

# DOES EDUCATION ERODE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a new survey by the Pew Research Center, "In America, Does More Education Equal Less Religion?"

"Overall, U.S. adults with college degrees are less religious than others, but this practice does not hold among Christians." This is the central Pew finding, though there is much in the survey that reveals other important data.

For the adult population as a whole, college graduates are much less likely than those with no more than a high school diploma to say that religion is "very important" in their lives. Similarly, the more highly educated are also less likely to believe in God with absolute certainty. Yet when it comes to attending religious services, there is no discernible difference between these two segments of the population.

The survey does not attempt to explain these findings. But it would be shocking to learn the opposite: students are subjected to a highly secular orientation in college, and in many cases the milieu on campus is not religion-friendly. Regarding attendance at religious services, we know from other studies that church-goers are presented with significant opportunities for bonding with neighbors; this may be especially important to those at the top of the socio-economic scale.

When it comes to believing in God with absolute certainty, Catholics and Jews bring up the rear. Here are the data on this measure:

- Historically black Protestants (89%)
- Evangelical Protestants (88%)
- Mormons (86%)

- Mainline Protestants (66%)
- Catholics (64%)
- Jews (39%)

Catholics and Jews may be the least likely to believe in God with absolute certainty, but their reasons for doing so are very different. Among Catholics with less than a high school education, only 50% say they are sure God exists, but for those with a post-graduate degree it is 66%. For Jews, the respective numbers show the opposite pattern—58% and 24%.

Pew doesn't offer an explanation, but it appears that the secularism that marks higher education has had a much greater effect on Jews than Catholics. This may be because Jews are much more likely to be raised in a non-observant family than are Catholics, thus making them more subject to the secular influences of graduate school. It may also be that poorly educated Catholics may be more cynical about life in general, spilling over into their belief in God.

This Pew survey should put to rest a bias that is commonplace among intellectuals: religion is not the opiate of the masses that Marx espoused. If it were, then all the non-believers would also be the most educated, and they are not—Christians threw a wrench in that idea.

If the deep thinkers were curious about this subject, they would ponder the observation of French sociologist Raymond Aaron: Marxism is the opiate of the intellectual.

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## **CHRIS HARDWICK NEEDS REHAB**

# AGAIN

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the talents of Chris Hardwick:

The April 28 edition of “@Midnight with Chris Hardwick” featured a comedian no one ever heard of, Jo Koy. He showed his brilliance by making a gratuitous remark about a priest who “put his hands up my ass.”

On the April 19th edition, Hardwick said if “you get fired for a raft of sexual harassment charges, you can always find a job in the Catholic Church.”

I didn’t address the April 19 smear after it happened, but now that the show is libeling Catholicism again, it is worth mentioning.

Hardwick obviously has a problem with sexuality, and an obsession with the scatological. Perhaps—this is just a guess—it has something to do with his own experiences: his multimillion dollar home in Hollywood Hills features an outdoor mosaic tile bath with a 200-year-old faucet.

Hardwick went into rehab after his serious bout with alcoholism. Now it’s time he sought more serious help.

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## ACLU SUES ANOTHER CATHOLIC

# HOSPITAL

Bill Donohue comments on the ACLU's latest anti-Catholic lawsuit:

The ACLU is suing another Catholic hospital—and this one really puts the lie to their professed motives of anti-discrimination and access to healthcare.

Evan Michael Minton, a former legislative aide in California, wants to change from being a woman to a man. As part of the process, Minton sought a hysterectomy at Mercy San Juan Medical Center, part of the Dignity Health Care chain.

As a Catholic institution, Mercy San Juan does not perform elective hysterectomies. A spokeswoman for the hospital explained that such procedures may only be performed to treat a serious medical problem, and when there is no alternative treatment available.

Mercy immediately referred Minton to another hospital within the Dignity chain—one that is not Catholic—and the procedure was performed within a few days.

So there was no discrimination. Minton was treated exactly the same as any other patient seeking an elective hysterectomy at a Catholic hospital. And there was no lack of access to the procedure. The very institution Minton and the ACLU are suing facilitated that access for Minton at another hospital.

