

NYS WEIGHS NEW RULES FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on new guidelines for private schools in New York State:

There is a proper, but limited, role for government in seeing to it that private schools meet certain academic standards. This is not controversial. Problems begin, however, when oversight slides into meddling. For private schools in New York State, this has now emerged as a legitimate concern; religious schools have the most to fear. New rules governing private schools will soon be issued.

The proximate cause of the new guidelines for private schools, as announced by Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia, are conditions that inhere in some Orthodox Jewish yeshivas. There have been complaints from some of the parents who send their children to these schools that the time spent on religious studies is excessive; this allegedly comes at the expense of time spent on basic academic subjects.

[Note: The source of most of the complaints are schools in Kiryas Joel, an Orthodox Jewish community 45 miles northwest of New York City. In 1999, the Catholic League filed an amicus brief in support of the right of Orthodox Jews in Kiryas Joel to maintain their own school district for disabled children. We did so to protect their religious rights.]

Current law mandates that private schools must offer an education that is “substantially equivalent” to that provided by public schools. This means, for instance, that the academic achievement scores of students in private schools—in such subjects as math, English, history, and science—should be roughly the same as those tallied in public schools. The new guidelines, which will soon be published, will address what

happens when private schools fail to meet expectations.

For many private schools, especially parochial ones, this is not a problem: their scores are well above their public counterparts. But what happens if a religious school fails miserably? Under the new guidelines, public funding would be cut, impacting the entire school. Of paramount concern is the scope of public oversight of private schools.

How much authority will public school superintendents be given in their oversight role of private schools? From what we know, they will be asked to inspect the curriculum and instructional material used in private schools. Visitation rights will be granted, allowing public officials to sit in on classes, all in the name of assessing how private schools—many of them religious—are conducting themselves.

There's the rub: The guidelines run the risk of allowing the state to encroach on the First Amendment rights of religious schools. It is one thing to assess private schools; it is quite another to police them. Previous rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court rightly protect the autonomy of religious schools, so the guidelines had better not cross church and state lines.

Surely there is a way to address poor performing private schools without inviting a new series of lawsuits. The more narrow and specific the scope of authority awarded to those who will assess private schools, the better.

ARCHBISHOP SMEARED AT U.N.

EVENT

Catholic League president Bill Donohue invited University of Mississippi School of Law Professor Ronald Rychlak to address a serious issue at the United Nations.

Professor Rychlak has lectured and authored works on Cardinal Stepinac; has written eight books; is a past honoree at the U.S. Holocaust Museum for his work on inter-faith dialogue; is an advisor to the Holy See's delegation to the U.N.; and serves on the advisory board of the Catholic League. Thus, he is well suited to discuss the following issue. Here are his remarks:

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres recently gave his permission for the opening of an exhibition at the U.N. building in New York City. Entitled "Jasenovac – The Right to Remember," the exhibit is part of a joint Serbian-Jewish project connected to International Holocaust Remembrance Day. It focuses on war crimes committed in the most notorious World War II concentration camp in Croatia – Jasenovac. While reports on the number of people who died there vary greatly, the memorial webpage maintains a list of 69,842 victims.

No one questions the importance of remembering and documenting the horrors of the concentration camps, but Croatian authorities have protested aspects of the exhibit. The biggest problem has to do with how it portrays Archbishop (later Cardinal) Alojzije Stepinac from the Archdiocese of Zagreb.* Rather than being a collaborator with those who ran the camp, as the exhibit suggests, he openly opposed the abuses and defended the victims of Jasenovac. Allegations against him are most unfair.

During the Second World War, when Croatia was part of Yugoslavia, a pro-Nazi group, the Ustaše, came to power under

leader Ante Pavelic. Ustaše leaders claimed a Catholic background, but they were not on good terms with the Church. They were very vicious in their persecution of Jews, Serbs, and anyone who got in their way. They also ignored repeated instruction from the Church not to engage in forcible conversions.

Stepinac often preached against racism and in support of Serbs, Jews, and others who were persecuted for their race. His sermons against the Ustaše were so strong that the fascist leaders prohibited their publication. There is even a story about a Nazi officer who came to Zagreb and heard Stepinac condemn the Ustaše's actions so strongly that he said, "If a churchman in Germany spoke like that, he would not step down from the pulpit alive."

