

NBC'S "JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR" IS FINE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the NBC Easter Sunday broadcast of "Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert":

One of the big myths about Christians is that they get exercised whenever some producers or artists take some liberties about the Gospel story. No, they generally don't take offense unless it is insulting, exploitative, or malicious. That is why almost no Christians protested "Jesus Christ Superstar" when it opened on Broadway in 1971. Even fewer are likely to be upset with the NBC telecast on Easter Sunday.

It was mostly Jews who protested the musical, not Christians, when it first debuted. The American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League were afraid that there were elements in the show that might invite viewers to think that Jews conspired to kill Jesus, thus fanning the flames of anti-Semitism. The good news is that their fears were unfounded.

The Catholic community was mostly dismissive of the show, at least at first. That changed in 1999 when the Vatican officially endorsed it. Three years later, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops said it was "a sincere effort to tell the story of Jesus in contemporary musical and ethical terms."

As I pointed out in my book, *Twilight of Liberty: The Legacy of the ACLU*, the only organization in the United States to go off the rails about "Jesus Christ Superstar" was the American Civil Liberties Union, an organization with a history of censorship (it sued a magazine for libel in the 1920s—five years after it was founded—simply because of a critical

article about it; see my book, *The Politics of the ACLU*). In the 1980s, it threatened a lawsuit against Bethel High School in the state of Washington over a performance of the play.

So incensed was ACLU activist, and professed atheist, Nat Hentoff at the time that he wrote the state's affiliate inquiring whether the ACLU was prepared to file suit against a public school concert featuring Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis" or Duke Ellington's "Sacred Concert." He got no reply.

The NBC show should be just fine. Just don't bring it to your local school or the ACLU censors will come down your throat.

OBAMA'S HHS MANDATE SUFFERS MAJOR DEFEAT

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a very important federal court ruling on religious liberty:

The Obamacare Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate forcing Catholic non-profits to provide coverage for abortion-inducing drugs, contraception, and sterilization, was dealt a lethal blow by U.S. District Court Judge David Russell.

He issued a permanent injunction stopping the federal government from enforcing the mandate against the Catholic Benefits Association (CBA). He also issued a declaratory judgment, holding that the mandate was illegal; it violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

The CBA represents over 1,000 Catholic employers, including 60 dioceses and archdioceses, as well as many religious orders, colleges and universities, hospitals, and other ministries.

Baltimore Archbishop William Lori chairs the CBA; serving with him are six other archbishops. Douglas G. Wilson is the CEO of the organization.

Judge Russell's ruling not only binds the Trump administration (which was opposed to the HHS mandate anyway), but all future administrations. Catholic employers who belong to the CBA are now free from attempts by the federal government to coerce them into providing morally offensive healthcare coverage.

This is a smashing victory for religious liberty and a stunning defeat for the pro-abortion industry and its allies.

CULT GURU BUSTED DURING HOLY WEEK

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the arrest of Keith Raniere:

Holy Week is a week of atonement for Christians, but this year it has special meaning for Keith Raniere as well: the cult guru, who exploited his women followers, was arrested by the FBI in Mexico on March 26 on charges of sex trafficking and forced labor. On March 27, the FBI raided the home of his sidekick, Nancy Salzman, in upstate New York.

Raniere, known to his minions as "The Vanguard," ran a master-slave operation with vulnerable and morally confused women. He had sex with them over and over again, took photos and videos of them, and had one of his female workers use hot irons to brand his initials on the stomach of his woman victims, just below their pant line; it took about 30 minutes for this to be done. But not all his victims were adults: some were girls in

their subteen and teenage years.

"During the branding ceremonies," one complainant told CBS News, "slaves were required to be fully naked, and the master would order one slave to film while the other held down the slave being branded."

Who was Ranieri? According to the *Niagara Falls Reporter*, he was a boy genius who was able to speak in full sentences at age one, "taught himself high-school math in 19 hours when he was 12 and completed three years of college math and computer-language by the age of 13." He graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1982, majoring in physics, math and biology. In 1989, he made the Guinness Book of World Records for his stunning IQ, which ranged between 188 and 194.

Ranieri was also a monster. He founded a self-improvement organization called NXIVM (pronounced Nex-ee-um). Originally from Brooklyn, he anchored his master-slave operation outside of Albany. The philosophical basis of his cult was drawn from many sources, including Scientology, Buddhism, Ericksonian hypnosis, humanism, and a smattering of New Age religions.

