

ABC'S "WHEN WE RISE" MOCKS CATHOLICS

Bill Donohue comments on last night's first episode of the Disney/ABC miniseries, "When We Rise":

Catholics in America make up about 25 percent of the population. Yet when it comes to negative stereotypes of religion, Hollywood targets us almost 100 percent of the time.

Nowhere is this more true than with gay-themed entertainment. The hostility shown toward all things Catholic made us wary when we heard about ABC's miniseries on the history of the gay rights movement, "When We Rise." As last night's opening episode confirmed, we were right to be on guard.

The slaps at Catholics kept coming. There was the nun, in full habit, of course, who walks in on two teenage boys kissing, grunts, and walks out; the young woman from a "very Catholic" family, whose put-upon mother was beaten down by 10 pregnancies and a domineering husband who wouldn't let her work outside the home; and the same young woman afraid to reveal her lesbian relationship because of that big Catholic family.

Most vicious was a discussion about holding a "women's march" in Boston. "We get beat up by the very cops that refuse to protect us," one character says, "in a city run by all Catholic cops."

Right. Any negative comments about "Jewish bankers," or "gay hairdressers," or "black criminals"? Of course not. Those vicious and hurtful stereotypes would never be uttered on TV networks—and rightfully so. But it's OK to stereotype "Catholic cops" who run a city and beat up women. As always, Catholics are the target of the entertainment industry's bigotry.

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KENTUCKY WEIGHS RELIGION IN SCHOOL

Bill Donohue comments on two bills before the Kentucky legislature:

In 1965, an animated Christmas special was aired, "Charlie Brown's Christmas." Peanuts character Linus quoted from Luke in the New Testament, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior which is Christ the Lord. That's what Christmas is all about." It was widely hailed as a thoughtful and joyous statement.

Back then, virtually no one thought about registering a complaint against "Charlie Brown's Christmas" being performed in a public school. But a half century later, activist Christmas haters now threaten lawsuits, and nervous school administrators cave in to the intimidation. That is why Kentucky lawmakers have said enough is enough.

At Christmastime 2015, a Kentucky school in Johnson County, W.R. Castle Elementary, was ordered by Superintendent Tom Salyer to excise the scene featuring Linus' statement about the true meaning of Christmas from the school's presentation of "Charlie Brown's Christmas." One person complained. That was enough to muzzle free speech.

Parents and public officials were not pleased with this act of censorship, and began to reexamine the role of religion in the schools. Two bills are now pending to rectify conditions.

The Senate bill, SB 17, is the more comprehensive of the two: it seeks to ensure the religious rights of teachers and students; it passed 31-3 and is now pending before the House. The other, HB 128, passed the House 80-14, and awaits Senate approval.

The Senate bill is in direct response to the censoring of "Charlie Brown's Christmas." The sponsor, Sen. Albert Robinson, would like to expand the religious and political rights of students, whether expressed in homework assignments, artwork or other modes of speech.

In addition, his bill would respect speeches given by students at a school forum: the text of their remarks could not be altered before delivering them. Religious messages on student clothing would also be covered, as would the right of students to meet outside the classroom for religious purposes. Teachers could use the Bible to teach history and the study of religion; they could also use it to discuss biblical influences on art and music.

The House bill would allow an elective social studies course on "the Hebrew Scripture, Old Testament of the Bible, the New Testament, or a combination" of the two. The bill's sponsor, Rep. D.J. Johnson, reminds us that "The Bible is the single most impactful literary work that we have in Western civilization. It affects our culture, our values, our laws."

That these measures are needed in 2017 is a sign of how militant the nation's secular activists have become. All these bills would do is lock in what should be considered the uncontroversial rights of students and teachers.

A Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life report of 2007 accurately summarized these rights. The following four principles can be found in two documents: the 1995 "Religious Expression in Public School" report by the U.S. Department of Education, and its revised guidelines in 2003:

- “Students, acting on their own, have the same right to engage in religious activity and discussion as they do to engage in comparable secular activities.
- “Students may offer a prayer or blessing before meals in school or assemble on school grounds for religious purposes to the same extent as other students who wish to express their personal views or assemble with others.
- “Students may not engage in religious harassment of others or compel other students to participate in religious expression, and schools may control aggressive and unwanted proselytizing.
- “Schools may neither favor nor disfavor students or groups on the basis of their religious identities.”

Regarding the rights of teachers, while they cannot teach religion, they have every right to teach about religion. There is a difference between mandating that students believe that Jesus is the Son of God and teaching that this is what Christians believe.

The American people want to guarantee religious rights in the public schools. A Pew survey from 2006 found that 69 percent agreed that “liberals have gone too far in trying to keep religion out of the schools and the government.” In 2002, a Rasmussen poll found that 82 percent favor celebrating at least some religious holidays in school, Christmas being first among them. In 2013, a Rasmussen survey reported that a majority of Americans believe that “public schools need more religion.”

This past Christmas, a school district in Texas banned a “Charlie Brown Christmas” display because the dreaded word “Christ” was mentioned. The school board agreed. Fortunately, the censors were overruled by Bell County State District Judge Jack Jones. “Religious discrimination toward Christians has become a holiday tradition of sorts among certain groups,” he noted.

Kentucky lawmakers need to insist that the religious rights of students and teachers are respected, and the governor needs to be supportive of them. They would then be providing a great model for all states. Not to do so would be to award the censors with constitutional rights they should never have.

ALAN COLMES, R.I.P.

Bill Donohue comments on the death of Alan Colmes:

For many years, I was a guest on “Hannity and Colmes,” and that is how I got to know Alan. His kindness was always evident, as was his great sense of humor. He was never hostile, even in the midst of a heated debate.

I told Alan many times what I said to conservatives who said they didn’t like him. “So you know him?” No, they said, but they didn’t agree with him. Unfortunately, too many people make judgments about a person based on his thinking, not his character.

Alan Colmes was a gentleman. May he rest in peace.

ACLU’S WAR ON CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE CONTINUES

Bill Donohue comments on the ACLU’s latest anti-Catholic attack:

The ACLU continues its war on Catholic health care, this time in Peoria, Illinois.

The ACLU objects to the fact that federally funded Heartland Health Services leases two of its four clinics from OSF Saint Francis Medical Center. The lease agreement requires staff at those two clinics to comply with the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services—meaning, complains the ACLU, that patients cannot get prescription contraceptives at those clinics.

Heartland's director of marketing, however, points out that prescription contraceptives are available at its other two clinics in the city, and that it offers free bus passes and taxi vouchers for patients who might have transportation issues. So once again, the issue for the ACLU is not access to contraception. Their real goal is to bring the Catholic Church to heel—forcing it to either provide “services” that contravene its moral teachings, or else to get out of health care ministry. This is just the latest front in the ACLU's ongoing assault on the religious freedom of Catholic health care institutions.

As usual, the real victims would be the people who rely on those institutions: in this case, Peoria's low-income adults and children, minorities, uninsured, medically indigent, and homeless who are the focus of Heartland's services. They are the people who would suffer if the ACLU succeeds in driving a wedge between Heartland Health Services and OSF Saint Francis Medical Center.

But to the ACLU, they are just acceptable collateral damage in its ideological war against the Catholic Church.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH SLAVERY AND RAPE?

Bill Donohue comments on media reaction to a speech given by Georgetown professor Jonathan Brown on February 7:

Two weeks ago today, a professor from Georgetown University publicly rose to the defense of slavery and rape, and not a single major media outlet—with the exception of a blogger on the Washington Post website and a brief posting on foxnews.com—has said a word about it. The absence of outrage is not hard to figure out: Jonathan Brown's defense was limited to Islam.

Brown, a convert to Islam, holds an endowed chair in Islamic studies at Georgetown. The Jesuit-run institution has a wealthy benefactor in Saudi Arabia, a nation which bans Christianity. How sweet.