But those inconvenient facts won't stop the ACLU's war on Catholic hospitals. Quite frankly, the ACLU is trying to use Catholic healthcare to undermine the moral integrity of the Catholic Church. They want to force Catholic hospitals to abort babies and provide contraception and sterilization, in direct violation of Catholic teaching.

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# INFLATING THE NUMBER OF ATHEISTS

Bill Donohue

Two University of Kentucky psychologists, Will M. Gervais and Maxine B. Najle, claim that 26 percent of Americans are atheists. Their research, available now at PsyArXiv.com, will appear in an upcoming edition of *Social Psychological and Personality Science*; the journal is published eight times a year.

Their finding not only contradicts every reputable survey on this subject—from Gallup to Pew Research Center—their methodology is questionable, their classifications are inexact, and their conclusions are contentious.

The researchers start with the assumption that owing to prejudice, many Americans who are atheists are reluctant to identify themselves as such in phone surveys. Gervais and Najle tried to skirt this bias by employing what is known as “the unmatched count technique.”

They split their respondents into two groups: both were asked the same series of mundane questions, such as whether they owned a dog, but one group was also asked if they believed in God. All the respondents were then asked to say how many of the items were true about them, without identifying any one specifically.

“The difference between the aggregate rates in these conditions can presumably be attributed to the addition of the socially sensitive item,” they said. In other words, they assumed that the two groups were similar in most respects,

thereby leading them to assume that any difference was attributable to the question about God.

This is not an indefensible methodology, but it is obviously laden with assumptions—too many of them to draw a meaningful conclusion. More controversial is their binary classification of atheists as people who do not believe in God (as compared to those who do).

The researchers define atheists as “merely people who disbelieve or lack belief in the existence of God or gods.” They cite the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as the source of their definition. But there is much more to this than they suggest.

The OED’s definition is broad enough to include agnostics. A more precise definition is found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary: It defines an atheist as “a person who does not believe in the existence of a god or any gods.” It defines an agnostic as “a person who holds the view that any ultimate reality (such as God) is unknown and probably unknowable.”

To put it differently, an atheist denies the existence of God; an agnostic doubts that God exists. They are not identical.

Digging a little deeper, even the OED lends support to the Merriam-Webster definition. For example, it cites historical examples where the early usage of the word atheist is employed to mean “there is no God.” By contrast, it defines an agnostic as “One who holds that the existence of anything beyond and behind material phenomenon is unknown and unknowable...”

A more serious objection concerns the way the researchers classify the population. From my own work, *The Catholic Advantage: Why Health, Happiness, and Heaven Await the Faithful*, the binary definition preferred by the researchers is too simplified, and therefore inadequate.

Frank Newport, editor-in-chief at Gallup, wrote a book a few years back, *God Is Alive and Well*, that concluded that more than 90 percent of Americans believe in God. That's a much higher number than what Gervais and Najle would have us believe. Moreover, a Pew Forum survey concluded that 40 percent of Americans are "very religious," and that the rest of the population was split between those who occasionally attend church and those who are not religious.

This last segment of the population is the most diverse of the three: about half of the "nonreligious" persons still go to church, albeit infrequently, and almost half of them believe in God; the other half, about 16 percent of the population, never attend church. These are the "nones"—those who, when asked about their religious affiliation, say they have none.

This shows how much more complex this segment of the population is: even those who are not religious defy classification as atheists, as interpreted by Gervais and Najle.

In fact, most of the "nonreligious" are neither atheist or agnostic, and a slight majority still believe in God. Indeed, agnostics are only 3.3 percent of the population and atheists are a mere 2.4 percent. Furthermore, 13 percent of these two segments of the population still attend church on a monthly or yearly basis.

So let's recap. The most reputable survey research organizations in the nation put the percent of atheists in the population at 2.4. Gervais and Najle are saying the real figure is closer to 26 percent. In other words, Gallup and Pew are off by almost 1,000 percent.