In 1990, Ranieri was introduced to a 12-year-old girl by her mother, who had recently divorced. The mother called the cult guru "an Einstein," and agreed to have her daughter tutored by him. He said he would teach her algebra and Latin. Instead, he raped her. He had sex with the girl, still wearing braces, in his townhouse and in the empty offices of his company, Consumers' Buyline. He also raped her in an elevator and in a broom closet. All total, he violated her about 60 times.

Ranieri was experienced in rape. In 1984, when he was 24, he met Gina Melita, a 15-year-old, whom he befriended. The *Albany Times-Union*, which has done the best work on "The Vanguard," described what happened. "He took her virginity in a dark room, her T-shirt flecked with blood. She told him it was painful, yet a short time later, he wanted more. During their

four-month relationship, he hounded the 135-pound girl to lose weight and urged her to keep their relationship secret from her mother.”

The adult women drawn to Raniere were invariably well educated and attractive. But their childhood experiences and adult relationships were troubled, leaving them distraught and ripe for abuse. He sought to own them, mentally and physically, requiring them to sign confidentiality agreements, which they did.

Some of his subjects were co-workers, such as Toni Natalie. A married woman raising an adopted son, Raniere convinced her that her husband was having an affair. He invited her to attend his childhood sexuality class, where he told his students that it was not uncommon for some tribes to perform oral sex on children to relieve their tensions.

Naturally, Raniere raped her, and each time he did, she told the *Niagara Falls Reporter*, he said it “was harder on him than it was on me, that we needed to be together so that I could share in his energy, and that I needed to remain silent so as to not wake up my child who was sleeping in a nearby room.”

Raniere was able to attract big time donors, none more famous than Sara and Clare Bronfman; their father, Edgar, made his fortune at Seagram. The daughters gave Raniere \$100 million. They sincerely believed that their calling in life was to create world peace, turning to “The Vanguard” to lead the way.

The IQ wizard spent his life lying, cheating, ripping off his patrons, trashing women, and raping children. And he did it all in the name of ethical humanism.

It’s easy, too easy, to say Raniere was a fraud. He was much more than that: He was a brilliant and evil tactician who knew how to manipulate the weak. His entire adult life was spent dabbling in one vacuous philosophical system after another, ultimately blending them into a self-serving cult.

At bottom, Raniere thought that Jesus was irrelevant and that he had all the answers. Regrettably, he was able to convince these simple-minded and thoroughly confused women—all desperately looking for direction—that he could save them. But he saved no one. Instead, he not only savaged his followers mentally and physically, he made them pay for it, lavishly.

His day of atonement has arrived. That it has come during Holy Week is not only ironic, it is fraught with meaning. Sadly, it is one that likely escapes him.

VICTORY IN CONNECTICUT—MCDONALD LOSES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the Connecticut Senate vote on Justice Andrew McDonald:

Andrew McDonald's unprecedented explosion of anti-Catholic bigotry in 2011, when he was a Connecticut state senator, should have been enough to stop him from subsequently securing a seat on the state's Supreme Court, but politics prevailed. Now justice has finally triumphed over politics. In a 19-16 vote, McDonald has been denied the big prize: the Senate denied him the post of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Had McDonald attempted a state coup of temples or mosques—that is what he tried to do to the Catholic Church in Connecticut—Jews and Muslims would have been outraged. More important, the media would have been livid. That they were mostly silent about his anti-Catholicism shows their own bias.

Charges that McDonald was a victim of anti-gay sentiment were found to be totally baseless. *Not one anti-gay sentence, by*

any public person or group, ever materialized. That is why Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy looks so foolish, and unethical, to be screaming about homophobia.

There was bigotry involved in this controversy alright, but it wasn't gay bashing—it was vintage anti-Catholicism, promoted by McDonald and given cover by the media.

What a sweet victory.

SATANIC ICE CREAM HITS USA

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the latest commercial assault on Christianity:

When a Catholic League member emailed us a note recently about a Canadian ice cream company, Sweet Jesus, we decided to give it a pass: it was a fairly innocuous appropriation of Christianity, and there was no reason to believe that the intent was to offend. But that has all changed

We have now learned that the company's logo includes at least one satanic symbol: in some marketing campaigns, the "S" in Sweet has been replaced with the symbol of a lightning bolt; an inverted cross appears in the place of the "T." The former is known as the "satanic 'S'" (which was used by Hitler's elite), and the latter is a mockery of the Cross of Jesus Christ. In other instances, the first "S" in Jesus appears as a lightning bolt.