What did Georgetown get from this arrangement? Money, and a lot of it. Twelve years ago, Saudi Arabia wrote a check to the Jesuit-run institution for \$20 million; it went to support the school's Center for Muslim Christian Understanding, run by Brown. And what did Saudi Arabia get from this peculiar "understanding"? Legitimacy.

The fruit from this decayed tree is now apparent. Georgetown now employs a tenured professor who defends slavery and rape, provided the slavemasters and rapists are Muslims. This is apparently Georgetown's idea of diversity. It also shows how phony the school is. Why all the handwringing about Georgetown's ownership of American slaves in the 19th century when it employs defenders of slavery today?

Brown's position was not made in the heat of debate. If anything his comments were well prepared: they were delivered at the Islamic Institute for Islamic Thought. After being

criticized by some, he tried to walk it back, offering a lame Tweet that meant nothing.

“As a category, as a conceptual category that exists throughout states and trans-historically,” Brown said clumsily, “there’s no such thing as slavery.” It gets better. “I don’t think you can talk about slavery in Islam until you realize that there is no such thing as slavery.”

It is not certain what Brown would say to slaves in Mauritania and Somalia today—they are owned by their Muslim masters. Would he tell them to stop promoting fake news? Would he tell them that slavery is a mirage? Would he tell them that they are delusional? Better yet, would he switch places with them?

Brown is also incompetent. If slavery doesn’t exist in Muslim-run nations, why the need to justify it? “Slavery cannot just be treated as a moral evil in and of itself,” he opined. He really means it. “I don’t think it’s morally evil to own somebody because we own lots of people all around us.”

(Who he owns he did not say, but perhaps the Southern Poverty Law Center will look into it. Maybe I’ll convert to Islam and see if I can buy him. I’ll use my credit card—Mastercard for the Master.)

When someone in the audience challenged Brown, he became indignant, as well as inconsistent. “The fact that there was slavery is wrong [thus did he contradict his remark that there was no such thing in Islam]. Okay. If you’re a Muslim, the prophet of God...had slaves. He had slaves. There’s no denying that. Are you more morally mature than the prophet of God? No, you are not.”

One would hope that all of us are more morally mature than Muhammad. After all, he was not only a slavemaster and an advocate of violence, he consummated his marriage with his bride Aisha when she was nine years old. That’s what we call rape.

Speaking of which, Brown went on to say that non-consensual sex—it's called rape—is okay with him, at least if the offenders are adherents to Islam. He took aim at the Western notion of "consent," maintaining that "It's very hard to have this discussion because we think of, let's say in the modern United States, the *sine qua non* of morally correct sex is consent."

Continuing his defense of rape, Brown criticized Americans for making a big deal about individual rights. "We fetishize the idea of autonomy to the extent that we forget, again who's really free? Are we really autonomous people?" In other words, since none of us is really autonomous, the difference between us and a rape victim is more contrived than real.

Brown and Georgetown would be on the front page of every newspaper in the nation if he had justified Christians enslaving and raping Muslims. It would be the lead news story of the night on television, and the Internet would explode. But because Brown was justifying slavery and rape committed by Muslims—whose real life victims are Christians and Jews—there's hardly a peep.

This is moral relativism gone off the cliff. It is a direct consequence of multiculturalism run amuck. On campuses and newsrooms across the country, the Judeo-Christian ethos and heritage has been slashed and burned beyond belief, the rubble of which is Professor Jonathan Brown, Georgetown University, and the media.

MICHAEL NOVAK, R.I.P.

Bill Donohue comments on the death of Michael Novak:

Michael Novak was more than a brilliant and dedicated Catholic, his range of scholarship was astounding. Theologian, sociologist, economist, political scientist—he was all of these and more.

I have many fond memories of my exchanges with Mike. He was courageous and kind, thoughtful and considerate, and always there when you needed him. His commitment to the Catholic League's best interests meant a great deal to me and to the organization; he served on our board of advisors for over 20 years.

