

NON-ACCOUNTABILITY DEFINES OUR CULTURE

[Bill Donohue](#)

Many children enjoy testing adults, whether at home or in school; they like to see what they can get away with. If there are few consequences for acting out, it's a sure bet they will continue. Adults are no different: when criminals are not held accountable—when they are caught and released—they have no reason not to offend again.

This was apparent when President Biden intentionally allowed 15-20 million illegal aliens to crash our borders. They kept on coming because the Biden administration all but invited them to break the law. There were no consequences for their behavior.

Minneapolis was recently in a state of crisis. It is a "sanctuary city," the effect of which allows local law enforcement not to cooperate with ICE agents seeking to deport illegal aliens, two-thirds of whom have a criminal record. Left-wing agitators capitalized on this state of lawlessness by obstructing federal agents from doing their job, putting them and their doxxed families in harms way. There are no consequences for their behavior.

Not long ago, during the "Summer of Love" in Portland, portions of neighborhoods were seized by domestic terrorists, creating so-called autonomous zones. There were no consequences for their behavior. In New York City, thugs shoved innocent persons into subway tracks, and they did so repeatedly. There were no consequences for their behavior.

Occasionally, there are attempts to rein in this culture of non-accountability, but it is hard to put the toothpaste back in the tube.

In 2023, New York Assemblyman Zohran Mamdani, now Mayor of New York City, lobbied for free bus fare along certain routes. A pilot program was launched, one in each of the five boroughs, for low-income people. When they discontinued the program a year later, half the riders still refused to pay. Why should they? There were no consequences for their behavior.

Mamdani plans to reinstitute the program, but not right now. Reportedly, he is upset that currently more than half of all bus riders refuse to pay—sometimes whole groups barge in without paying. They are not acting irrationally: they are just getting a jump on his upcoming no-fare policy. There are no consequences for their behavior.

Under the Biden administration, there was a moratorium on student debt. Under Trump, they have reversed this rule, but it is too late. Fully three-in-four with student debt refuse to pay. Why should they? There are no consequences for their behavior.

The student debt crisis was started by President Obama with his signature ObamaCare legislation, the Affordable Care Act of 2010. He wanted to cut out the “middleman,” meaning the banks which were underwriting the loans; the government would now provide loans directly to students. Not only did this gambit not save money, rapacious colleges saw an opportunity to bleed students and hiked tuition to record highs, knowing Uncle Sam would come to their rescue when they defaulted. Student debt skyrocketed. There were no consequences for their behavior.

Many other examples could be made, but the point is the same. A country that does not hold its citizens responsible for their behavior cannot survive, not if it covets liberty. Civility depends on citizens who internalize proper codes of conduct, and when the elites who govern no longer insist that these strictures be observed, they threaten the social order.

This should be common sense. Unfortunately, we need to relearn why it is important to abide by elementary rules of civility. But this will come to naught unless those in positions of authority hold everyone accountable. A norm, or a law, that is not enforced, is virtually useless.

NOTRE DAME'S PROBLEM IS NOT UNIQUE

[Bill Donohue](#)

The University of Notre Dame is not only one of America's best institutions of higher education, it is also seen, for the most part, as an authentically Catholic institution.

That is why it was so disconcerting to read that a professor, Susan Ostermann, was named director of the Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies. She is not someone who happens to be "pro-choice"—she is a pro-abortion zealot.

Any person who falsely claims that the pro-life movement has "its roots in white supremacy and racism," and condemns crisis pregnancy centers as "anti-abortion propaganda sites," belongs working at Planned Parenthood, not Notre Dame. Planned Parenthood, of course, was founded by a bona fide white supremacist, Margaret Sanger.

Ostermann didn't get the job by mistake. She got it with the approval of the president, Fr. Robert Dowd, provost John McGreevy and the dean of the Keough School of Global Affairs, Mary Gallagher. Dowd claims he was "blindsided" by the appointment. That's strange. Did he not know that his predecessor, Fr. John Jenkins, publicly rebuked Ostermann for

championing the pro-abortion cause? Surely McGreevy and Gallagher must have known.

The good news is that the blowback was ferocious and ultimately forced Ostermann to go back to the classroom. Led by the brilliant historian, Fr. Bill Miscamble, and the courageous Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Kevin Rhoades, the case was made to reject her appointment. Some twenty bishops, including Archbishop Paul Coakley, president of the bishops' conference, joined the fight, as did many students and alumni; those who have been given awards at Notre Dame also registered their objections. So it ended well. But problems remain, and Notre Dame is not unique among Catholic schools.

I taught at a nominally Catholic college for 16 years, and witnessed firsthand how uncommitted many administrators and faculty are to the teachings of the Catholic Church. In fact, some were openly hostile to Catholicism, and this included the nun who ran the school. But La Roche College in Pittsburgh (now a university) is not atypical.

Georgetown University, a premier Catholic institution, has two pro-abortion student clubs on campus. Moreover, student government officials have sought to punish students who accept the Church's teachings on marriage. It also employs a professor who justifies rape and slavery, provided the rapists and slavemasters are Muslim.

Thankfully, Notre Dame is not like Georgetown. But its central problem is still extant. There are two main reasons why a pro-abortion extremist came close to being promoted: one is ideological and the other is a matter of identity.

While it is oversimplified to say there are social justice Catholics and pro-life Catholics, there is more than a measure of truth to it. Catholic teachings on the poor, the needy, the rejected, and immigrants are seen as being in the liberal camp; those that stress abortion, euthanasia, marriage, the

family and sexuality are seen as being in the conservative camp. Both are expressions of Catholicism.

It has become abundantly clear that social justice Catholics are soft on abortion. That's being kind. Quite frankly, many of them—indeed most—do not regard abortion as “intrinsically evil,” which is the way the Church defines it. They see it as unfortunate. The Church also says racism is “intrinsically evil.” On that they agree. In short, racism upsets them infinitely more than abortion.

Are there Catholics in the conservative camp who are soft on racism? No doubt there are, but in my experience there are far fewer of them than there are liberal Catholics who are soft on abortion.

The other problem is not ideological; it is matter of identity. Unfortunately, many Catholic professors and administrators are uneasy being identified as Catholic in higher education circles. To be exact, they have a deep-seated need to win the affirmation of secular elites. At bottom, they are not comfortable in their Catholic skin.

They know the way secular elites look at Catholics of a more traditional stripe, and they are scared to death of being thrown in with them. In other words, their reluctance to defend conservative moral teachings—even when they don't disagree with them—is done to win the blessings of secular elites, in and out of education. That's how insecure they are about their Catholic identity.

Christian Smith, a Notre Dame sociologist, recently wrote an article in *First Things* explaining why he left the school. He says the Catholic identity problem is due to three things, one of which is a strong desire to secure “mainstream acceptance by ‘peer institutions’: Duke, Northwestern, Vanderbilt, Washington University in St. Louis, Emory, Rice, Stanford, NYU, and the like.” He says “Notre Dame desperately wants to

belong to this club." Regrettably, this leads many to low ball their Catholicism.

Notre Dame will be challenged again, and it will come from within. But as long as it has enough faculty, students and alumni who are vigilant—and there is no question about that—it will never lose its reputation as a truly great Catholic institution of higher learning.