

WOULD RELIGION HAVE SAVED BOURDAIN?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the death of Anthony Bourdain:

If Anthony Bourdain had been a religious man, would he have killed himself? Probably not. The celebrity chef was found dead today in his hotel room in Strasbourg, France.

Bourdain was raised by his Catholic father and Jewish mother, though neither of them saw fit to raise him in any religion. In 2011, he said his views on religion were similar to those expressed by Christopher Hitchens, the British atheist. This is why the atheist organization, Freedom From Religion Foundation, was so proud of him.

His death comes at the same time of a study on suicide issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Suicide rates have spiked dramatically in recent years, in nearly every state. Indeed, suicide is now the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S. One of the chief factors contributing to suicide, the study said, is substance abuse. Bourdain was a known substance abuser.

The study, "*Vital Signs: Trends in State Suicide Rates—United States, 1999-2016 and Circumstances Contributing to Suicide—27 States, 2015*," has one glaring flaw: it says nothing about religion. The eight authors of the study disaggregate the data on the basis of sex, age, race/ethnicity, and other factors, but not on religion. This is inexcusable: virtually all studies on suicide include the variable of religiosity, or religious practice and commitment.

As I have recounted in my book, *The Catholic Advantage: How Health, Happiness, and Heaven Await the Faithful*, there is an inverse relationship between religiosity and suicide: those

who are regular churchgoers have a much lower rate of suicide than atheists like Bourdain.

May Anthony Bourdain rest in peace. And may the CDC hire more astute scholars.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS TARGETED BY NYS ABUSE BILL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on recent exchanges between the Catholic League and New York State Senator Brad Hoylman:

New York State Senator Brad Hoylman says that his co-sponsored Child Victims Act does indeed apply equally, in every regard, to public institutions, as well as private ones. Furthermore, he has agreed to invite former New York State Appeals Judge Susan Phillips Read to consult with him on the language of his bill so that there is no ambiguity about this matter.

We commend Senator Hoylman for his decision.

This issue first arose on May 11 in a phone conversation I had with Senator Hoylman. I told him that many Catholic lawyers were not convinced that the language of his bill would cover public schools retrospectively.

To be exact, I asked him about the “lookback” provision, that part of the bill which allows alleged victims of child sexual abuse to file claims extending back before the statute of limitations expired. I asked if he would say, unequivocally, that it is his intent to have the “lookback” provision apply to the public schools. He replied that his bill already does

that. He then faxed me a copy of it, noting those areas where the bill meets this objective.

I shared a copy of this fax with the New York State Catholic Conference. Their lawyers reviewed it and found it wanting: they were still not convinced that the bill applied to public institutions retrospectively. They then asked if Judge Read would offer her own assessment of the bill. On June 5, the Conference issued a news release saying that Judge Read had determined that the "lookback" provision of the bill does not extend to public entities.

Once the Conference released its statement, I emailed Tara Klein, the legislative director for Senator Hoylman (whom I had previously dealt with), to see if Senator Hoylman would agree to meet with Judge Read. "I am requesting that this issue be put to rest by having Senator Hoylman sit down with Judge Read and craft language that accomplishes the ends he says he wants, without any ambiguity."

On June 6, Senator Hoylman called our office and spoke to Rick Hinshaw, our director of communications. He told Rick that he would be open to any suggestions from Judge Read that would assure everyone that the public schools are covered in all aspects of the bill. When asked if he would invite her to consult with him, he said he would.

We are taking Senator Hoylman at his word.

From our perspective, the bill is in need of some slight rewording. All that needs to be done is to insert a clear-cut statement to the effect that every part of the Child Victims Act is meant to have equal application to both the public and private sectors.

In short, we are not doubting Senator Hoylman's intent. What we are asking for is the one thing that the bill seriously lacks—clarity.

SAMANTHA BEE STILL DOESN'T GET IT

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Samantha Bee's commentary last night about her assault on Ivanka Trump:

Samantha Bee, and the geniuses at TBS, had a week to script an astute statement for her—getting the issue of her signature vulgarity off her back—and they blew it.

Bee said last night that she has dropped the “c-word” many times before, stating that her goal is to “reclaim” it. Why? Why would she want to normalize a word that if used to describe her own mother she would recoil?