For the reasons stated, the findings reported by these two prominent research institutes offer a much more in depth and sophisticated portrait of the public than the inquiry made by the Kentucky researchers.

It cannot go unsaid that the predicate of their research, and their conclusion, is also contentious. They maintain that “anti-atheist prejudice” is driving their findings. In other words, due to prejudice, atheists are reluctant to identify themselves as such.

If Gervais and Najle were less given to political correctness, they might admit it is not atheists who are stigmatized in many cultural circles, it's those who are openly religious. On TV, especially on late-night talk shows, and in movies, it is religious Americans—not atheists—who are the butt of cruel jokes and portrayals. Let's not forget about college campuses: the faithful, not atheists, are much more likely to be stigmatized.

That the ones doing the branding consider themselves the high princes of tolerance makes this situation all the more disturbing. Quite frankly, never before in American history has there been less prejudice against atheists than there is today. Inflating their numbers may be a good strategy to embolden their ranks, but it is poor social science.

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## **TRUMP MUST NIX HHS MANDATE**

Bill Donohue comments on the Trump administration's handling of the Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate:

The majority of Catholics voted for Donald Trump, and many did so because he identified himself as pro-life and ran against a candidate who justified partial-birth abortion. He also said he would rescind the HHS mandate that makes Catholic non-profits complicit in providing for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization, and contraception in their healthcare plans. Now his Justice Department is balking on this issue.



Almost a year has passed since the Supreme Court instructed President Obama's Justice Department to work with the plaintiffs in reaching reconciliation on the mandate. Two days ago, the Justice Department asked the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals for another 60 days to reach a settlement.

Trump officials say the delay is necessary because many staff positions have not yet been filled, and the issues involved are "complex." But that hasn't stopped the Justice Department from settling other lawsuits. Moreover, this business about the mandate being "complex" is a dodge: either the mandate is an affront to religious liberty or it is not.

The Obama administration angered Catholics when they learned that it was targeting such groups as the Little Sisters of the Poor. Initially, the Obama team tried to force the Little Sisters to pay for abortion-inducing drugs in their healthcare plan. Under pressure, the lawyers scaled back their demands, but they still sought to compromise the nuns by making them complicit in approving the mandate.

The most pernicious aspect of this issue is rarely discussed. Just how did the Obama administration manage to put the arm on the Little Sisters in the first place? By adopting the thinking of the ACLU.

It was the ACLU's lawyers in California who first broached the idea that a Catholic institution is not legitimately Catholic if it staffs and serves a large body of people who are not Catholic. The Obama administration, under the tutelage of HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius—a rabid defender of partial-birth abortion—tailored the language of the mandate to meet that test. Therefore, because the Little Sisters *do not discriminate against non-Catholics* in tending to their needs, they are not considered Catholic!

In sharp contrast to his predecessor, Trump has shown himself to be religion-friendly. He needs to recognize, however, that

the HHS mandate is a non-negotiable issue: If he wants to keep the support of Catholics, the HHS mandate must go.

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## ATHEISTS PROTEST POPE MEETING

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a protest by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF):

FFRF co-presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor have written a letter to the president of the University of Michigan protesting the school's football team attending a papal audience on April 26; attendance is voluntary.

The professional atheists have become completely unhinged over the spectacle of college jocks receiving an "Apostolic Blessing" by Pope Francis. "The practice violates the well-established constitutional principle that the government must remain neutral toward religion."

Their constitutional acumen is appalling. On January 2 last year, in a speech he gave in Louisiana, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia made it clear that the Constitution was never meant to be neutral about religion. Indeed, he said, "there is no place for that in our constitutional tradition." While one religion cannot be favored over another, that does not mean that religion cannot be favored over non-religion.

Most of the Founders were Christian, and none was hostile to religion. They were decidedly biased in favor of a robust public role for religious expression, something FFRF wants to stamp out.