Sweet Jesus has opened in Baltimore and plans to expand to Minnesota's Mall of America. "Our aim is not to offer commentary on anyone's religion or belief systems," the company says. Nonsense. Its aim is to offend. Indeed, if what

they say is true, then let them sell “Sweet Jesus” ice cream absent the satanic symbols, restoring the “S” and the “T” to their proper place.

Meanwhile, Americans should send the purveyors of this demonic message a Christian message of their own: boycott Sweet Jesus.

Contact: franchising@sweetjesus4life.com

WHAT GOV. CUOMO MEANS BY CHILD WELFARE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo:

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has waded into the matter of child welfare, and it's time everyone understood what he means by it.

In his budget proposal, which is the subject of much negotiation this week—the budget is due April 1—Cuomo includes the Child Victims Act. In his State of the State address earlier this year, he voiced support for the Reproductive Freedom Act. Both issues touch on child welfare; they also tell us a great deal about where he stands on this matter.

The Child Victims Act would extend the age by which victims could bring suit; this part of the bill is uncontroversial. The “look-back-window,” however, is very controversial: it would allow a one-year period where a victim could bring suit for being molested at any time in the past. New York State Catholic bishops are opposed to this provision.

Gov. Cuomo says that his support for the “look-back-window” is justified on the basis of protecting minors. *In fact, it won't*

protect a single child. All it will do is open the door to rapacious anti-Catholic lawyers out to “get the Church” for alleged offenses that took place when Neil Armstrong was walking on the moon.

[As I pointed out recently](#), it is nearly impossible to fairly adjudicate old claims. Besides, Catholic dioceses in New York State have already addressed this issue by instituting a program designed to bring justice to those who were truly abused in the past. Gov. Cuomo knows all of this, yet prefers to grandstand anyway, at the expense of justice to the Catholic Church.

What makes his position on this legislation so odious is his enthusiasm for sacrificing the lives of innocent children in the name of “reproductive rights.” I am not talking about abortion: I am talking about children born alive as a result of a botched abortion. Cuomo says let them die on the physician’s table, unattended by any healthcare professional. Yes, that is what the “Reproductive Freedom Act” permits.

Cuomo is now sanctioning infanticide—the killing of infants. This is not child welfare: it is child abuse in its most grotesque form.

It is said that Gov. Cuomo has presidential ambitions. Once the public learns of his tortured understanding of child welfare, it should be enough to finish him. What he is doing is morally wrong and politically stupid.

ABORTION IS NOT TORTURE—NOT

HAVING ONE IS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an editorial in the *New York Times* on abortion:

The March 26 editorial in the *New York Times* will go down in history as its most radical defense of abortion. It's hard to see how it can ever top this one. Here is what it said:

"Carrying to term a pregnancy against one's will is punishment enough—in fact, it can amount to torture—according to the United Nations Human Rights Council."

So not being able to abort one's baby is torture, but the mangling of one's baby is not.

The March 26 editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* sheds light on the United Nations Human Rights Council. Here is what it said:

"Syria bombs civilians with chlorine gas, China tortures dissidents, Venezuela restricts access to food and Burma is engaged in ethnic cleansing of a Muslim minority. So naturally the United Nations Human Rights Council trains the bulk of its outrage on...Israel."

So real examples of torture don't seem to bother the United Nations Human Rights Council, but not being allowed to abort one's baby does—it amounts to torture.

This is the mind-set of the pro-abortion industry. The *New York Times* and the United Nations Human Rights Council have become completely unhinged.

CONGRESS RESPONSIBLE FOR NEA FUNDING

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the Omnibus spending bill signed by President Trump:

On March 23, President Trump reluctantly signed the Omnibus spending bill, noting that while the military will receive much needed funds, there is still too much wasteful spending.

For example, last month his budget proposal called for the National Endowment for the Arts to “begin shutting down.” He authorized \$29 million for the agency. But the Congress rejected his proposal and wound up awarding it \$152.8 million.

The NEA, [as we have pointed out](#), is still awarding grants to groups that promote anti-Christian fare. Knowing that the Congress does not take this matter seriously, we have called upon President Trump to name a morally responsible person to chair the NEA; the current chairman’s tenure is up in June.

If the NEA is going to continue to receive funding, at least it should be led by someone who will not tolerate offering grants to those who delight in mocking Christianity. We hope President Trump moves on this matter soon and chooses the right person for this job.