Bee admits that a lot of women “don't want that word reclaimed.” Sadly, she can't figure out why. What's the point of reclaiming a word that invites men to think of women as a piece of meat? To show that her animus is not simply against women, she said that “Many men were also offended by my use of the word. I do not care about that.” Spoken like a true sexist.

Bee needs to be careful. Men have wives and daughters, and some might unfortunately find it an occasion for violence if Bee were to call one of them the “c-word.”

Bee ended by saying, “If you are worried about the death of civility, don't sweat it—I'm a comedian.”

This is exactly the problem. A comedian has no more right to obscenely insult people than a cop has a right to randomly beat a person up. Neither should be allowed to take cover hiding behind his status.

We have ways to deal with trespassing cops, but no remedy to deal with trespassing comedians. Save for boycotts. Don't push us, Bee. There are a lot of activist groups monitoring your next move.

Contact Keith Coccozza, Sr. VP, Communications, Time Warner: keith.coccozza@timewarner.com

YOUNG MALE AGNOSTIC DEMS LIKE PORN

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the results of a new Gallup poll on pornography:

More Americans now find pornography morally acceptable than ever before. Just last year, 36% were okay with porn; today it is 43%.

As expected, young unmarried men are the most approving of porn (as we know, they are also its biggest consumers).

Among the unmarried, 50% find pornography morally acceptable, as compared to 35% of married men and women. By a margin of 53% to 32%, men go for porn more than women. Moreover, two of every three males (67%) aged 18-49 approve of it (this is a 14% jump in one year!).

Religion, or the absence thereof, also plays an important role. Among those who say "religion is very important," only 22% find porn morally acceptable, but among those who say "religion is not very important," the figure spikes to 76%.

"For the first time on record," the Gallup report says, "a majority of Democrats (53%) say pornography is morally

acceptable." The figure for Republicans is 27%.

Young single Democrat males with no religion are the problem. As previous studies have shown, this is the same population that champions a woman's right to abortion. Why should we be surprised to learn that morally vacuous young males are the most likely to be sexually reckless? They always have been. The difference now is there are so many more of them, the ultimate losers being women.

As for the political element, the Democratic Party has been hostile to religion, supportive of abortion rights, and embracing of sexual deviance for almost a half century. This was once the Party that serious Catholics were drawn to, but those days are long over.

Now the Dems have become home to the morally challenged, not all of whom are young men (Harvey Weinstein, Eliot Spitzer, Anthony Weiner, Eric Schneiderman, Bill Clinton, Bill Cosby). In fact, some are women (Joy Behar, Whoopi Goldberg, Michelle Wolf, Samantha Bee). That's quite a combo.

BILL FLYNN, R.I.P.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the death of William J. Flynn:

Bill Flynn, former chairman of Mutual of America, died on June 2 and will be buried today. I was at his wake last night in Garden City, New York. He was 91.

Bill will be remembered for many things, but above all it was his role in brokering peace among warring factions in Ireland in the 1990s that made him an international star.

Over the past several years, Bill and I dined together many times, sharing our thoughts on many subjects. He was a rabid supporter of the Catholic League and a generous contributor.

Unlike so many other persons who made it big, Bill did not have a big head. To that point, he did not go on endlessly telling stories about his accomplishments, which were many. Instead, he wanted to talk about problems facing the nation.

Bill's love for the Catholic Church was palpable. He did regret the diminution of its prestige in recent years, but he never got discouraged.

His love for Ireland was also a huge part of who Bill was. He had the patience, and the determination, to engage elites on the national and international stage. And he knew how to win.

His wife, Peg, and his two children, William K. Flynn and Maureen Welsh, will obviously miss him. But so will I, and all of those who were lucky enough to know him.

SAMANTHA BEE'S DILEMMA

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on tomorrow night's statement by Samantha Bee responding to the controversy over her remarks about Ivanka Trump:

Ever since Samantha Bee let loose with her obscene woman-hating comments directed at Ivanka Trump, she and a swarm of TBS senior staff members have been plotting on what to do next. The answer will come June 6 on Bee's "Full Frontal" show: she will offer a more detailed account of this issue.

Bee and TBS have their work cut out for themselves. If what happened on May 30 was simply an anomaly, Bee could ride it

out, saying she was apologizing for this one-time screw up. But this was not one ugly chapter in an otherwise sterling series of shows. While it was more over the top than any of her previous performances, what she said was more typical of her routine than exceptional.

