kingdom," a documentary with an all-star cast that detailed Disney's departure from a family-friendly company. Our documentary won nine awards and has been seen by millions of people around the world. It is streaming on Amazon and the DVD is available from the Catholic League.

Christmas is a time for reflection, as well as joy. It is our hope that Disney continues to reflect on the damage it has done and moves with dispatch to bring about the joy that made it so famous in the first place.

THE POLITICS OF COMEDY

[Bill Donohue](#)

This first appeared in the [American Spectator](#) on Oct. 22

They got to Jerry Seinfeld. He received enough blowback from the Left that he caved: he no longer blames humorless left-wing pundits and activists for the war on comedy. Indeed, he now says he “[regrets](#)” saying that comedy on TV has basically disappeared as “the result of the extreme left and P.C. crap, and people worrying so much about offending other people.”

Will Chris Rock and Jennifer Aniston be next? [Rock](#) complained in 2019 that he can’t say anything “offensive and funny right now,” and [Aniston](#) said last year that “it’s a little tricky” telling jokes these days “because you have to be very careful.”

The humorless ones, who are heavily concentrated in education, non-profit advocacy groups, and the media, have certainly had an effect. In 2008, comedy as a share of the U.S. box office was [21 percent](#). Now it is in the single digits.

Seinfeld got it right the first time, but he understated it even then.

Political correctness, or woke politics, is a form of mind control. What animates the Left is power, and nothing is more important than getting inside the heads of the masses. Once the people surrender their conscience, they can be mobilized to do whatever the ruling class wants. Make no mistake, controlling what we are allowed to laugh at is part and parcel of their agenda.

The two most protected demographics in the nation are LGBTQ people and blacks. But there is a big difference between the two: blacks are much less incensed about jokes that come at

their expense than gays and transgender persons are. The latter, represented most conspicuously by GLAAD, are the biggest promoters of censorship in the nation. And they are very good about punishing the “offenders,” squeezing apologies from them.

- [Tracy Morgan](#) has apologized to the gay and lesbian community for a joke he told in 2011.
- In 2019, [Eddie Murphy](#) apologized to the same people for a joke he told in 1996.
- [Kevin Hart](#) apologized in 2019 for a joke that “hurt members of the LGBTQ community.”
- In September this year, [Will Ferrell](#) said he regretted dressing as a woman some years earlier while telling a joke. “That’s something I wouldn’t choose to do now.”
- Comedy writer [Harper Steele](#) said he regrets penning a drag queen joke that he wrote years ago. He now says, “It’s absolutely not funny.”
- [Amy Schumer](#) apologized in 2015 for making a joke about Hispanics, saying, “I hope I haven’t hurt anyone.”
- [Jay Leno](#) often made fun of Asians but now he says he regrets it.
- [Trevor Noah](#) had lots of fun at the expense of Indians and Pakistanis, but now he is apologizing for the “hurt” he caused.
- [Jimmy Fallon](#) has apologized for wearing blackface in a 2000 SNL skit.
- [Jimmy Kimmel](#) apologized in 2020 for wearing blackface in the 1990s.
- [Tina Fey](#) has apologized for wearing blackface in her sitcom.
- [Sarah Silverman](#) now says she is “horrified” about wearing blackface in one of her 2007 episodes.
- [Nikki Glaser](#) has apologized for making fun of “skinny” women.
- In 2018, [“Weird Al” Yankovic](#) apologized for featuring the word “midget” in one of his songs from the 1980s.

- [Patton Oswalt](#) now regrets joking about “retards.”

No one ever apologizes for telling patently obscene jokes about Jesus, Our Blessed Mother, nuns, priests or the sacraments. This includes many of those who are now apologizing profusely about insulting others. Sarah Silverman and Trevor Noah, for instance, are two of the biggest anti-Catholic comedians in the nation, but they will never apologize for slandering priests.

If proof is needed to show how political all of this is, consider that [Dave Chappelle](#) (who won't apologize for LGBTQ jokes) apologized for simply saying in 2016, “I'm wishing Donald Trump luck.” Similarly, [John Mulaney](#) now says he “deserved backlash” for joking about Trump and Biden without making it clear that he very much favored Biden.

Best of all is [Stephen Colbert](#). In 2017, he made an obscene joke that offended Trump supporters and gays at the same time. He only apologized to gays.

