

ANOTHER JUDICIAL NOMINEE UNDER ATTACK

Bill Donohue comments on opposition to a new federal court nominee:

The atheists at the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) are opposing another Trump judicial nominee. Their target this time is Allison Jones Rushing, nominated for the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals based in Richmond, Virginia.

Rushing's offense is twofold: a law review article on Establishment Clause cases that she co-wrote as a Duke University law student in 2005; and the person she wrote it with, a senior counsel at Alliance Defense Fund, now Alliance Defending Freedom. So let's compare FFRF's allegations with the facts.

FFRF says: Alliance Defending Freedom "was designated an 'anti-LGBT hate group' by the Southern Poverty Law Center."

Fact: The ideologically-driven Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is hardly a credible source. It labels as "hate groups" virtually any conservative-minded group that doesn't embrace its left-wing agenda. It recently had to give a \$3.375 million settlement, plus an apology, to former Islamic radical Maajid Nawaz for falsely labeling him an "anti-Muslim extremist." SPLC also had to apologize to Ben Carson for placing the current HUD secretary, an African American, on its "extremist watch list" along with neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

FFRF says: The article Rushing co-authored, "Nothing to Stand On: 'Offended Observers' and the Ten Commandments," dealing with court challenges to displays of the Ten Commandments on public grounds, evinced "extreme views on religious freedom and the importance of state-church separation."

Fact: The article actually called for treating Establishment Clause cases the same as “all other areas of the law,” noting that the plaintiffs in the Ten Commandment cases were not held to the same standing requirements, under Article III of the Constitution, that ordinarily must be met for a case to be heard in federal court.

FFRF says: Rushing argued that “‘offended observers’ should never be allowed a day in court” to challenge alleged government violations of the Establishment Clause; and that this “leaves citizens totally unable to hold government accountable for even clear Establishment Clause violations.”

Fact: Rushing clearly explained that “To have standing under Article III, a plaintiff must have suffered a ‘concrete and particularized’ injury”—not simply have been “offended” by a religious display. If they have suffered such injury, they would of course have standing to sue.

FFRF says: “Rushing has demonstrated hostility toward secular Americans.”

Fact: Rushing warned not against all secular Americans, but against “village secularists” who “charge into court with the ACLU and challenge governmental acknowledgements of religion, no matter how passive or benign.” She cited Judge Frank Easterbrook of the U.S. Seventh Circuit, who noted that courts are required to distinguish between “injured and ideological plaintiffs.”

FFRF says: “Rushing reverse-engineers results that privilege religion and violate the Constitution,” as when she warns against allowing the opinions of Establishment Clause plaintiffs to “override those of the rest of the population.”

Fact: Rushing’s point is that, absent “concrete injury,” the plaintiff’s recourse should be through the political process. This holds for religious believers as well. For example, she explained, parents having religious objections to the content

of their child's school curriculum have no standing to sue based solely on exposure to offensive ideas. "A parent's recourse is to the political process of the school board, just as the political process is the proper place for offended observers of the Ten Commandments to take their complaints." This doesn't "privilege" religion, it subjects religious as well as secular plaintiffs to the same standing requirements.

FFRF says: "Rushing fails to grasp the difference between speech and religion," and that government has no "free speech right to take a stance on religion."

Fact: The FFRF argument that the government has no "free speech right to take a stance on religion" is plain dumb. The U.S. Supreme Court opens every session with a prayer, "God save the United States and this honorable court," and "In God We Trust" is our national motto. What are they if not the exercise of free speech by the government in behalf of religion?

When it comes to issues of religious freedom, the facts are seldom as FFRF describes them. That is the case again in their attacks on Allison Jones Rushing.

IS TRUMP'S DOJ HOUNDING CATHOLIC CHURCH?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an AP story about a Trump administration probe of clergy sexual abuse in Pennsylvania:

The Associated Press has learned, from anonymous sources, that the U.S. Justice Department is investigating the Catholic

Church in Pennsylvania. AP reports that U.S. Attorney William McSwain of Philadelphia has issued subpoenas seeking information on the clergy and seminarians who may have committed federal crimes. This follows the release in August of a Pennsylvania grand jury report on six dioceses in Pennsylvania.

