

# 2017 YEAR IN REVIEW

The Catholic League's *2017 Year in Review* is now available. It contains a brief description of the year's highlights, along with links to sources that provide greater detail.

We cover a lot of ground at the Catholic League. Activist organizations, the arts, business and the workplace, education, government, the media—from all parts of the nation—are sources of trouble. We shy from none of them, and are proud to recount our efforts in our *2017 Year in Review*.

To read it, click [here](#).

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## FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE: OBAMA AND TRUMP

Catholic League president Bill Donohue compares President Barack Obama's first year in office on religious liberty issues to that of President Donald Trump's:

There may be no issue which shows how far apart President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump are than religious liberty. The following is a chronological account of important religious liberty issues that both presidents addressed in their first year in office.

### *Obama*

- Three days after assuming office, Obama announced that he would overturn restrictions on funding abortions overseas.
- Less than a week later, he said he would restore U.S.

funding to the U.N. Population Fund, which pays for abortion.

- In February 2009, Obama's newly designed Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships was announced. Its focus was not religious liberty. Instead, its goal was to decide on a case by case basis which funding requests were constitutionally acceptable, calling into question the hiring rights of religious non-profits.
- In March, Obama appointed Kathleen Sebelius as Secretary of Health and Human Services. An abortion-rights zealot, she was a defender of Dr. George Tiller, who performed more than 60,000 abortions. She also accepted money from him.
- Obama lifted restrictions on federal funding of embryonic stem cell research, thus allowing the government to be in the business of killing nascent human life.
- Dawn Johnsen was nominated to be assistant attorney general in charge of the Office of Legal Counsel. She started her legal career in the 1980s by working with the ACLU to strip the Catholic Church of its tax exempt status.
- Harry Knox was appointed to the Advisory Council of the faith-based initiative. He had been denied ordination in the United Methodist Church for being a sexually active homosexual. He denounced Pope Benedict XVI's comments on AIDS, calling the pontiff a liar. He also maligned the Knights of Columbus.
- When Obama spoke at Georgetown University, his advance team insisted on covering up all religious statues so that none would be seen on television.
- The Obama administration reopened a case against Belmont Abbey College, challenging the school's decision not to cover abortion, artificial contraception, and sterilization in its health care coverage.
- Obama rolled out his health care bill, which included funding for abortion.

- In September 2009, Kevin Jennings was appointed Safe School Czar. He was known for promoting unsafe sex practices at several homosexual conferences, and for his Christian bashing. He also publicly condemned God.
- Chai Feldblum was nominated to join the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She was known for arguing that sexual rights, which are nowhere mentioned in the Constitution, should trump religious rights, which are cited in the First Amendment.
- The religious elements of Christmas at the White House were downplayed. Ornaments of a mass killer were displayed on a White House Christmas tree.

### *Trump*

- On February 1, 2017, Trump chose Judge Neil Gorsuch to take Antonin Scalia's place on the U.S. Supreme Court. Gorsuch is a strong proponent of religious liberty, holding that conscience rights are paramount.
- Trump endorsed educational equality, championing the cause of tax incentives to businesses that fund private schools. He directed his support for school choice at poor minority families.
- Trump issued an executive order on religious liberty which, while lacking specifics, sent a clear message to his cabinet on how to proceed with such matters.
- A bill to allow the states to strip funding from Planned Parenthood was signed into law by Trump.
- The "Trump Effect" was noted in several states that chose to pass bills restricting abortion.
- A decision to provide direct assistance to persecuted Christians in the Middle East was announced.
- A religious exemption to Obama's HHS mandate was granted by Trump.
- The religious elements of Christmas at the White House were celebrated.

The stark contrast between the two administrations' approach

to religious liberty was illuminated in two Rasmussen surveys. In 2014, under Obama, 30 percent of the public said government was a protector of religious liberty; 48 percent saw it as a threat. In October 2017, under Trump, 39 percent named government as a protector of religious liberty; 38 percent saw it as a threat.