FFRF wants to know how the university would react to the

outrage that might accompany a meeting of the students with a “top Muslim cleric,” or with an atheist such as Richard Dawkins. But the pope is not simply a religious figure, he is a head of state: He represents the Holy See. Imams and Dawkins are private citizens. The pope is also the Vicar of Christ.

The zealots at FFRF must be awfully bored to get this enraged over college kids sitting in St. Peter’s Square listening to the pope. Their pettiness is on a par with their sophomoric approach to the First Amendment. They need to get over themselves and move on before the guys with the white jackets show up.

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## PLANNED PARENTHOOD GALA IS SICK

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a Planned Parenthood event that will honor Hillary Clinton and Shonda Rhimes on May 2 in New York City:

They are billing it as “a once in a lifetime Gala, 100 Years Strong: The Celebration of the Century.” Hillary Clinton will receive the Champion of the Century Award and Shonda Rhimes will receive the Champion of Change Award. They are touting Clinton’s “service to women and girls,” and Rhimes’ effort at “revolutionizing” the way abortion is “portrayed on television.”

They chose the right people to honor: neither woman has ever found an abortion she couldn’t justify, and both have taken aim at people of faith who believe in the sanctity of innocent

human life.

Though Planned Parenthood's founder, Margaret Sanger, was anti-abortion, she was virulently anti-Catholic, as well as racist. In other words, the organization she founded is sicker today—it can't get enough of abortion—than when it was started.

Clinton and Rhimes really earned their stripes in 2015.

In June 2015, Hillary spoke at the Women in the World Summit in New York City. She offered red meat to the audience, all of whom came to hear how she might promote abortion-on-demand once she became president. She didn't disappoint (well, not entirely).

Speaking of abortion rights, Hillary said, "All the laws we've passed don't count for much if they're not enforced. Rights have to exist in practice, not just on paper. Laws have to be backed up with resources, and political will and deep-seated cultural codes, *religious beliefs*, and structural biases have to be changed." (My emphasis.)

Practicing Catholics got the message: If Hillary becomes president, she will let the Catholic Church know that it had better get on board and change its "religious beliefs" about abortion. So much for diversity.

In November 2015, Rhimes intentionally insulted Catholics in an episode of one of her shows, "Scandal." While Olivia Pope, played by Kerry Washington, was having an abortion, "Silent Night" was playing in the background. The show ended with a self-satisfied Olivia Pope listening to "Ave Maria."

Rhimes sits on the board of directors of Planned Parenthood's Los Angeles affiliate, is a champion of graphic gay sex on the tube, and has three children but no husband. The latter is not a mistake: "I do not want a husband in my house." Self-absorbed, she never asked her kids if they might want a father

in the house.

Children have a right to be born and Catholics have a right to promote that right. The reason why Hillary Clinton and Shonda Rhimes are being honored by Planned Parenthood is because they oppose both rights. It should prove to be a bloody good night for the tolerant ones.

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## **RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ATTACKED IN CALIFORNIA**

Bill Donohue comments on legislation targeting religious employers in California:

Under the guise of “anti-discrimination,” a pro-abortion California assemblywoman is pushing a bill that would bar faith-based codes of conduct for employees of religious organizations.

AB 569 specifically targets codes of conduct involving employees’ “reproductive health care decisions,” such as abortion and contraception. It would actually prohibit Catholic organizations from demanding fidelity to Catholic teachings on the part of their employees. Perversely, this grand assault on separation of church and state is being waged in the name of “rights.”

The background of the bill’s sponsor, Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, leaves little doubt as to what her agenda is. Gonzalez Fletcher describes herself as a very religious Catholic who is personally pro-life, yet she proudly touts her 100 percent pro-abortion voting record. She cannot have it both ways: No one would believe her if she said she was

opposed to racial discrimination yet voted to promote it.

Her bill is a poorly disguised effort to impose radical pro-abortion policies on religious organizations.

AB 569 is scheduled for a hearing today in the Judiciary Committee of the California State Assembly. Committee members should kill it, and protect religious freedom.