God bless Michael Novak. He will surely be missed

RELIGION SURVEY RAISES MANY QUESTIONS

Bill Donohue comments on the results of a new Pew Research Center survey on religion:

The Pew survey employs a “feeling thermometer” to measure how Americans feel about religious groups. Consistent with previous Pew surveys, the methodology is sound. But the commentary by reporters and pundits on its findings has been mostly a summation of the results, seriously lacking in analysis.

Its most basic finding is that Americans are feeling warmer about religious groups today than they were in 2014. That is a

positive sign. Jews and Catholics are at the top of the thermometer readings (67 and 66, respectively); atheists and Muslims are at the bottom (50 and 48, respectively). Among the four age groups that were surveyed, only Catholics were rated in the top three religious groups across the board.

Why Catholics are looked upon so favorably was not addressed. From the vantage of the Catholic League, this finding means there is a huge gap between the public's perception of Catholics and the perception that is projected by the cultural elite. To be specific, no religious group is insulted by Hollywood more than Catholics, whether on TV or in the movies. Indeed, if we were to include all demographic groups—from gays to the working class—Catholics would still be the most negatively portrayed group on the tube and on the screen.

On the surface the Pew survey is good news. It suggests that most people make their determinations about religious groups independent of Hollywood's influence. But it is important to keep in mind that the survey did not measure feelings toward priests—they are almost uniformly portrayed in a vile way—nor did it measure feelings toward the institution of the Catholic Church (also the subject of relentless disparagement).

It is not surprising that atheists are the least fond of evangelical Christians (they merit a score of 29), and are much more embracing of Buddhists and Hindus (68 and 60, respectively). After all, evangelicals are perceived as taking their Christianity seriously, providing a ripe target for many atheists.

What are we to make of the fact that young people (18-29), unlike the other three older groups, have the most positive feelings about Buddhists (66) and Hindus (tied with Catholics at 64)? They rank them higher than evangelical Christians, Mormons, Jews, Muslims, atheists, and mainline Protestants.

The survey found that knowing someone from a different

religion increases the likelihood of having a positive response about that religion. But this does not explain why young people hold Buddhists and Hindus in such high regard: only 22 percent of them say they know a Buddhist person and only 21 percent know a Hindu. Moreover, they know someone from all the other categories more than Buddhists and Hindus. Therefore, having an association with those of another religion does not explain why young people feel so positively about those of an Eastern religion.

One possible answer is multiculturalism. Young people have been subjected to hours of lectures on different cultures and religions, and a significant part of that experience yields a much more negative appraisal of Western civilization than Eastern civilization. Just examine the textbooks used in the schools.

If this analysis is correct, there is nothing to cheer about. Young people's perceptions of Buddhists and Hindus may have more to do with being indoctrinated with political correctness than any other factor.

The survey raises interesting questions. Too bad most commentators have been decidedly incurious about them.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS IMPERILED

Bill Donohue addresses the most pressing civil liberties issue of our time:

On February 16, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice will hold a hearing on "The

State of Religious Liberty in America.” Hopefully, it will accelerate the push to secure this most fundamental of freedoms.

President Trump is considering an executive order on religious liberty, the draft of which holds much promise. But legislation is also needed: religious liberty is currently imperiled on several fronts.

The war on religion—and that is exactly what it is—is being led by agents of government and activist groups seeking to impose a militant secular agenda on Americans. What drives them more than any other issue is an irresponsible interpretation of sexual freedom.

The activists and lawmakers pushing this cause accuse many religious institutions of resisting their agenda. They are correct. Traditional Catholics, evangelical Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Jews, Mormons, and Muslims, reject abortion and homosexuality, and they find attempts by the government to encroach on their beliefs and practices objectionable. There is much to object to, especially at the state level.

Many states are considering pro-abortion legislation. In Connecticut, they are weighing a bill that takes aim at a familiar target: crisis pregnancy centers. These centers are the epitome of choice—they give young pregnant girls the choice of giving their baby up for adoption—yet the pro-choice lobby works to deny them this choice.