The conclusion is obvious: Obama was not a religious-friendly president, but Trump surely is.

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## **“CRUCIFIED SANTA” ARTIST EXPLOITS CHRISTMAS**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a portrait of Santa crucified that was shown on Christmas Eve:

I recently had an [exchange](#) with Robert Cenedella, the artist who created “The Presence of Man”; it depicts Santa crucified. After being mildly critical of his work some 20 years ago, I came to the conclusion that his intent is sincere: it is a statement on the commercialization of Christmas.

But now Cenedella has taken his work to a new level, one that is indefensible: he stood outside of St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Christmas Eve showing his portrait to the faithful as they exited Mass.

This is grandstanding, and it is also exploitative. Children are not capable of processing his message, and Cenedella knows it. Does he expect parents to spend Christmas Eve discussing his real intent? If so, that smacks of narcissism. And one does not have to be a child to take affront at this stunt: there is a time and a place for everything, and this was

certainly not the right place.

Cenedella's prank does not speak well for him. It appears that the only way he can generate discussion is to be in-your-face. That is a sign of weakness, not strength.

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## **CELEBRATING THEIR FIRST WHITE HOUSE CHRISTMAS: OBAMA AND TRUMP**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on White House celebrations:

There could not be a greater difference between President Barack Obama's first White House Christmas and President Donald Trump's. Obama did not believe in exchanging Christmas gifts with his family; Trump does so lavishly.

The cover story of the July 23, 2008 edition of *People* magazine set the tone for how presidential candidate Obama would celebrate Christmas, if elected. Here is what it said. "The kids receive no birthday or Christmas presents from Mom and Dad, who spend 'hundreds' on birthday slumber parties...."

Trump's first White House Christmas has the imprint of Melania Trump: she turned several rooms into a colorful display of epic proportions.

The theme "Time-Honored Traditions" included more than 18,000 feet of lights, 3,100 yards of ribbon, 12,000 ornaments and 53 Christmas trees. Most spectacular is the hallway of the East Colonnade: it is decorated like a winter wonderland of twinkling wintery branches. There is also a grand nativity

scene in the East Room, and a stunning tribute to the armed forces in the East Wing.

Obama's first White House Christmas was embroiled in controversy from the beginning. The following is from a news story in the *New York Times* published on December 7, 2009.

"When former social secretaries gave a luncheon to welcome Ms. [Desirée] Rogers earlier this year, one participant said, she surprised them by suggesting the Obamas were planning a 'non-religious Christmas....'

"The lunch conversation inevitably turned to whether the White House would display its crèche, customarily placed in a prominent spot in the East Room. Ms. Rogers, this participant said, replied that the Obamas did not intend to put the manger scene on display—a remark that drew an audible gasp from the tight-knit social secretary sisterhood."

When the reporter, Sheryl Gay Stolberg, asked the White House for clarification, she was told that "there had been internal discussions about making Christmas more inclusive and whether to display the crèche."

After creating this polarizing moment, a nativity scene was reluctantly displayed. But this didn't end the controversy. Genocidal maniac Mao Zedong, who was responsible for the deaths of 77 million Chinese people, was celebrated by the Obama White House: his picture adorned a Christmas tree ornament. Various drag queens were also honored.

There have been no reports of Trump honoring Stalin or sexual deviants.

Merry Christmas from the Catholic League.

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# NEW YORK TIMES' DUPLICITOUS SEX ABUSE POLICY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the sexual abuse policy of the *New York Times*:

Just as we [showed](#) the rank hypocrisy of the *Boston Globe* in its handling of sexual misconduct among its own employees, we will show today the same duplicity on this issue that is evident at the *New York Times*.

*New York Times* reporter Glenn Thrush has been accused of sexual misconduct by four female journalists. An in-house inquiry found that Thrush did misbehave. "While we believe that Glenn has acted offensively, we have decided that he does not deserve to be fired," said Dean Baquet, the executive editor. They decided to allow him to undergo counseling instead.