The Associated Press reported that "by 1942 Stepinac had become a harsh critic" of the Ustaše, condemning its "genocidal policies, which killed tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and Croats." The feud between the Ustaše and the Church eventually got so serious that several Catholic priests were sent to Jasenovac.

In 1943, Stepinac wrote that "Jasenovac is a shame and stain for the Independent State of Croatia... The entire nation, particularly the close families of the murdered seek retribution, reparation, the bringing of the executioners before the court. They are the gravest misfortune of Croatia!" He sent money and sacks of flour to the Jewish community on a monthly basis for the benefit of the inmates at Jasenovac.

Stepinac's reputation was tainted after the war when a Soviet-dominated Communist government took over and began persecuting the Church. Stepinac was tried and convicted of treason and collaboration with the Ustaše in a proceeding that was widely recognized as a show trial. With the fall of communism, the unfairness of the trial was revealed. In 2016, his conviction was annulled due to "gross violations of current and former

fundamental principles of substantive and procedural criminal law.” Pope John Paul II, of course, did not need to wait for that governmental action; he declared Stepinac a martyr and beatified the cardinal in 1998.

Historians should take care not to perpetrate falsehoods as they work to memorialize the past. Croation authorities are legitimately concerned that the display at the U.N. will do just that.

**From what we have learned the exhibit was modified before its U.N showing, excising any reference to Archbishop Stepinac.*

“ALIENIST” GETS CRAZY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the January 29 edition of the TNT show, “The Alienist”:

On last night’s edition of “The Alienist,” there was an exchange between a priest and a doctor—the latter is the wizard, of course—that was priceless. The scene is set in the 1890s in New York City. After some horny young gal was caught masturbating, the good Father takes her to Dr. Wizard.

Stop right there: Is this what priests did in the late nineteenth century—escort self-pleasuring adolescents to the neighborhood physician? Yes, according to the #MeToo Hollywood script writers, this is exactly what happened.

The priest, being a stereotypical dunce, suggests that his masturbating friend undergo an “ice bath.” But that doesn’t always work. Worms, we learn, are needed to make a difference. This explains why Fr. Dunce recommends that leeches be thrown in. Dr. Wizard disagrees, telling Fr. Dunce that “there’s not

a thing your mother nor any priest can do about it [the masturbating].”

What would Louis C.K. do? Best not to answer.

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MAKING CATHOLIC HOSPITALS ILLEGAL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a demand that Catholic hospitals be made illegal:

An editorial in today's *New York Times* posits a conflict between religion and healthcare, abortion being the main focus. “Freedom of religion is essential—and so is access to health care,” it says. It should have stopped there.

Instead, the editorial says that “Current law tries to accommodate both, but the far right has stirred unfounded fears that religion (and Christianity in particular) is under assault, and that people of faith are in danger of being forced to do things they find morally objectionable.”

The far-right has stirred unfounded fears that Christianity is under assault? First of all, the term “far-right” is usually employed to describe the Klan or some assembly of racists or terrorists. Second, one does not have to be a Brownshirt to know that organizations such as the ACLU—which the *Times* favorably cites—have given Christians, especially Catholics, lots to fear. Importantly, their concerns are grounded in reason, not emotion. Here's the proof.

A recently published report, “Bearing Faith: The Limits of

Catholic Health Care for Women of Color," is the most anti-Catholic document assessing Catholic healthcare ever published. The authors want to effectively shut down Catholic hospitals, unless, of course, they stop being Catholic. The report is the work of the Public Rights/Private Conscience Project, a unit of Columbia Law School. It draws on data supplied by MergerWatch.

MergerWatch is a child of Planned Parenthood. In the 1990s, MergerWatch was a project of the Education Fund of Family Planning Advocates of New York State. Family Planning Advocates is the lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood. MergerWatch frequently teams up with such groups as the ACLU, Catholics for Choice, NARAL, and other foes of the Catholic Church.

The report goes beyond the usual criticisms of Catholic hospitals made by the pro-abortion industry: It plays the race card, trying to paint Catholic hospitals as racist.

How does it manage to do this? It claims that African American women are more likely to go to a Catholic hospital than white women, and because Catholic teachings proscribe killing in the womb, this means that African American women are more subject to abortion restrictions. Of course, no one is forced to go to a Catholic hospital, and everyone knows, or should know, that abortion is not sanctioned by the Catholic Church.