A few years back, after one teacher, Brother Stephen Baker, in a northwestern Pennsylvania Catholic high school, was found to be an abuser in the 1990s, the Cambria County District Attorney asked the Pennsylvania Attorney General, Kathleen Kane, to launch a grand jury investigation into Bishop McCort Catholic High School.

Kane, who was subsequently found guilty on nine counts, including two felony perjury charges, dutifully complied. Next came a probe of six of the eight dioceses in the state (two had already been investigated).

The grand jury report by Kane's successor, Josh Shapiro, was released in August. It was so incredibly delinquent—it is strewn with lies and unsubstantiated claims—that it occasioned a [lawsuit](#) by the Catholic League in September (it is before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court).

Why would the Trump administration decide to join the hunt for offending priests—most of whom are either dead or kicked out of the priesthood—at this juncture? If all it takes is one molester to trigger this avalanche of investigations, why is it that every other institution in Pennsylvania, beginning with the public schools, is free from scrutiny?

I have some suggestions for Mr. McSwain. He can begin by reading the Catholic League brief detailing the recklessness of Attorney General Shapiro. Then he should interview all the people named in our brief who contest the allegations made against them. Be sure to interview retired Bishop Donald Trautman and ask him about the lies made about him in the

report. Ditto for Cardinal Donald Wuerl.

McSwain should then interview Shapiro and ask him why he won't cooperate with those who are demanding the public release of a 10-year-old report on former East Stroudsburg University Vice President Isaac Sanders. He is charged with bribing students, sexually assaulting them, and forcing them to perform oral sex on him. Why is Shapiro protecting his buddies in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education who don't want the truth known about one of their own?

The duplicity is sickening. We have one system of justice for the Catholic Church and one for everyone else. And now the Trump administration is jumping on board as well? Catholics need some fast answers.

POLLS, PERCEPTION, AND THE POPE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the results of a new CBS poll of Catholics:

A poll by CBS of American Catholics reveals that Pope Francis is no longer receiving the high marks he once enjoyed, especially with regards to his handling of clergy sexual abuse. Three years ago, roughly half of Catholics thought he was doing a good job dealing with this issue, but now only 29% feel this way. It has even led about a quarter of Catholics to question whether they will remain in the Church.

These results are not good, but they are not as bad as they seem.

Current reports of past instances of sexual abuse have had no serious effect on 70% of Catholics (they are not contemplating leaving). The figure is even higher for those who regularly attend Mass; conversely, those who only occasionally attend Mass are the most prone to question whether they will remain in the Church.

Moreover, fully 10% of those polled say they never go to Church, yet their response to survey questions count as much as those who attend Mass more than once a week. Thus, these respondents skew the findings in a negative direction.

Perhaps the most revealing question and answer in the survey is the following: How serious a problem is sexual abuse of children by priests in the Catholic Church today?

Very serious	69%
Somewhat serious	21%
Not that serious	7%
Don't know/No answer	4%

If this question had been asked between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, the results would likely have been reverse: we would expect that approximately 7% would say there is a "very serious" problem, and roughly 69% would say it is "not that serious."

Here is the paradox: the timeline just cited is exactly the period when most of the sexual abuse of minors took place, but few were aware of it. It therefore had no real effect on Catholics. Today, there is almost no abuse taking place: in the last two years for which we have data, the average percent of the clergy found to have had a credible (not proven) accusation against them is .005%. Yet the alarms are going off now.

In 1928, sociologist W.I. Thomas provided insight into this phenomenon. "If men define situations as real," he wrote, "they are real in their consequences." Ergo, if Catholics

perceive the issue of sexual abuse to be a big problem today—even though it is not—then it is.

The reason why Catholics believe there is a serious problem today has everything to do with media reports of sexual abuse. So as not to be misunderstood, the media are not to blame for reporting on the three most important reasons why so many Catholics (and obviously non-Catholics) have a false perception of reality: the McCarrick scandal, the Pennsylvania grand jury report on clergy abuse, and the resignation of Cardinal Donald Wuerl.

Most of Theodore McCarrick's predatory behavior took place in the 1980s. The lion's share of the predatory behavior reported in the Pennsylvania grand jury report took place in the last century. Cardinal Wuerl had a better record of handling this issue than most bishops and cardinals, but because he was the "big fish" cited in the report, he paid a price for a few bad judgments that he made in the last century.