This is not an indefensible position, but it smacks of pure hypocrisy when it is made by the *New York Times*. The Catholic Church used to treat offending priests this way—do an in-house inquiry and send the guilty to counseling—but when it did, the *New York Times* went bonkers. It demanded that the authorities be immediately contacted and the guilty priest be given his walking papers. Indeed, it ridiculed the idea that "counseling" was sufficient.

Did Baquet contact the police? Did he report Thrush to the New York District Attorney—that is what Cardinal Timothy Dolan does when he learns of an accusation against a priest. Why did Baquet think it was sufficient to handle sexual misconduct as an in-house matter?

Baquet defended his policy by saying, "Each case has to be evaluated based on individual circumstances." Yet when that same policy was followed by the Catholic Church, it was found

objectionable by the *Times*. It demanded “zero tolerance” for *all* offenses.

To make matters even more sickening, consider that the story on Thrush that appears in today’s edition also includes several other stories and columns that rap the Catholic Church for its handling of these issues.

Yesterday, the *Times* had a front-page story on the death of Cardinal Bernard Law, the Boston archbishop who presided over the sexual abuse scandal there. In case readers missed the rehashing of the scandal, the *Times* ran an obituary on Law today that is almost identical, word-for-word, to yesterday’s story. Both stories condemned Law for not reporting the offending priests to the authorities.

The news story and the obit should have had the decency to say to readers that it does not believe that its own offending employees need to be reported, just those who work for the Catholic Church.

There is another news story today that takes the Vatican to task for not making good on “zero tolerance” for offending priests, citing Australian prelate Cardinal George Pell as an example. It faults the pope for allowing Pell a leave of absence after being “formally charged with sexual offenses.”

First of all, Pell has never been found guilty of any wrongdoing. Second, what this story does not mention is that Pell has never been told what he is being charged with!

In yesterday’s *Herald Sun*, an Australian newspaper, it ran a story with this headline: “Secret Charges Against George Pell Released.” It specifically says that secret charges “have not yet been publicly released but were given to lawyers” representing the media. The story also says that “the specific charges he [Pell] is facing, or the number of alleged offenses, is not yet known.”



Why isn't this travesty of justice not the issue? The *Times* would never stand for this kind of injustice if it were one of its own.

Adding to this insanity is a column in today's *New York Times* by columnist Bret Stephens insisting that Matt Damon was right when he said that there is a difference between "patting someone on the butt and rape or child molestation."

I have been saying this for 15 years: most of the abuse committed by priests involved "inappropriate touching," yet every time I mentioned this I have been accused of making excuses. Now all of a sudden people like Stephens, and [Joan Vennochi](#) of the *Boston Globe*, have adopted my position, and it is considered enlightening.

Moreover, one of the offenses that Pell is likely to be accused of involves a "butt" infraction: he is accused of grabbing a boy's behind when he tossed him in a pool decades ago. Is the *Times* now willing to concede that this "offense" is less serious than the charges against Thrush, for whom it has shown great compassion?

Best of all today we have an "editorial observer" piece by Elizabeth Williamson. She is still fuming over Cardinal Law, and even admits that she refused to baptize her 13-year-old son because of the Boston archbishop.

Williamson should resign immediately.

She works for a man who covered up serial child rape for decades. Mark Thompson, the president of the New York Times Company, was in charge of the BBC when Jimmy Savile molested kids in the "corridors, staircases and canteens" of the BBC's headquarters. Thompson claims he never knew of Savile's 61 sexual assaults, four rapes, and one attempted rape, though the evidence does not support him. (See the Catholic League news release of 2-11-16, "*New York Times* Lectures Vatican.")

All organizations have their inconsistencies, but few are more guilty of rank hypocrisy than the *New York Times*.

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## **“WAR ON CHRISTMAS” DOES NOT LACK FOR EVIDENCE**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on various aspects of the “War on Christmas”:

The “War on Christmas” began in the 1980s with legal challenges to nativity scenes on public property, and then morphed into a multicultural rage in the 1990s. It peaked around 2005-2008, and then subsided.