The authors are so desperate in their attempt to brand the Catholic Church as a racist institution that they include a statement about slavemasters who raped black women. So what does this have to do with the Church? Nothing. Even the authors do not attempt to pin this on the Church, but the fact that it is included in a report on Catholic healthcare makes it clear what they want readers to believe.

Unfair as this part of the report is, what is really driving the authors is an animus against Catholic teachings on life.

To be specific, they cite the “Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services” that was issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Their major objection? The Church’s teachings on abortion. They know, however, that in order to accomplish their goal, they must throw the kitchen sink at the Church, hoping something sticks.

Most Americans, including those who are not Catholic, have no problem with Catholic hospitals, but this doesn’t stop the authors from trying to portray this as a myth. They claim that Catholic hospitals “provide disproportionately less charity care than do public hospitals and other religious non-profit hospitals.”

The evidence the authors use to make this charge is from a report by the ACLU and MergerWatch in 2013. It found that public hospitals serve more Medicaid patients than Catholic hospitals do. So what? Why is this surprising?

Public hospitals are not likely to be located in wealthy neighborhoods: they are more likely to be in areas where the indigent live. More important, as even the report notes, Catholic hospitals have a better record of serving the poor than either secular non-profits or for-profit hospitals (the margin of difference between Catholic hospitals and religious non-profits is statistically insignificant).

The authors are so worked up over trying to stick it to Catholic hospitals that they even find fault with Catholic hospitals that don’t have Catholic names. For example, they find it objectionable that there are Catholic hospitals known as Affinity and AMITA. Again so what? As if every Catholic institution should have a name like St. John’s. By this logic, the founders of Stonehill College can be accused of trickery for not acknowledging its Catholic identity.

Also, it does not help the authors to cite a recent study

showing that “37% of patients whose regular hospital was Catholic were unaware of its religious affiliation.” If the care were substandard, they wouldn’t be coming back.

Toward the end of the report, the authors critically cite several laws that protect the autonomy of religious healthcare institutions. This underscores my point: It shows that their real problem is the First Amendment. If they had it their way, the free exercise of religion provision would be excised. This is a serious charge—it demands serious evidence. Fortunately, the authors supply it.

Their first recommendation says it all: “Reform laws and policies that allow health care providers to refuse service on the basis of religious or conscience objections.” They could not be more clear—do away with all exemptions for religious hospitals. In short, force Catholic hospitals to be thoroughly secularized, thus neutering their Catholic identity. In short, this means making Catholic hospitals illegal. It would be like telling Jewish restaurants they can no longer serve kosher food, but they can stay in business if they want.

This is what the Catholic haters want. Alas, there is one saving grace: at least now no one can pretend that their goal is not to shut down Catholic hospitals.

CONGRESS ASKED TO LAUNCH NEA PROBE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue is asking the House and Senate Subcommittees of the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies—the unit of the Appropriations Committees that oversees the National Endowment for the Arts—to conduct a

probe of the NEA for violating its own funding guidelines. To read it, click [here](#).

“SPRINGER OPERA” AND THE NEA CHAIRMAN

Catholic League president Bill Donohue has written to the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts about funding a grantee that is hosting “Jerry Springer: The Opera.” To read it click [here](#).

Contact NEA Chairman Dr. Jane Chu: chairman@arts.gov

APPEAL TO PRESIDENT TRUMP

Catholic League president Bill Donohue sent this [letter](#) to President Donald Trump today regarding yesterday’s press conference on the National Endowment for the Arts.

HHS CRITICS GO OFF THE DEEP

END

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on how opponents reacted to several new religious freedom initiatives:

The Trump administration's Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) took several welcome steps last week to roll back Obama era policies that undermined the conscience rights and religious freedom of health care providers.

The effectiveness of these initiatives can be gauged by the level of hysteria they provoked among pro-abortion, LGBT, and other assorted enemies of religious liberty.

Planned Parenthood—which, as the nation's leading abortionist, stands to lose its pipeline to state Medicaid family planning funds—said the new initiatives will be used “to deny essential, potentially life-saving care to people of all identities.”