As for the pope, his handling of the McCarrick scandal accounts for his low numbers.

Here is a question no one asks: Why did the media have something to report on in the first place?

Most Catholics, and most of the public as well, don't realize that the reason why we know about McCarrick is because of a reporting program instituted by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York. It was his program dealing with sexual abuse that inspired one of McCarrick's victims to come forward. Dolan acted on that accusation and the rest is history.

The Pennsylvania grand jury report was not launched because of a widespread problem of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church today. No, it was done because Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane (now awaiting a prison term) decided to go after the Catholic Church and open a wide investigation of past

practices merely because of reports that one teacher at a Catholic high school in the northwestern part of the state had been an abuser.

This is why I contend that Catholics are being played.

Is there a single institution in the United States, religious or secular, that has conducted an internal review of sexual misconduct that comes even close to what the Catholic Church has done? Is there a prominent leader in any institution that has turned in one of his own leaders, the way Cardinal Dolan turned in McCarrick?

Why has Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro stood behind a grand jury report that is strewn with palpable lies and unsubstantiated accusations? Why did he single out the Catholic Church for a probe, destroying the reputation of innocent men (this, and other issues, is why the Catholic League filed a brief in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court)? Why has he shown no interest in pursuing the sexual abuse of minors that is going on right now in Pennsylvania public schools?

Perception may function as reality, as W.I. Thomas instructed, but misperceptions are not analogous to truth. Truth does not turn on interpretation.

STEPHEN HAWKING'S SIMPLISTIC ATHEISM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the last book written by Stephen Hawking:

Brief Answers to Big Questions is Stephen Hawking's last book. His family finished the manuscript that he started, launching the book this week, six months after the famous physicist died. The media hullabaloo over the book centers mostly on his professed atheism. CNN shouted Hawking's conclusion, "There is no God," calling it a "bombshell."

It is hardly a "bombshell" to learn that a celebrated atheist was an atheist. Hawking never declared himself a religious man, though his atheism was always shaky. Just last year, in a book about him by Kitty Ferguson, he was asked why there is a universe. "If I knew that," he answered, "then I would know everything important." He added, "then we would know the mind of God."

Now we are told that in his new book, at the end of his life, he was more sure of his atheist convictions. "Do I have faith? We are each free to believe what we want," Hawking said, "and it's my view that the simplest explanation is that there is no God...No one created the universe and no one directs our fate. This leads to a profound realisation: there is probably no heaven and afterlife either." Probably. Which means there may be.

Why did Hawking hedge? And why would a brilliant man who supposedly understands elements of the universe that are too complex and difficult for most of us to understand settle the question of God's existence by choosing "the simplest explanation" available?

Would it not be just as simple to adopt Pascal's answer to the wager he proffered? The wager entailed the consequences of believing in God versus not believing. The 17th century French philosopher said it was wiser to err on the side of caution. "If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing."

A popular reconstruction of Pascal's wager goes like this: "If I believe in God and life after death and you do not, and if

there is no God, we both lose when we die. However, if there is a God, you still lose and I gain everything.”

This is clearly one of the “simplest” alternatives to Hawking’s position. It also has the merit of being more persuasive—to lose the wager is to lose it all.

It is fascinating to learn that while Hawking cannot conceive of a personal God, and doubts there is life after death, he believes in life in outer space. In *Brief Answers to Big Questions*, he confesses his belief in aliens. Great. But for a guy who insists on scientific evidence for everything else, where is the proof?

Why would Hawking believe in aliens? In the book by Ferguson, he says, “We are such insignificant creatures on a minor planet of a very average star in the outer suburbs of one of a hundred thousand million galaxies.” He is entitled to *believe* that human beings are “insignificant creatures,” but he has no empirical evidence to support it.

It would have helped had Hawking identified who the significant creatures are and where they live. But he never did. More important, why is it rational for him to believe in aliens but irrational for me to believe in God?