Jay Leno called me years ago after I blasted him for telling anti-Catholic jokes. He said he tells 11,000 jokes a year and wanted my advice on which kinds of jokes about Catholics are okay and which are not (reporters and TV talk-show hosts have asked me the same thing).

I told him that jokes about Catholic school kids are fine. “Sister Act” type fare is also okay. But when you get to the heart of our religion—as Gretchen Whitmer did by mocking the Eucharist—that crosses the line.

The comedians of an earlier era—Bob Hope, Jerry Lewis, Sid Caesar, Rodney Dangerfield, Dean Martin, Don Rickles—made their audiences laugh without getting vulgar. Mel Brooks managed to lampoon everyone without getting nasty. So it can be done. All it takes is creativity, prudence and a sense of decency. When that happens, there is no need to protect or demonize anyone.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY TRIUMPHS; SUPREME COURT NEXT UP

According to the *Washington Post*, Donald Trump won the Catholic vote 56 percent to 41 percent. That's a great triumph for religious liberty.

Exit polls showed that it wasn't abortion that hurt Kamala Harris the most with Catholics, it was other issues. Among them, surely, was her stand on religious liberty. Moreover, when a candidate loses the Catholic vote by 15 points, it is hard to win the White House.

In late October, Harris was asked by an NBC reporter if she would consider any concessions on abortion. The reporter, Hallie Jackson, specifically asked Harris if she would allow religious exemptions. No, she said—not even one. That's the voice of extremism.

Harris' extremism on religious liberty was also evident on the subject of transgenderism.

The issue of gender ideology is laden with religious overtones. Harris not only supports attempts by minors to change their sex behind the backs of their parents, she co-sponsored bills that would force Catholic doctors and hospitals to perform sex-reassignment surgery and abortions.

Then there is Harris' record of anti-Catholicism, something which we documented more than any other organization in the nation. It is extreme, and it is obviously a religious liberty issue.

The battle for religious liberty is not over. We need the

support of the courts.

Trump appointed Amy Coney Barrett, Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch; the first two are Catholic and Gorsuch, who was raised Catholic, is Protestant. All are good on religious liberty. Chief Justice John Roberts, another Catholic, is mostly reliable on this issue. Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, both staunch Catholics, are rock solid on this First Amendment right.

Thomas is 76. Alito is 74. Both have served with distinction. They are bright and courageous and have been subjected to incredible vitriol. Indeed, they have survived attempts to destroy them by the masters of personal destruction: those who work in the media, left-wing advocacy organizations, the entertainment industry, and education have worked overtime to smear them.

The Left failed to bring them down. Halleluiah. But early next year it will be time for them to step down. If Trump can appoint two more just like them—he can't do any better—he will secure a religious-friendly court for decades.

The most important right in a democracy is the free exercise of religion, which is encoded in the First Amendment. That right, and another First Amendment right—free speech—were targeted by Biden-Harris more than any administration in American history. But their days are numbered.

Our work is never done. But if we get more Supreme Court Justices that support religious liberty, that will be a big step forward.

CHRISTMAS BILLBOARD

Every year the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), a group of militant atheists—whose love for abortion is on a par with their love for Christian bashing—like to erect a silly Winter Solstice exhibit at the Capitol in Madison, Wisconsin. This year they are in for a surprise.

We have decided to send these activists a lesson, reminding them that the Christmas season is our season. We rule. They lose.

We will have a billboard displayed in the vicinity of Madison, Wisconsin from December 16 to December 29. It will be on the beltway, south of Mineral Point Road. The panel size is 12 x 50.

(We will feature a picture, or a facsimile of the billboard, in the next edition of *Catalyst*, but the wording can now be revealed.)

It is headlined, "ATHEISTS STRIKE OUT AT CHRISTMAS," we opine, "Celebrating Winter Solstice is a Child's Game." We remind them that "*This Is Our Season—Not Theirs*," and that it is meant to "Celebrate the Birth of Christ." We end by saying, "*Merry Christmas*."

We chose Madison because it is home to FFRF and we wanted them to see it. Call it our Christmas gift to them.

They put up their Winter Solstice display to compete with the manger scene; it is only apropos that we compete with them.

They filed a bogus complaint with the IRS against us in the fall, so this is our way of saying, "we're not going away."

REFLECTIONS ON THE ELECTION

William A. Donohue

Not surprisingly, the mainstream media were in disbelief over the results of the presidential election. That's because they live in an intellectual ghetto. Instead of just talking to each other, it would be so nice if they actually spent time talking to those who work in housekeeping, the cafeteria, maintenance and security.