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## **DEMOCRATS HAVE A CATHOLIC PROBLEM**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the Democrats and Catholics:

Heath Mello has divided the Democratic Party. This is unusual given his low profile: he is running for mayor of Omaha, Nebraska. What makes him controversial among Democrats are his pro-life convictions.

Senator Bernie Sanders, an Independent, has taken the high road, prudently saying that although he favors abortion rights, there should be room for Mello in the Democratic Party. Tom Perez, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, disagrees—there is no room for people like him.

Perez speaks for the base of the Party. The Daily Kos initially endorsed Mello, but pulled its support once it learned that his idea of human rights begins when humans are conceived. NARAL Pro-Choice America, the extreme pro-abortion organization, sided with Perez, calling Sanders' support for Mello "politically stupid."

Is it okay to hold "personal beliefs" against abortion and be

a Democrat? Perez says it is, just so long as those beliefs are not voiced. "If they try to legislate or govern that way," he declared, "we will take them on." In other words, keep your pro-life ideas to yourself or else.

So whatever happened to those grand ideas about diversity and inclusion? Perez just blew them up. Where does this leave Catholics?

Mello is described by the *New York Times* as a "practicing Catholic," and Perez is simply identified by the media as a Catholic; his practicing status is unknown. What is not in doubt is his complete rejection of the Catholic Church's teaching on abortion. That teaching is not analogous to the Church's endorsement of immigration rights: the Church labels abortion "intrinsically evil."

It's been a long time since Catholics have been welcomed in the Democratic Party. Geoffrey Layman of Columbia University cites 1972 as the pivotal year when secularists took command. So do Louis Bolce and Gerald De Maio of Baruch College. That was the year Catholics were effectively driven out of command positions in the Party.

After Senator Hubert Humphrey lost to Richard Nixon in 1968, the McGovern Commission was established to reform the way presidential candidates were chosen. "Catholics had made up about one in four Humphrey votes in 1968," observes author Mark Stricherz, "yet they received only one in fourteen slots on the commission in 1969." When the voters went to the polls in 1972, secular Americans chose the Democrats by a margin of 3-1.

Fast forward two decades to 1992. According to Layman, "The Democratic Party now appears to be a party whose core of support comes from secularists, Jews, and the less committed members of the major religious traditions." Similarly, Bolce and De Maio said, "60 percent of first-time white delegates at

the [1992] Democratic convention in New York City either claimed no attachment to religion or displayed the minimal attachment by attending worship services ‘a few times a year’ or less.”

Why did this happen? Mike McCurry, former press secretary to President Bill Clinton, explained it this way: “Because we want to be politically correct, in particular being sensitive to Jews, that’s taken the party to a direction where faith language is soft and opaque.”

Now the “faith language” is just about gone. In the 2016 Democratic Party Platform, there are 14 sentences on specific rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People, and two vague sentences on “respecting faith” at home. Though LGBT rights are nowhere mentioned in the Bill of Rights, and the First Amendment protects religious liberty, the Platform warns against “the misuse of religion to discriminate” against LGBT persons. Religious rights are not mentioned at all, save for a line condemning ISIS.

Mello and Perez are equally Catholic, though not all Catholics are equal. The Democrats need to decide if there is room in their increasingly shrinking tent to house practicing Catholics, the ones most likely to see abortion as “intrinsically evil.”

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## **KATE O’BEIRNE, R.I.P.**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the death of Kate O’Beirne:

The Catholic community lost a champion with the passing of Kate O’Beirne. She was a smart, courageous conservative who



never ducked an opponent.

I first met Kate in the late 1980s when I was a Bradley resident scholar at The Heritage Foundation; Kate was a vice president there. Her ability to quickly analyze public policy—on a range of subjects—was impressive. But it was her amiable personality that won everyone over.

Shortly after I became president of the Catholic League, Kate joined our board of directors; she would later switch to our advisory board. She was outspoken in her denunciation of Catholic bashing, and was equally vocal in her support for the rights of the unborn.

Kate O'Beirne was a role model for men, as well as women. She will be sorely missed.