The anti-Christmas forces are still out there, most notably on college campuses. One thing never changes: the anti-Christmas activists continue to make spurious legal and ideological arguments to justify their hostility to the holiday. But they do not speak for most Americans.

As a recent Pew Research Center survey showed, 90 percent of Americans celebrate Christmas. The majority still celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, though somewhat less than a few years ago. The majority also note that the religious roots of Christmas are less emphasized now than in the past, however only a third say they are bothered by it.

Some observers conclude that since most Americans are not bothered by the diminishing religious role of Christmas that that is evidence of how contrived the “War on Christmas” is. Wrong.

The attacking and neutering of Christmas has had the cooperation of elites from many segments of society: the courts; the universities; the elementary and secondary schools; the media; the entertainment industry; and activist secular organizations. All have played a pivotal role. So it would be astonishing if the survey data were different.

It is important to note that the elites did not take their cues from the people: there was no push by the public to accomplish this end.

Americans are a practical people. Their primary interests are both micro and local: they put their family and community first. In general, they tend to accommodate themselves to the prevailing winds of the culture, even if they would prefer different conditions. This includes the transformation of Christmas.

Instead of asking respondents whether they are “bothered” by the decline in the religious elements of Christmas, Pew researchers should have asked if they are “happy” with this outcome. No doubt that would have elicited a different response.

Most Americans are not cultural warriors, so when they note changes in the culture that they dislike, they tend to shrug, saying such things as, “it is what it is.” That should not be read as an endorsement: it is a way of practically adjusting to new norms and values.

Similarly, if the American people had been asked some 30 years ago, when the “War on Christmas” began, whether they would prefer to preserve the religious roots of Christmas, or adopt a more secular approach, it is a sure bet they would have opted for the former. But the elites never asked—they never do—they simply imposed.

Anyone who thinks the “War on Christmas” is not real should go to the Catholic League website and check out our Annual

Reports; there are hundreds of examples available online. To read a short list of some of our favorites, click [here](#).

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## **CARDINAL LAW R.I.P.**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the death of Cardinal Bernard Law:

Cardinal Law was a champion of the unborn, a sincere friend of Jews, and a civil rights activist who embraced the cause of African Americans. Sadly, he will also be remembered for presiding over the clergy sexual abuse scandal.

Two of the most diabolical priests in the nation served in the Archdiocese of Boston—John Geoghan and Paul Shanley. Geoghan preyed on young boys, and Shanley had with sex with males of all ages, from children to adults.

It was Law's predecessor, Cardinal Humberto Medeiros, who appointed Shanley his "representative for sexual minorities," a bizarre role for any priest. This occurred in 1970, at a time when homosexual priests were actively abusing young men all across the nation. Shanley took advantage of his post, arguing publicly about the merits of man-boy sex; he was also named chaplain to Dignity, the dissident homosexual Catholic group.

By the end of the decade, Medeiros put an end to Shanley's ministry, but the damage had already been done. Shanley would later criticize two new oaths issued by the Vatican: the Profession of Faith and the Oath of Fidelity. The archdiocese did nothing about it. Indeed, it excused Shanley from taking the oath. It was delinquent decisions like this that created this monster priest.

Cardinal Law was a theological conservative, but he did not govern as a conservative. Indeed, it was his relaxed stance, allowing bishops subordinate to him to make decisions about molesting priests that got him into trouble. Had he confronted those who pushed for less stringent rules governing sexuality, there would have been no crisis. Ironically, those who promoted this agenda then blamed him when news of the homosexual scandal hit the news.

In taking the measure of any leader, we must weigh his strengths alongside his weaknesses. He had plenty of both.

Cardinal Law is now with the Lord. May he rest in peace.

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## CRUCIFIED SANTA BACK IN NYC GALLERY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a window display at the Central Park Fine Arts in New York City:

Robert Cenedella's "The Presence of Man," a painting of Santa Claus nailed to the Cross hovering over New York City, is now being displayed in the window of the Central Park Fine Arts gallery in New York City. It caught my eye when it debuted some 20 years ago.