What defines Samantha Bee is her vulgarity. Ironically, the few willing to defend her cite her repeated insults as proof that she should not get fired. Bari Weiss, an opinion writer for the *New York Times*, understands why Roseanne Barr was fired but Bee was not. "ABC didn't hire Roseanne to be a racist, anti-Semitic conspiracy theorist," he said. "TBS hired Sam Bee to be...Sam Bee. She's an edgy late-night comic. That's what she does."

Weiss is unwittingly making my point: Bee was hired to offend. Not every person or group, of course—liberals have many protected classes—just those they think deserve it. Like Catholics. Indeed, [as I recently pointed out](#), she has a history of mocking Catholics with her barbaric sense of humor.

So does Jon Stewart. Predictably, he came storming to Bee's defense. He frequently lashed out at Catholicism on his "Daily Show," his signature moment coming in 2012. After touting his feminist credentials, he degraded women and assaulted Christian sensibilities. "Maybe women could protect their reproductive organs from unwanted medical intrusions with vagina mangers," he said. On the screen behind him was the picture of a naked woman with her legs spread and a nativity scene ornament in between.

So it comes as no surprise that Stewart is now telling Bee not to listen to her critics, or what he calls the "propagandist right." Instead, he advises, "create your own moral code to live by." She has. Which is why she is in this jam. She certainly isn't living by the Ten Commandments. If Stewart were an educated man, he would know that among those who have urged their followers to "make up their own moral code" was

Adolf Hitler.

Bee is in a dilemma. If she wants to pivot and start becoming a real comedian—someone who can make people laugh without descending to the gutter—she risks losing her immature audience. If she continues the way she did before, she will invite a pushback the likes of which television has never seen before. What she says June 6 will be defining. We will be sure to comment June 7.

FLAWED SURVEY ON BAKER YIELDS FALSE NEWS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on reaction to yesterday's Supreme Court decision on religious liberty and gay rights:

In a *Washington Post* web blog, Eugene Scott informs readers that most Americans disagree with the U.S. Supreme Court decision that pitted a Colorado baker against two homosexuals. That conclusion is not validated by the data he cites.

"Most Americans don't support allowing gay Americans to be denied services because of the religious convictions of the business owner," he said. He is right about that. But the wording of the question was deceitful, skewing the results.

Scott cites a survey taken last month by the Public Religion Research Institute that supports his conclusion. The survey question he refers to asked, "Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing a small business owner in your state to refuse to provide products or services to gay or lesbian people, if doing so violates their religious beliefs?"

It is hardly surprising to learn that 60% of Americans oppose such a right. But the issue before the Supreme Court dealt with forcing a baker to *customize* a wedding cake for two men who claimed to be “married” to each other in another state. The baker, Jack Phillips, did not say to the gay men that he will not serve them—they were free to buy whatever they wanted from his bakery. But to ask him to *personally inscribe* a wedding cake for them was to make him complicit in their undertaking. For religious reasons, he could not do so.

Phillips has a history of not customizing cakes for events he finds objectionable. “It’s never about the person making the request,” he said. “It’s about the message communicated on the cake.” It is for reasons such as this that in the Supreme Court ruling, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote a concurring opinion, joined by Justice Neil Gorsuch, arguing Phillips could have won on free speech grounds alone.

The wording of a survey question can be designed to elicit a predictable response. For example, what if the public were asked the following: “Do you favor or oppose the right of a Trump-hating photographer to decline a request by the president to take pictures of him at an event celebrating his achievements?”

In short, the survey question by the Public Religion Research Institute was flawed, leading to false reporting by Scott. Both should have known better.

GAY BULLIES LOSE IN BAKER

CASE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the Masterpiece Cakeshop case (*note: this is a revised posting, one that is less enthusiastic than the original*):

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled today that a Colorado baker could not be forced against his will, grounded in his religious beliefs, to make a wedding cake that affirmed a “marriage” between two homosexuals. The 7-2 ruling is a victory for religious liberty.

The high court ruled that the baker, Jack Phillips, was the victim of religious hostility made manifest by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission; it had concluded that the baker had to abide by the gay couple’s wishes. “The commission’s hostility was inconsistent with the First Amendment’s guarantee that our laws be applied in a manner that is neutral toward religion,” Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote. As expected, the decision was closely tailored to the specifics in this case.