Where Hawking fails, as do all atheists, is in responding to the central issue involving the origin of the universe. Saint John Paul II said it best. “Every scientific hypothesis about the origin of the world, such as the one that says that there is a basic atom from which the whole of the physical universe is derived,” he said in a 1981 Vatican conference on cosmology, “leaves unanswered the problem concerning the beginning of the universe. By itself, science cannot resolve this problem....”

How much of Hawking’s atheism was a function of his disability (he suffered from Lou Gehrig’s disease for most of his adult life) is uncertain, but in his last book he makes this an

issue. "For centuries," he said, "it was believed that disabled people like me were living under a curse that was inflicted by God. I prefer to think that everything can be explained another way, by the laws of nature."

It is true that in the ancient world it was believed that the disabled must have done something wrong to merit their condition. But Hawking should have updated his readings.

Jesus healed the sick, the blind, the lame—everyone in need of help—and the religion he founded does not abandon the disabled. On the contrary, it tends to their suffering. Christians have had a phenomenal record treating the handicapped of every malady, mental and physical alike. So to invoke centuries-old beliefs (many born of paganism for that matter) as a way of indicting religion today is simply wrong.

Christians believe in mysteries, and so did Hawking, albeit of a different kind. Pascal believed in mysteries as well, but he was much more rational than Hawking.

LIBERALS SHUN "GOSNELL" FILM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on reaction to the movie about Philadelphia serial killer Kermit Gosnell; it opened on Friday.

Kermit Gosnell is serving three consecutive life sentences for murdering three infants born alive during an abortion, and for committing involuntary manslaughter; in the latter instance, a woman died during a botched abortion. Phelim McAleer and Ann McIhenny are independent filmmakers who wrote a book on Gosnell, and then turned their work into a movie, "Gosnell: The Trial of America's Biggest Serial Killer."

The movie did well over the weekend, finishing first among indie films, and 10th overall. But it was shunned by liberals.

Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee are states that are pro-life friendly; not so would be New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. It is therefore not surprising to learn that "Gosnell" played in many more theaters in pro-life states than in pro-abortion states.

Texas has a population of 28.7 million and New York is close to 20 million. It played in 15 theaters in New York State (one in Manhattan), while Texas hosted the movie in 80 theaters.

Georgia and North Carolina are a little bigger than New Jersey, but in terms of theaters that showed the film, there was a big difference: it opened in 38 theaters in Georgia, 25 in North Carolina, and just 9 in New Jersey.

Tennessee and Massachusetts are roughly the same size, but "Gosnell" only played in 7 theaters in Massachusetts compared to 19 in Tennessee.

With the exception of the *Los Angeles Times*, no major newspaper reviewed the movie. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* review virtually every new movie, but found no interest in writing about "Gosnell."

The reviews curiously noted how liberals would not appreciate this film. The *Los Angeles Times* said the movie "never loses sight of the choir to which it is plainly preaching." Forbes called the movie "A Feature-Length 'Law & Order' for Conservative Christians." NBCNews.com called it a "conservative-backed dramatization of the story of Dr. Kermit Gosnell."

Why are liberals not interested in a movie about a man who exploits—even kills—women? Why are secular liberals not as interested in this movie as conservative Christians are? If this is a "conservative-backed dramatization," what would a

“liberal-backed” one look like? After all, a dramatization about a serial killer shouldn’t turn on ideology.

Of course, Gosnell was not a Las Vegas-type shooter, nor was he a Columbine High School one: He was an abortionist, a man who made his living by going beyond the call of duty, killing babies after birth as well as before. They don’t like that in Manhattan.

It’s not as though liberals abhor violence—many applaud Antifa. It’s violence that is integral to a cause they champion that they prefer to ignore.

POPE PRAISES CARDINAL WUERL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on remarks made by Pope Francis on the resignation of Cardinal Donald Wuerl:

Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Cardinal Donald Wuerl, the Archbishop of Washington. Ever since a Pennsylvania grand jury report was released in August, Wuerl has been under considerable pressure to resign.

In his letter accepting Wuerl’s resignation, Pope Francis commented favorably on his service to the Church. “You have sufficient elements to ‘justify’ your actions and distinguish between what it means to cover up crimes or not to deal with problems, and to commit some mistakes. However, your nobility has led you not to choose this way of defense. Of this, I am proud and thank you.”