Will they change now that they have been proven wrong? Not at all. They are hopelessly incapable of changing, though they love to say that the public has a hard time accepting change. Not so. They do.

Does money count in elections? Not as much as many think. Harris raised over \$1 billion and wound up \$20 million in debt in the final week. Trump spent half as much, over \$400 million. In the few weeks before the election, Bill Gates gave Harris \$50 million, and Michael Bloomberg followed with another \$50 million. George Soros topped them both.

Do celebrities matter? They may if they occasionally show up for a rally or fundraiser. But Harris went overboard, bringing in Oprah, Bruce Springsteen, Beyonce, Taylor Swift, Katy Perry, Jennifer Lopez et al. She also went on "Saturday Night Live" before the election. This actually hurt her. Why? She was already seen as a lightweight, the word-salad queen, so being surrounded by celebrities only fed the perception that she was not a serious person.

Why were so many of the polls wrong? Because most of them never corrected for the Trump supporters who simply won't speak to them. They don't trust them, and, importantly, they

know it is not popular in many circles to admit being for Trump.

The pollster that was the most accurate was J.L. Partners. Based in the U.S., it was founded by pollsters for the British Prime Minister; it published its results with the Daily Mail, a conservative U.K. publication. It was one of the few that got it right: it said in the run-up to the election that Trump had a 54 percent chance of winning. McLaughlin & Associates also did a good job.

Pollsters often ask the wrong questions, or they don't dig deep enough. For example, the media kept reporting that Trump's unfavorability rating was significantly higher than Harris'. On election day, Nate Silver, who runs an influential survey site, reported that Trump's unfavorability score was 8.6 points higher than his favorability score. For Harris, her unfavorable rating was 2.0 points higher than her favorable rating.

A more important question is how the public views the candidates on their leadership abilities and their ability to get things done. A month before the election, Gallup found that when it comes to who is a strong and decisive leader, Trump outscored Harris 59 percent to 48 percent. On their ability to get things done, Trump won 61-49. Exit polls on election day found that his numbers increased significantly on related measures.

In other words, an election is not a popularity contest. It is about issues and who is the most likely to govern effectively.

Billy Martin, who coached the New York Yankees, was hard to deal with. Bobby Knight, who coached the Indiana University basketball team, could be obnoxious. Bill Belichick, who coached the New England Patriots, was surly. Unlikeable though they were, they were also great leaders who knew how to win.

Ergo, while Trump's persona may strike many as offensive, few

question his ability to get things done, and that is what counts in the end.

Democratic strategist James Carville warned Democrats in October that Harris was not getting her message out. This misses the point. She had no message. That was her problem. Being against Trump is not a message—it's a feeling: it doesn't tell voters what policies you want to implement.

Admittedly, she was put in a delicate position. Joe Biden dropped out after the debate in June because the media could no longer pretend that he wasn't mentally challenged. They covered up for him for years, but could do so no longer. Harris never faced a challenger—she was anointed—and proved incapable of separating herself from his policies.

More than anything else, it was the politics of extremism that did her in.

- Flooding the economy with funny money drove prices sky high
- Allowing millions of migrants to crash our borders and then be rewarded with better services from the government than are afforded homeless veterans angered millions
- Playing catch and release with violent criminals was indefensible
- Forgiving student loans for the middle and upper classes while making the working class pay for them was infuriating
- Promoting policies that allow children to change their sex behind their parents' back was mindboggling
- Allowing boys to compete against girls in sports and shower with them was morally bankrupt
- Allowing the FBI to spy on Catholics was malicious
- Inviting foreign aggression was irresponsible

These policies did Harris in. For the most part, the American

people do not want extremists on the right or the left in office. Thank God for that.

THE STATE OF CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Anne Hendershott

Anne Hendershott, *A Lamp in the Darkness: How Faithful Catholic Colleges Are Helping to Save the Church* (Sophia Institute Press)

For faithful Catholics, the loss of a strong Catholic identity at most of the 230 Catholic colleges and universities has been a great disappointment. Earlier generations of Catholic immigrants built the majority of those schools during the late 1800s and early 1900s at great personal sacrifice because they wanted to nurture the faith of their children and protect them from the anti-immigrant nature of the existing colleges.