At that time, I said, "We took no objection to art that protested the commercialization of Christmas, but we also maintained that it was not obvious that the painting conveyed that message."

More recently, thanks to a reporter from the *Daily News*, Cenedella and I exchanged our thoughts on his painting.

"My personal conclusion on the matter, after years of considering different opinions," Cenedella said, "is that Santa Claus has become the embodiment of Christmas, and to see him in place of Christ confuses and challenges those who have accepted a myth in place of what is considered the most important person in human history."

"We are not far apart," I replied. I told the reporter that "I take him at his word—the message he seeks to convey is indeed the commercialization of Christmas. I agree that it is not an auspicious development."

But I hastened to add that I still had two concerns, one from 1998 and one from now.

In 1998, I said, "Our point was that the artist could have made the same point by putting Santa in a noose, thus avoiding a conflict with Christians."

Cenedella's answer was revealing—he said that would offend African Americans. Yes it would. But to concede that point undermined his contention that his depiction of Santa crucified should not offend Christians. "To be exact," I said at the time, "blacks and Catholics are properly concerned about depictions of their heritage that appear insensitive."

Cenedella now writes that "what amazes me is that people are so offended by a character that is crucified, while the image of a *human being* in the same position is perfectly acceptable." (My italics.)

"What he wrote is disturbing," I replied, "though I hasten to add that I do not believe it was intentional. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, albeit in human form. Thus, he is not just another human being."

No matter, Cenedella has convinced me that he is well meaning. I am also convinced that he is more sensitive to other demographic groups than he is Christians.

Will the Catholic League protest his Santa crucified? No. Good intentions, while not dispositive, are important when assessing such matters. Also Cenedella's willingness to engage me is much appreciated. Besides, I save my real salvos for egregious attacks on Catholicism.

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## BOSTON GLOBE REFUSES TO NAME ABUSERS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the *Boston Globe's* practice of keeping confidential the names of employees charged with sexual abuse:

In the 1970s, a senior editor at the *Boston Globe* was known to sexually harass young female workers. He would ply them with alcohol and then make advances. More important, he was not the only one who preyed on women. But nothing was done to stop him, or the others.

Sexual abuse is still going on at the *Globe*. In March, a young woman employee filed a complaint against a male journalist with human resources. She said he propositioned her to have sex with his wife. But nothing came of it. One year ago, the same man propositioned her to have sex with him. He was allowed to stay on the job, until, that is, more accusations were made against him from outside the office.

So who is he? The *Globe* refuses to say. They declared this to be a "confidential personnel matter." Indeed, they are proud of covering up for the predator. *Globe* editor Brian McGrory says he knows he will be accused of hypocrisy, but says, "I can live with that far more easily than I can live with the thought of sacrificing our values to slake the thirst of this

moment.”

What are those company values, Mr. McGrory? Honesty? Consistency? Fairness? Transparency? Not on your life. What about fidelity to the law? Under Massachusetts law, sexual harassment in the workplace covers both *verbal* and physical conduct. The law explicitly says that sexual advances and *requests for sexual favors* constitute sexual harassment.

There is no reason to think that this kind of cover-up isn't going on at other media outlets (predators were known to senior employees at NPR and the *New York Times* and nothing was done about it). What makes the *Globe* worse is that it refuses to hold itself to the same standard it insists that the Catholic Church must respect. To top things off, sexual harassment in the workplace is still going on, and its boss is bragging how confidentiality rights matter more than full disclosure.

In 2002, the investigative staff of the *Boston Globe* published a book, *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church*; it detailed its findings on the sexual scandal in the Archdiocese of Boston. On the second page of the Foreword by Ben Bradlee Jr., he notes how the archdiocese settled claims of priestly sexual abuse “in private, with no public record.” Is that not what McGrory is now counseling—even touting—as the proper response to his miscreant employees?