Every word of the pope’s statement is true.

When Cardinal Wuerl was Bishop of Pittsburgh, he was among the

first bishops in the nation to institute a Diocesan Review Board to assess charges of clergy sexual abuse. In his 18 year tenure there, 19 new cases of alleged abuse were brought to his attention, and in 18 of them he quickly dismissed the priest from ministry.

Soon after being named Bishop of Pittsburgh, Wuerl removed Father Anthony Cippola from ministry. Cippola appealed to the Congregation for Clergy, but it sided with Wuerl. The accused priest then appealed to the Vatican Signatura, the Vatican's high court. He won. But then Wuerl stunned Rome by refusing to accept him back in ministry. On a second review, the Signatura agreed with Wuerl's assessment and Cippola was laicized.

What Wuerl did took courage, but he gets little credit for it. Instead, his critics focus on some aspects of the Pennsylvania grand jury report.

Like all newly appointed bishops, Wuerl inherited some cases that had not been fully adjudicated. Taking the advice of therapists who said they had successfully treated the offending priests, Wuerl gave them a second chance. In a few cases, it is obvious that the treatment failed, thus marring Wuerl's record. As always, no one blamed the "experts" for overselling their expertise.

This explains why the Holy Father said there were "sufficient elements to 'justify'" Wuerl's decisions. The pope is also right to note that Wuerl did not "cover up crimes" or refuse to "deal with problems." That view is supported by Nicholas Cafardi, who sat on the bishops' first National Review Board in 2002.

Cafardi, who is a Pittsburgh civil and canon lawyer, said that during Wuerl's time in Pittsburgh, he "never failed to react to a complaint of child sexual abuse." The same is true of Cardinal Wuerl's 12-year tenure as Archbishop of Washington.

Wuerl's spokesman, Edward McFadden, says that "not a single

priest of the Archdiocese of Washington has faced a credible claim, and there is not today a single priest in ministry in Washington who has faced a credible claim.”

Some argue that Cardinal Wuerl should be held accountable for the behavior of Theodore McCarrick, his predecessor in Washington. But Wuerl had no authority over McCarrick when he was abusing seminarians in New Jersey. Moreover, to blame Wuerl for McCarrick’s refusal to abide by restrictions placed on him by Rome is similarly misplaced: No one at the Vatican ever asked Wuerl to be McCarrick’s policeman.

The pressure on Wuerl to resign came partly from the left, but mostly from the right. Right-wing activist groups, along with normally level-headed conservative Catholic writers and pundits—this includes some priests—have led the way. The former are vindictive and lie with abandon. The latter approach this issue the way some in the “#MeToo” movement have acted.

We just went through an ugly chapter in American history where totally unsubstantiated charges were made against Brett Kavanaugh. Yet the allegations are believed by millions of Americans, all of whom are angry about women being abused. So is every normal American. But when anger becomes a substitute for reason, it is easy to lump allegations together, tying them into a knot of supposed truths. This is a gross injustice. Indeed, it is pernicious.

This is what Wuerl has had to endure as well. He has become the scapegoat for Catholic conservative purists who are angry about the abuse scandal. Others are angry as well, but they do not approach this subject with childlike innocence. To be explicit, those who are familiar with the complex issues that the bishops have faced, and who do not insist that today’s standards be used to judge decades-old cases, have a more mature understanding of the problem.

This is not an excuse for bishops who have acted irresponsibly from beginning to end. But most of the really bad apples, whether they be enabling bishops or molesting priests, are either dead or out of ministry. It's about time everyone acknowledged this verity and stopped looking for any bishop to scalp.

These carping conservatives love to take wide swipes at the hierarchy, patting themselves on the back for being so right. But purists are a problem in all institutions, and it matters not a whit what side they are on. Mr. Clean exists only in their heads.

Kudos to Pope Francis for being so kind to Cardinal Donald Wuerl.

IS WASHINGTON STATE PRO-LIFE?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on life and death policies in the state of Washington:

On October 11, Washington State's Supreme Court unanimously declared that the death penalty was unconstitutional. It cited the "arbitrary and racially based" manner in which the death penalty was invoked as grounds for its ruling.