In Illinois and Maryland lawmakers are considering bills that would allow Medicaid and state employee health insurance to cover abortions.

In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo is pushing the legislature to consider a bill that makes abortion legal for any reason, and at any time during pregnancy, even if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned; he wants *Roe* codified in the New York State

Constitution. Rhode Island lawmakers are studying similar legislation.

New Mexico is considering a bill that would force Catholic hospitals to pay for and perform abortions. The ACLU and other anti-Catholic organizations are lobbying for it.

Most outrageous, there is a coordinated effort going on in 18 states to expand abortion rights. They want abortion to be covered in both public and private insurance plans, including Catholic ones.

This fight is being led by pro-abortion lawmakers in Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin. In St. Louis, city lawmakers passed a bill last week that threatens to do the same.

On the LGBT front, the following states are weighing measures that would treat LGBT rights as analogous to race and religion in the workplace: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Texas. Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe recently signed an executive order that protects LGBT rights among state employees, contractors, and subcontractors.

New York's Cardinal Timothy Dolan, who chairs the bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, recently sent a letter to President Trump calling on him and his administration to make religious liberty protections a priority. They also called on the Congress to do the same.

Lori specifically cited the Health and Human Services mandate issued by the Obama administration as a grave threat to religious liberty; it would make religious institutions such as the Little Sisters of the Poor pay for abortion-inducing

drugs in their healthcare provisions.

The most immediate relief needed is to secure the kinds of religious exemptions in law that have been traditionally afforded. Not to do so is to allow the government to police Catholic non-profits and other religious entities.

President Trump needs to issue a strongly worded executive order on religious liberty, one that is as wide in scope as the law allows. Similarly, lawmakers at the local, state, and federal levels need to pass bills that safeguard religious liberty from the heavy hand of government. At stake is the First Amendment and the beliefs and practices of millions of Americans.

MACY'S CASE CONCLUSION AWAITED

Bill Donohue comments on the Macy's anti-Catholic discrimination case:

Our feud with Macy's may be coming to an end.

Members recall that last year we led a campaign against the mega-department store chain for its firing of a Catholic Hispanic senior store detective, Javier Chavez, merely because he disagreed with the store's policy of allowing cross-dressing men to use the ladies room.

Chavez was made aware of Macy's policy after a transgender person complained when told to leave the ladies room. Even though he agreed to enforce the policy, he was punished by the Macy's thought police for expressing his personal

reservations, grounded in his Catholic faith.

How much will be made public regarding this issue has to do with how this is handled by the New York State Division of Human Rights. If the ruling is made part of the public record, we will make an announcement.

No matter what the official outcome is, Macy's has proven to be a brazen bully. We hope our role in making this episode public helps to generate a fair conclusion for Chavez.

HARVEY WEINSTEIN SEEKING A FIGHT?

Bill Donohue comments on movie mogul Harvey Weinstein:

There is no one in Hollywood who delights in offending Catholics more than Harvey Weinstein: he has made a long list of anti-Catholic films.

Now he is at it again, putting the final touches on his latest contribution to Catholic-themed films, *Mary Magdalene*. No release date has been set.

In December, the online edition of the *Hollywood Reporter* asked rhetorically if the movie, starring Rooney Mara, "will spark controversy among conservative Christians?" Co-producer Iain Canning said it wouldn't. Time will tell if he is right, but one thing is certain: Weinstein is laying the groundwork for a fight.

Weinstein is quoted by Screen International saying, "I'll probably take a vacation around the time the film comes out because over the years the Catholic League have [*sic*] made me

their poster boy. I get sent lovely letters [saying things] like 'Dear Jew mother*****'."

I have a quote for Weinstein. "If you don't want to be the subject of vitriol, stop baiting Catholics. If a Catholic made as many anti-Semitic films as you have made anti-Catholic ones, no one should be surprised if some Jews act badly. Stop the bigotry and stop the whining."