

BIGOTRY EMBROILS TWO STATES: CONNECTICUT AND WISCONSIN

Anti-Catholicism has gripped two states: Connecticut and Wisconsin. In Connecticut, an anti-Catholic judge is being considered for the top post as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; in Wisconsin, a Trump nominee for a federal judgeship is being opposed on anti-Catholic grounds.

The Catholic League has been actively engaged in both cases. As we went to press, the outcome in both instances was inconclusive.

The Connecticut case involves Supreme Court Judge Andrew McDonald. We are opposing him because of what he did in 2011 when he was a state senator.

At that time, McDonald introduced a bill with Rep. Michael Lawlor that would have allowed state officials to take over the administrative and fiscal decisions of the Catholic Church in Connecticut. It authorized lay Catholics in each parish to run internal affairs, stripping the pastor of his duties.

As Bill Donohue said in March 2011, this was “payback” time. “This brutal act of revenge by Lawlor and McDonald, two champions of gay marriage,” Donohue wrote, “is designed to muzzle the voice of the Catholic Church.”

Donohue called for their ouster, saying, “They have evinced a bias so strong, and so malicious, that it compromises their ability to serve the public good. They should therefore be expelled by their colleagues.”

They were not, but they didn’t win, either. We stood firm with Bridgeport Archbishop William Lori (now the Archbishop of Baltimore) in defeating this power grab. They backed off.

McDonald got an “unsatisfactory” rating from the Joint Judiciary Committee but survived a one-vote margin in the full House. The Senate will decide his fate. We blitzed the Connecticut media opposing him on the basis of his anti-Catholicism (we did not oppose him because he was gay).

In Wisconsin, a former federal prosecutor, Gordon Giampietro, has been nominated for the federal district court in Milwaukee. He has come under fire for holding to Catholic teachings on marriage, the family, and sexuality. None of his comments were outside the domain of settled Catholic theology, which is why Wisconsin bishops supported him.

Donohue wrote to Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin saying that Giampietro has been the victim of a smear campaign; she is wavering in her support of him. He said he understood why some might disagree with Catholic teachings on specific subjects, but “just as it is wrong to tar those who disagree with us as bigots, it is just as wrong for others to make such a charge about us.”

The fate of Giampietro, like that of McDonald, is still in doubt. We will report on both cases next month.

BILLY GRAHAM R.I.P.

When Rev. Billy Graham died on February 21, Bill Donohue released the following statement to the media:

“Growing up Catholic in New York in the 1950s, the Catholic we most identified with was Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, the first televangelist. The Protestant we most clearly revered was Rev. Billy Graham. In both cases, they had no rival.

“For Catholics, Graham was more than just the titular head of the Protestant community, he was a man who inspired us. He was a man of prayer, and his deep spirituality was contagious. Moreover, his ecumenical efforts were legion.

“When Graham was at his peak, our culture was Christian-friendly, allowing him to follow a decidedly pastoral approach. Those ministers who came after him were forced to take a more aggressive public stance, owing to the advent of the culture war.

“I have one fond remembrance of him. In the late 1990s, he contacted me about some cruel story that had circulated about him—it made him out to be an anti-Catholic bigot. The story was completely bogus. I appreciated how seriously he took this issue, and how quickly he responded.

“Rev. Billy Graham will be missed. I am happy that he is with our Lord.”

Almost everyone applauded Rev. Graham. One notable exception was Niall O'Dowd from Irish Central, who branded him an anti-Catholic. Donohue labeled that accusation a smear, saying, “O'Dowd is a proud Irishman and an irresponsible critic of the Catholic Church.”

LYING BY THE NUMBERS

Whenever there is a serious social problem, the media turn to experts to diagnose it and provide data. As it turns out, many of these persons are not experts at all—they are activists seeking to advance their agenda. Others are simply liars.

The mass shooting in Parkland, Florida is the most recent

example of this phenomenon. The media were quick to report that this was the 18th school shooting in 2018. They were wrong. It was the fifth. So where did the figure of 18 come from? It was given to the media by Everytown for Gun Safety, a gun control group. As the *Washington Post* revealed, "Just five of Everytown's 18 school shootings listed for 2018 happened during school hours and resulted in any physical injury."