Does this make Washington State pro-life? After all, its position on the death penalty is shared by the Catholic Church. But to qualify as truly pro-life, it would have to share the Church's opposition to abortion as well. It does not. Indeed, it is one of the most enthusiastic defenders of abortion in the nation.

Nationally, blacks account for 28% of abortions, even though

they are slightly less than 13% of the population. That kind of racial disparity should matter to the elites in Washington state, but it doesn't—disproportionate racial representation only applies to the death penalty, not abortion.

The following restrictions on abortion are available in the states [source: Guttmacher Institute October 1, 2018]:

- *Physician and Hospital Requirements.* 42 states require an abortion to be performed by a licensed physician. Washington does not. Some states, 19 of them, require abortions to be performed in a hospital. Washington does not.
- *Gestational Limits.* 43 states prohibit abortions in almost all instances after a specified point in pregnancy. Washington does not.
- *"Partial-birth" Abortion.* 20 states ban it. Washington does not.
- *Public Funding.* 32 states prohibit public funding of abortion in most instances. Washington does not. In fact, it funds abortion under Medicaid.
- *Waiting Periods.* 27 states require a waiting period, usually 24 hours, before a woman can elect to have an abortion. Washington does not.
- *Parental Involvement.* 37 states have some kind of parental involvement in a minor's decision to have an abortion. Washington does not.
- *"Choose Life" License Plates:* 32 states allow "Choose Life" license plates. Washington does not.

Getting back to the question, "Does this make Washington State pro-life?" Only when it comes to saving the lives of serial rapists, serial killers, and genocidal terrorists. As for the most innocent among us—those who are alive but not yet born—it is one of the most pro-death states in the nation. That makes it a splendid example of liberalism.

MEDIA OMIT POPE'S ABORTION REMARKS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on how the media covered Pope Francis' comments on abortion this week:

On October 10, in his weekly address before the general audience at St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis spoke about the evil of abortion. Going off script, he said procuring abortion is like hiring a hit man to kill. The media in the United States showed little interest in reporting his comments.

The pope said that to kill an unborn baby "in the name of protecting other rights" was a contradiction. He questioned, "Is it right to snuff out a human life to solve a problem? Is it right to hire a hit man to solve a problem? No, you can't. It's not right to take out a human being, a small one, too, in order to fix a problem. It is like hiring a professional killer."

Sky News reported that the pope was roundly condemned by pro-abortion activists. That was predictable. It was just as predictable that the media in the United States would ignore what he said.

The only major dailies to report this story were the *Boston Globe*, which picked up the AP article, and the *New Hampshire Union Leader*. That was it. The *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*—all of which never miss an opportunity to report the pope's most liberal-left statements—said nothing.

The rest of the world did not share the disinterest shown by American newspapers. This story on the pope made papers in

Australia, Canada, France, England, Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, Kenya, and India.

The disinterest that the American media have in reporting such stories is not grounded in indifference; rather, it is ideologically based.

In early May, when the pope said that it did not matter to God whether someone was a homosexual, it was widely reported by the American media. Later in the month, when it was reported that the pope raised a red flag about allowing gays in the seminary—"If in doubt, better not to let them enter"—it was ignored by almost every media outlet. Similarly, in June, when the pope said that gay couples do not constitute a family, most of the media failed to report it.

When a pattern emerges, it is not an accident. Surely in this case it is by design. The media have a vested ideological interest in pushing the liberal-left agenda, and that is why they highlight the pope's remarks which fit their cause and omit reporting on those that don't. This may not qualify as "fake news," but it sure smacks of media bias.

RANK-AND-FILE CATHOLICS HOLD THE LINE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a Pew report on Catholics released October 10:

A report by the Pew Research Center, "7 Facts about American Catholics," restates data from previous Pew surveys on Catholics in the United States. As usual, it reports on whether Catholics think the Church should change its teachings

on various social issues.

Why “as usual”? Because many researchers, academicians, pundits, and reporters love to point out the alleged divide between rank-and-file Catholics and the official teachings of the Church. Moreover, these same people show very little interest in asking Protestants, Jews, and Muslims whether the teachings of their religion should be changed.

The Pew report notes that 46% of Catholics in 2015 said they thought the Church should change its teachings and policies on gay marriage. But this figure is inflated: it is not representative of rank-and-file Catholics.