ANDREW MCDONALD IS NO VICTIM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Connecticut Supreme Court Justice Andrew McDonald:

A vote on elevating Connecticut Supreme Court Justice Andrew

McDonald to the top post of Chief Justice is scheduled for next week. How ironic it is that a man who has shown a strong animus against the Catholic Church will be voted on during Holy Week.

One of the most despicable aspects of McDonald's nomination is the incredible media bias that he has benefited from. A Lexis-Nexis search of articles that were published over the last month about his anti-Catholicism turned up 29 articles, 19 of which were AP stories. And most of them were perfunctory: they did not go into any detail about what he did in 2011.

In 2011, when McDonald was a state senator, he introduced a bill that would have allowed an unprecedented power grab: the government would take over the administrative and fiscal decisions of the Catholic Church in Connecticut, and lay Catholics would be authorized to run the internal affairs of their parish, throwing the pastor overboard. Jodi Rell, the governor at the time, accurately called this coup "blatantly unconstitutional, insensitive, and inappropriate."

The media, for the most part, are allowing McDonald to get away with his anti-Catholic behavior while hyping his alleged victim status as a gay man. There were 48 stories, 27 by AP, stating that some of his opposition is anti-gay. Yet the best anyone could do was to say that there were some anonymous comments.

There is not one person or group identified in all of these stories who has said anything anti-gay about him. This is why House Republican leader Themis Klarides recently said, "There is not one person who has mentioned Andrew McDonald's sexuality except Democrats."

This explains why the best the *New York Times* could do to help him was to say that "his supporters have suggested that at least some of the opposition has been motivated by Justice McDonald's sexual orientation...."

His “supporters have suggested.” This is their best shot? This is evidence of nothing, absolutely nothing. Conversely, there is hard evidence of McDonald’s contempt for separation of church and state, though the media downplay it considerably. Not surprisingly, the *Times* never mentioned this in its sympathetic story on him.

Opposing a person for a judgeship because he is gay is wrong. It is equally wrong to lowball a person’s anti-Catholic bigotry.

McDonald is no victim—he is a victimizer.

EUROPEAN YOUTH ABANDONING CHRISTIANITY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a new survey of European youth:

Catholic sociologist Stephen Bullivant has issued a detailed report on the state of Christianity in Europe. It is not encouraging. Bullivant, who teaches at St. Mary’s University, outside of London, is director of the Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society. The report, “European Young Adults and Religion,” measured religious practice and affiliation in 22 countries; the data were taken from a survey of those aged 16-29.

The proportion of young adults with no religious affiliation ranges from a high of 91 percent in the Czech Republic to a low of 17 percent in Poland. Following the Czech Republic are Estonia, Sweden, and the Netherlands; between 70 percent and 80 percent of young adults in those countries have no

religious affiliation. The next most religious country to Poland is Lithuania; Austria and Ireland also post respectable numbers.

Conditions in the United Kingdom have changed markedly. More young people there identify as Catholic (10 percent) than Anglican (7 percent), with Muslims (6 percent) coming on fast.

Attendance at religious services has fallen off dramatically, as has the proportion of young people who pray. Poland is the least affected by the secularization of Europe; Estonia, the Czech Republic, and the Scandinavian countries are the most secular.

What does this mean? Bullivant maintains that "Christianity as a default, as a norm, is gone, and probably gone for good—or at least for the next 100 years." He adds that "In 20 or 30 years' time, mainstream churches will be smaller, but the few people left will be highly committed."

What does this forebode? Douglas Murray, author of *The Strange Death of Europe*, points out that "Europe today has little desire to reproduce itself, fight for itself or even take its own side in an argument." Speaking of European elites, he says, they "seem persuaded that it would not matter if the people and culture of Europe were lost to the world."

Who saw this all coming? Pope Benedict XVI. He saw the effects of multiculturalism as clearly as anyone, showing how a contempt for moral truths that adhere to the Judeo-Christian ethos has led to "a peculiar Western self-hatred that is nothing short of pathological."

The de-Christianization of the West has yielded such fruit as record high levels of abortion, out-of-wedlock births, homosexuality, divorce, sexually transmitted diseases, pornography, prostitution, drug abuse, depression, and suicide. This is the natural outcome of a civilization that has allowed moral relativism to triumph over Christianity.

Just as Pope Benedict XVI said it would.