Unfortunately, there are few faithful Catholic colleges left today which share the vision of helping young Catholics maintain their faith. From internships at Planned Parenthood, and “reproductive choice” clubs at schools like Georgetown, to Catholic campus GLBTQ celebrations and Drag Shows presented annually at campuses like the once-faithful University of San Diego, and several of the Jesuit schools, parents can no longer assume that their children will receive a faithful Catholic education on a Catholic campus. Even the once-venerable University of Notre Dame appears to have given up much of its commitment to supporting Catholic teachings on life and traditional families by giving awards and speaking platforms to notorious pro-abortion politicians and GLBTQ

activists. In 2016, Notre Dame awarded its most prestigious award, the Laetare Medal, to then Vice-President Joseph Biden in recognition of his “outstanding service to the Catholic Church,” even though he had long promoted both abortion and same-sex marriage. The Laetare Medal is an award that was originally created by Notre Dame to honor an American Catholic “whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences, illustrated the ideals of the church, and enriched the heritage of humanity.”

And although the award to Biden created scandal among the faithful, nothing could have prepared them for Ash Williams, the transgendered pro-abortion speaker who was given a platform at Notre Dame to present her position that “abortion is a type of birth.” Williams, a self-described “transgender man” who calls herself an “abortion doula,” told students during her Notre Dame presentation on March 20, 2023, that she draws upon the experiences in her own “Black, trans, abortion-having life” to question and demean what she called oppressive norms against abortion. As a self-described “abortion doula” Williams claims to provide physical, emotional, or financial help to people seeking to end a pregnancy, suggesting that the reason we don’t understand an abortion as a type of birth “is because it has become so disenfranchised.” Williams, who shared with Notre Dame students that she had undergone two abortions, has a tattoo on her left forearm of a surgical instrument used for manual vacuum aspiration abortion. Glib about her own abortions and celebrating the abortion success stories of those she helps, she told the Notre Dame students that she tells her abortion stories “as often as a broken record.”

This latest abortion doula scandal was not just a fringe event sponsored by a renegade Notre Dame Gender Studies department on campus. Rather, Ash Williams, the transgendered abortion advocate was sponsored by the Dean’s Office in the College of Arts and Letters, as well as by seven other major departments

in the university including the Center for Social Concerns, a Notre Dame institute that was created to apply Catholic social teaching to societal problems. It is clear that the loss of the Catholic identity is a systemic or structural problem at Notre Dame—like that at most Catholic colleges.

In fact, rather than embracing the good, the true, and the beautiful, most Catholic universities have adopted the same curricular fads as their secular peers, trading their commitment to the Catholic faith and the liberal arts for trendy departments of gender studies, black studies, ethnic studies, and gay and lesbian studies. Most of these schools host GLBTQ social clubs and celebrations of Pride Month using student affairs funds so that all enrolled students contribute to the festivities. Campus leaders on these now-faithless campuses claim that their Catholic campus commitment to social justice differentiates them from non-Catholic colleges, but they neglect to mention that their definition of social justice is so broad as to include “reproductive justice,” transgender rights, and equal access to marriage for same sex couples as among the social justice issues they promote.

The situation is dire but not hopeless. There are still some Catholic colleges that are true to the original mission of Catholic higher education. *A Lamp in the Darkness* introduces readers to 14 faithful Catholic colleges and universities that have resisted the cultural pressure to conform to the world and have instead, stayed true in their mission, their commitment to the liberal arts and academic excellence, their liturgies, and to the magisterial teachings of the Church. These schools have made significant sacrifices to continue providing students with a faithful Catholic education that not only prepares them for careers but also prepares them to live lives of integrity, goodness, holiness, and authenticity. When any of these “faithful few” schools have fallen short—as some of them have—they have quickly recovered because they have never lost sight of the salvific mission of authentic Catholic

higher education.

Many of these faithful Catholic colleges like Christendom, Thomas More and Thomas Aquinas College were born from the ashes of the secular revolution that gripped the Church following Vatican II and have become some of the most faithful Catholic colleges in the country. Others, like Belmont Abbey, Franciscan University of Steubenville, Catholic University, the University of Mary, and the University of Dallas were founded in the late nineteenth or early to mid-twentieth centuries, but have each, in their own way, sought continuous renewal in faithfulness and mission orientation.