Merriam-Webster defines “rank and file” as “individuals who constitute the body of an organization.” If we consider practicing Catholics, those who attend Mass weekly, as the “rank and file,” then only 37% think the Church should accept gay marriage. No doubt that figure would drop if respondents could voice their position privately (as in a voting booth): it takes courage to publicly state a view that is countercultural.

Should those who are not practicing Catholics, i.e., those who do not attend Mass regularly, be counted as Catholic in a survey? This is important because including them in the aggregate data—the figure reported by the media—distorts what rank-and-file Catholics think.

Two years earlier, in 2013, Pew asked Catholics if the Church should “maintain traditional positions” or “move in new directions.” 63% of practicing Catholics said the Church should “maintain traditional positions,” while only 42% of non-practicing Catholics felt that way. Since practicing Catholics are the heart and soul of the laity, as well as the Church’s bread and butter, it would make no sense for the Church hierarchy to abandon its traditional positions in favor of “progressive” ones.

Finally, asking Catholics, or anyone, if they think the organization they belong to should alter certain positions is not an expression of demand: there is a profound difference between a preference and a demand. Yet the latter is how the media spin it, feeding the perception that Catholics are at war with Church teachings. This is propaganda, not serious social science.

ARCHBISHOP CHAPUT'S COUNTERCULTURAL MESSAGE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput's statement of October 4 on the Vatican Youth Synod document:

Archbishop Charles Chaput possesses both the brilliance to astutely analyze the content of the dominant culture, and the courage to challenge us to think more clearly about it. His recent remarks before the Youth Synod in Rome, which were refreshingly countercultural, are a case in point.

Chaput takes issue with Chapter IV, paragraphs 51-63, of the Vatican Youth Synod document. For example, the document refers to young people as the "watchmen and seismographs of every age," something which Chaput rightly labels as "false flattery." Young people, he says, are "*too often products of the age*" and today this means they are strongly affected "by a culture that is both deeply appealing and essentially atheist."

Chaput's observation makes eminently good sense. Young people need to be tutored in the wisdom of Catholic teachings, not left to themselves to negotiate a morally debased culture.

Furthermore, there is no virtue in sentimentalism: young people deserve an honest response. They are not now, and never were, the “watchmen and seismographs” of the culture. It would be more accurate to say they are a barometer of the culture, a reflection of its norms and values.

Leaders in and out of the Church have too often failed young people, Chaput says, abdicating their responsibilities “out of a combination of ignorance, cowardice and laziness in forming young people to carry the faith into the future.” Those three attributes—ignorance, cowardice, and laziness—have sadly taken the place of wisdom, fortitude, and diligence, virtues that have served the Catholic community well in the past.

The critics of Chaput’s remarks focus heavily on his contention that there is no such thing as an “LGBTQ Catholic,” or a “transgender Catholic,” or a “heterosexual Catholic.” He is adamant in his conviction that *“‘LGBTQ’ and similar language should not be used in Church documents, because it suggests that these are real, autonomous groups, and the Church simply doesn’t categorize people that way.”*

Francis DeBernardo of New Ways Ministry, who heads a dissident group that stands outside the Catholic Church, takes Chaput to task saying there is no difference between being an LGBTQ Catholic and an Italian Catholic. He even says that those who describe themselves as LGBTQ do not consider their sexual orientation to be “the dominant marker of themselves,” comparing them again to Italian Catholics.

Unfortunately, DeBernardo is flatly wrong. Catholics who are Italian may also be New Yorkers, Democrats, and the like. Chances are they are also heterosexual. But their sexual orientation would never be their master status, any more than their being left-handed might be. But to many of those who identify as LGBTQ—which is not a monolithic entity—their master status is their sexual orientation. It is they who tribalize their sexuality, not others.

Identity politics is perverse and un-American, to say nothing of violating every tenet of our Judeo-Christian heritage. It makes individuals invisible, reducing every human being to some ascribed group status, thus depriving them of their God-given dignity. Moreover, America treasures individual rights, not group identities.

Archbishop Chaput is one of the great princes of the Catholic Church in the United States. He proved that once again with his seminal commentary at the Youth Synod.