On the next page, Bradlee writes how brave it was for the *Globe's* editor, Martin Baron, to challenge a judge's confidentiality order “on the grounds that the public interest in unsealing the documents [of offending priests] outweighed the privacy concerns of the litigants” of the Boston archdiocese. We can only assume that “privacy rights” constitute the “values” that McGrory covets—for the *Globe*, that is. They certainly do not apply to the Catholic Church.

The editorial page of the *Boston Globe* has been relentless in



calling out the Catholic Church for its reluctance to name the names of priests who have been disciplined for sexual abuse, even though it now insists it has no obligation to name the names of its employees who have been disciplined for such offenses. Here is an example of its editorial treatment of the Church.

- It accused the Church of a “code of silence” about abusive priests. (7/20/92)
- “It’s time for the secrecy to end.” (1/9/02)
- “Compassionate means exist to resolve these cases, but only if the Archdiocese of Boston provides the names of victims to law enforcement officials.” (2/27/02)
- After accusing the Boston archdiocese of a “veil of secrecy,” it wrote that “Full disclosure ought to be standard practice throughout the Catholic Church in the United States.” (3/13/02)
- “The essence of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church was clerical power and secrecy.” (6/16/03)
- It noted that “the district attorney criticized O’Malley [when the Boston archbishop was Bishop of Fall River] for not releasing names of priests involved in long-ago cases of abuse until the Boston scandal flared last year.” (7/2/03)
- It said Boston Archbishop Bernard Law was forced to resign because he would not release “confidential church personnel files.” (7/17/07)
- It accused Pope Benedict XVI of ruling over a “secretive culture.” (4/25/10)
- It said the Church had “kept information from parishioners” about offending priests. (7/21/10)
- It said that “over the years, a lack of transparency has been a problem for the Boston archdiocese.” (3/25/11)
- Archbishop O’Malley, it said, prevailed over an archdiocese that lacked transparency, noting that “The linchpin was secrecy.” (8/27/11)
- It heralded Archbishop O’Malley’s decision to “release

the names of priests accused of abuse,” imploring him to do more. (9/17/11)

This is just a sample of the editorials criticizing the Catholic Church for keeping names of molesting priests confidential. If we were to include news stories and op-eds that did the same, we could fill a book.

If the *Boston Globe* had any integrity, it would not have one standard for itself and one for the Catholic Church. But it plainly does, and that is why its credibility, at least on this matter, is shot.

We need Hollywood to do a “Spotlight” film on the corruption within the *Boston Globe*. But that is not likely to happen: studio moguls, actors, and entertainers—most of whom feel about the Catholic Church the way the *Globe* does—are too embroiled in sexual abuse scandals of their own.

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## NEW YORK TIMES HIRES NEW FACT CHECKER

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on fact-checking at the *New York Times*:

The *New York Times* has added a new fact-checker to its staff. Hopefully, the new person will take his job more seriously than his colleagues have.

On November 30, I contacted the “Corrections” editor at the *New York Times* offering proof that there were two serious errors, both in the same sentence, in a news story by Cara Buckley; the subject was Harvey Weinstein. There has been no correction, nor contention that I am wrong.

In her November 30 story, "Tainted Gold? This Year's Awards Season," Buckley said the following about Weinstein. "He arranged for Philomena Lee, who was forced by Irish nuns to give up her son for adoption, to meet the pope in the final weeks of the awards campaign for the 2013 film about her."

I emailed the following reply: "In the attachment you will see that Lee voluntarily (she was 22) assigned her baby to the care of the nuns. No one forced her to give up her baby. The source is from a book by Martin Sixsmith, upon which the movie was based."

"You will also see evidence that Weinstein failed to get a meeting with the pope," I said. "The best that could be arranged was to have Lee be a part of the general audience; she shook his hand behind a barricade." I even sent a picture of her standing behind the barricade shaking the pope's hand.

Why does this matter? Both statements are factually wrong, and both have the effect of feeding a negative portrait of Catholicism. Moreover, these falsehoods will be repeated by future writers.

Good luck to the new fact-checker. He has his work cut out for him.