The most recent wave of faithful Catholic universities emerged after 1990, apparently in response to the release of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the apostolic constitution on faithful Catholic higher education promulgated by Pope St. John Paul II in 1990. These schools, including Ave Maria University and John Paul the Great Catholic University, both founded in 2003, and Wyoming Catholic College in 2005, all had the ability to form their mission and identity while drawing directly upon the evangelical spirit of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. In fact, the influence of the 1990 papal constitution is seen most explicitly in the mission statement of Ave Maria University which describes itself as “Founded in fidelity to Christ and His Church...dedicated to the advancement of human culture, the promotion of dialogue between faith and reason, and the formation of men and women in the intellectual and moral virtues of the Catholic faith.”

Although *A Lamp in the Darkness* is not a book specifically about Franciscan University, the renewal of orthodoxy on Catholic college campuses cannot be properly understood without acknowledging the important role played by that university so an entire chapter is devoted to understanding the 1974 revitalization and renewal of Franciscan that transformed a struggling school into the center of evangelization that it is today. In a 2021 interview with Dr.

Scott Hahn, a theology professor at Franciscan, Monsignor James P. Shea, the president of the University of Mary in North Dakota—one of the faithful colleges profiled in this book—spoke of the “ripple effect” of Franciscan on his own campus: “What does St. Thomas say? *Bonum diffusivum sui*—the good is diffusive of itself. The ripples of the renewal of Catholic higher education, of which Steubenville is an exemplar, are felt all around. The students that we get to serve here are recipients of that as well, and so I am grateful. May we be worthy of that legacy.”

Franciscan University was not always the vibrantly Catholic place that it is today and certainly not the center of a dynamic orthodoxy that is “diffusive of itself.” In fact, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it was still called the College of Steubenville, the struggling school was known as one of the premier party schools in the country, featuring a hook-up culture that involved heavy alcohol and drug use. Established in 1946 by Franciscans of the Third Order Regular (T.O.R.), the school had lost its way and was on the verge of collapse in the early 1970s. But in 1974, with the arrival of the university’s dynamic new president, Father Michael Scanlan, the newly renamed Franciscan University of Steubenville became the vibrant center of Catholic orthodoxy it is today.

That ripple effect continues. One person who was inspired by Father Scanlan was Tom Monaghan, who, in 1986, while still at the helm as founder and president of Domino’s Pizza, Inc., provided the following endorsement for the back cover of Father Scanlan’s book *Let the Fire Fall*: “This book has given me inspiration and a road map for my life. Never in one book have I learned so much about my religion and how to live it.” Monaghan actually used the book as a “road map,” creating Ave Maria Law School, and later Ave Maria University, as a way to honor God. Both vibrantly Catholic and faithful to the Magisterium, these schools continue to flourish as Tom

Monaghan often says, “to help as many people as possible get into heaven.”

Today, Ave Maria University and the faithful few continue to attract students who desire an authentically Catholic education. They come to these schools because they want to be part of a faith-filled community that enriches their lives. Faithful Catholic parents who want their children to be nurtured by the faith while receiving an academic challenging environment are drawn to these schools. The stories of the founding and constant renewal of these faithful schools can inspire other Catholic colleges which have lost their way. The 1974 transformation of Franciscan University into today’s passionately Catholic college occurred because one charismatic priest—Father Michael Scanlan, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit—devoted himself to that renewal.

It is easy to feel bleak, looking at the state of modern culture and particularly at the decomposing state of higher education. It is tempting to think that all the battles have been lost, and that the secularization of society and of our Catholic schools is a *fait accompli*. Indeed, it may appear that from a sociological point of view, the battle has been lost. The faithful colleges and universities are too few and too small to make much of a difference. However, God does not see as humans see. God chose one-hundred-year-old Abraham to father a nation. He chose David, the smallest child of Jesse, to be a king. And He chose the teenage virgin Mary to bear His Son. That same God chose a lawyer-priest to redeem Franciscan University, a pizza mogul to start Ave Maria University, and a penniless historian to found Christendom College. The pattern that unites all these figures is not their strength, wealth, or wisdom, but rather their willingness to say yes to His plan. The hope that inspired this book and that caused Pope John Paul to prophesy of a new flowering of Christian culture is not borne from particular signs of worldly success, but rather is founded on the person of Jesus Christ and on His

promise that we would not remain in darkness. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). The same light burns in the lamp of each faithful school today, and, by God's grace, the darkness has not overcome it.

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