Sara Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD, warned ominously of health care workers “denying a transgender person—or any person—life saving care if they walk into an emergency room.”

The new Conscience and Religious Freedom division announced by HHS “puts in place systemic, intrusive oppression,” wailed the National Organization for Women. It “is likely to promote a license to discriminate,” chimed in Sarah Warbelow, legal director of the gay advocacy group Human Rights Campaign.

“The new office...is meant to make it easier for people to discriminate, not to protect people of faith,” charged Kelli Garcia, senior counsel at the National Women's law Center.

Not to be outdone, the ACLU accused the administration of “doubling down on licensing discrimination against women and LGBT people, all in the name of religion.”

Catholics for Choice vice president Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe termed the religious freedom initiatives “a cheap attempt by President Trump to pander to ultraconservative special interests that got him into power.”

“This is the use of religion to hurt people,” moaned Harper Jean Tobin of the National Center for Transgender Equality.

Given such hysterics, one would think HHS was imposing a whole new set of draconian laws. But in fact, no new laws are being promulgated.

The new Conscience and Religious Freedom division of the HHS Office of Civil Rights (OCR), and a new HHS rule announced Friday, are designed to see that *existing* laws protecting religious liberty and conscience rights are vigorously enforced—something that was sorely lacking during the Obama administration. And far from *denying* life-saving care, these initiatives protect faith-based health care providers from being forced to *take lives* through procedures like abortion and assisted suicide.

Similarly, new HHS guidelines to state Medicaid directors simply restore state flexibility in excluding abortion providers, like Planned Parenthood, from Medicaid-funded family planning programs. This was the policy that existed prior to a 2016 Obama administration directive that forced states to include abortion providers in such funding.

The enemies of religious freedom all operated from the same dishonest playbook. They claimed that the HHS initiatives promote discrimination against women, gays, and so-called “transgenders.”

That is false. As OCR director Roger Severino made clear, during a Friday morning conference call joined by Catholic League communications director Rick Hinshaw, the new initiatives do not target any group for discrimination. Just the opposite: they protect faith-based health care providers

from anti-religious discrimination.

And that is what really enrages these promoters of religious bigotry.

PRESS CONFERENCE ON “JERRY SPRINGER: THE OPERA”

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an anti-Christian play that previews on January 23:

On January 23, “Jerry Springer: The Opera,” a New Group production, will preview at the Pershing Square Signature Center, an off-Broadway venue.

That morning, at 9:30 a.m., I will hold a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington D.C., raising objections to the play and the source of funding for the New Group. Regarding the latter, the New Group receives *most* of its funding from public sources, led by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

The press conference has two objectives: to call attention to this frontal assault on Christian sensibilities; and to request that President Trump nominate a new chairman of the NEA, one who will discontinue funding of anti-Christian grantees, exhibitions, and performances. The current chairman’s tenure ends in April; the president is expected to announce his nominee in the near future.

To read a script summary of this vile, obscene, and grossly anti-Christian musical, click [here](#).

I am grateful to all those Catholics and evangelicals who have

expressed their support for our efforts.

HBO REFUSES TO SANCTION MAHER

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Bill Maher's Friday night show:

HBO chief Richard Plepler refuses to sanction Bill Maher, even though he was deluged with a petition in November by outraged Catholics protesting Maher's bigotry. Maher gives most demographic groups a pass, but is pathologically obsessed in his determination to slander all priests. His return on Friday showed that he picked up where he left off.

Maher showed a picture of a statue of St. Dominic, one that was recently commissioned by the Catholic Church in Australia. The statue depicts the saint offering a young boy bread; the child is standing next to the image at waist level. Maher, of course, saw this as a sexual statement, saying Church officials "didn't think it all the way through." He added, "Subway restaurants have finally found their new spokesperson, Father Footlong."

Maher is not only a bigot, he and his homosexual writers continue to promote a false narrative: most of the priests involved in sexual abuse—there are very few today—were homosexuals who hit on postpubescent males. So if Maher wants to continue with this theme, let him at least tell the truth.

Of course, Maher doesn't have the guts to tell the truth. If he did, he would have ripped into his sexually challenged buddy, Louis C.K.; instead, he let him off. Moreover, if he did dump on homosexuals, Plepler would drop the hammer on him. As long as he continues to defame priests, Plepler will look

the other way.

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