In 2012, Charlie Craig, his mother, and David Mullins went to the Phillips Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, Colorado, to order a wedding cake to celebrate the “marriage” of the two men in Massachusetts. Phillips did not refuse to sell them any of his baked goods, but he said he could not accede to their request. “I do not create custom designs that conflict with my conscience,” he said. For the same reason, he said, he doesn’t make Halloween cakes.

Had the ruling gone the other way, black bakers would have to custom design cakes for Klansmen, Jewish bakers would have to inscribe cakes for Nazis, and gay bakers would have to make personalized cakes for gay bashers.

While this victory is important, regrettably it focused

heavily on the bigoted remarks made against Phillips, calling into doubt how the case may have been decided absent religious hostility.

We were happier with the concurring opinion of Justice Clarence Thomas, signed by Justice Neil Gorsuch. They noted that in addition to Phillips' religious liberty claims, his right to freedom of speech was operative as well. The Colorado Civil Rights Commission violated both rights.

MUSLIM NATIONS SUNDER RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the findings of the U.S. State Department's 2017 document, "International Religious Freedom Report," which was released on May 29 (his remarks focus exclusively on the state of religious liberty in Muslim-run nations):

The results are not encouraging. In most nations where Muslims rule, religious liberty is either crushed altogether or it barely exists. Of the 15 nations from the Middle East and North Africa, only four—Egypt, Jordan, Libya, and Tunisia—have any religious liberty safeguards. Iran has the worst record. Of the 5 nations from South and Central Asia (the last five on the appended list), only Bangladesh is comparable to the four from the Middle East and North Africa in providing for some semblance of religious liberty.

We expect communist nations like North Korea to oppress people of faith, but when the rulers of a world religion do so—in the name of God or their spiritual leader—it is all the more disturbing. Fortunately, the record of the two other

monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism, is quite good.

When people are punished for converting to another religion—including imposition of the death penalty—we are dealing with evil. We look forward to seeing how Secretary of State Mike Pompeo handles this problem. We certainly wish him all the best.

To read a selective summary of the Report, taken verbatim, click [here](#).

SURVEY SHOWS COLLAPSE OF MORAL VALUES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a Gallup survey released June 1:

[Half the nation](#), 49%, say moral values in the U.S. are “poor.” This is the highest percentage ever recorded on this issue since Gallup first asked about it in 2002. Only 37% say moral values are “fair,” and a mere 14% say they are “good.” Moreover, 77% say moral values in the U.S. are getting worse; 18% think they are improving.

The American people are conflicted on moral issues. Even though more than three in four say our moral values are collapsing, a [Gallup survey](#) taken a year ago found that “Americans Hold Liberal Views on Most Moral Issues.” Consider the following.

More Americans find morally contentious practices acceptable today than ever before. For example, sex between an unmarried

man and woman is now found to be morally acceptable by 7 in 10 Americans (69%); gay or lesbian relations register a 63% approval; having a baby outside of marriage is at a record high approval rating (62%). Pornography is gaining acceptability—the 36% figure has never been higher—and the same can be said of polygamy, which now receives an acceptability rating of 17%.

What does this tell us? It tells us that Americans know in their hearts that some behaviors are morally wrong, but they have a hard time passing judgment on them. In other words, they know in their gut that the state of our moral values is getting worse, but they also feel the pinch of the dominant culture's embrace of moral nonjudgmentalism.

Here's the rub: The more we find morally contentious behaviors acceptable, the more likely we are to conclude that our moral values are deteriorating. This paradox is a function of immaturity: We refuse to stigmatize the very behaviors (e.g., having kids out-of-wedlock) that convince us that our moral values are collapsing.

It would be wrong to say that we are opposed to stigmatization. We are not. Ask smokers. Did stigmatizing smokers work? Yes, smoking has declined dramatically. But when it comes to other behaviors, we wimp out, following the lead of elites in the dominant culture. So we lose.

Gallup needs to broaden its questioning. It needs to ask the American people how they think people like Samantha Bee are helping to drive our morals south. Indeed, Hollywood merits its own survey—it has had more to do with crafting our morally debased culture than any other factor.