This was not the first time this game has been played. In 2015, Mass Shooting Tracker, a group the media cited as authoritative, said there were 355 mass shootings that year. But the government's figure was 32. What gives? Upon closer inspection, it was found that in a third of the incidents logged by Mass Shooting Tracker, no one died. Indeed, in 95 percent of the "mass shootings," there was only *one* fatality.

I did some research a few years back trying to figure out how many abortion deaths actually took place the year before *Roe v. Wade*. The most commonly cited figure was 5,000-10,000. The real number was 39. So where did the big numbers come from? The head of NARAL. He lied about the numbers. How do I know? Because he admitted it. His name is Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a Jewish atheist abortionist who later made a huge pivot: he renounced abortion, became a pro-life activist, and converted to Catholicism.

The abortion industry lies by the numbers all the time. In 1995, Ron Fitzsimmons, the head of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, said that partial-birth abortion was "rarely used." Two years later, his conscience got the best of him. He confessed, "I lied through my teeth. It made me physically ill."

In the mid-1980s, homeless advocate Mitch Snyder testified before a congressional committee. He was asked where he got the figure of three million homeless persons nationwide. He told them he made it up. The actual figure was somewhere between 250,000 and 350,000. Snyder refused to support his own

family, yet never stopped lecturing the rest of the country to dish out money for the homeless. Even after he was handsomely paid by Hollywood for a movie that was made about him, he never gave his family a dime.

In 2002, David Lisak, a college professor, claimed there was an epidemic of sexual assault on college campuses. He said that “serial rapists” were responsible for 90 percent of the assaults on campus. Where did he get this figure? He made it up. He also told the media that he interviewed “hundreds” of serial rapists (at other times he said it was “thousands”). As it turns out, he never interviewed even one.

Though Lisak was eventually revealed to be a charlatan, it was not before he did much damage. In 2011, the Department of Education under President Obama warned colleges that they had better institute new policies regarding campus sexual assaults, citing his work. Many did, the result being that the due process rights of men were severely curtailed, leading to a flood of lawsuits.

In March 2018, a “bombshell U.N. dossier” found that United Nations aid workers had raped 60,000 people. I was ready to write something about this but decided not to because I could not verify the figure. Neither could Andrew MacLeod, the author of the dossier. It was soon disclosed that he initially claimed there were “at least 311 victims.” So where did the 60,000 figure come from? He told a reporter that it was a rough guess.

The Catholic Church’s sexual abuse scandal has been the subject of incredible exaggeration. We always hear that between 1950 and 2002, 4 percent of the clergy was accused of molesting a minor. Almost never mentioned is the fact that almost half that figure was never substantiated.

Just as important, it is rarely reported that a mere 149 priests—one out of every 750—was responsible for over a

quarter of all the allegations. In other words, almost all priests never had anything to do with abusing minors. Even less likely to be reported is the fact that 8 in 10 of the molesters were homosexuals, not pedophiles.

Why all the lies? Part of it has to do with ideology: painting a dark picture of America is what drives the haters. Part of it is servicing a cause: new laws and policies are easier to get if lawmakers are scared. Part of it is ratings: the media love to get the public ginned up. Part of it is money: it's a lot easier to get funds for research when the alarm goes off.

No matter, it's all despicable. So beware of the next "crisis" reported by the media. It may be a lot less threatening than it appears to be.

MAKING CATHOLIC HOSPITALS ILLEGAL

Bill Donohue

A recent editorial in the *New York Times* posited 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 said 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.

And if anyone doubts the anti-Catholic animus behind this report, they need only take a look at the foundations that funded it.

Begin with the Ford Foundation, the most anti-Catholic foundation in the United States.

- The Ford Foundation has been the single largest donor in the United States to one of the nation's most virulently anti-Catholic organizations, Catholics for a Free Choice (now Catholics for Choice). This "organization" (it has no members) has twice been condemned by the U.S. bishops' conference as a fraud—there is nothing Catholic about it. Rabidly pro-abortion, its agenda—to champion child abuse in the womb—is anything but Catholic.
- The Ford Foundation has also funded Link TV, which on Feb. 3, 2009 featured a three and a half minute video, "Divine Food," that mocked Catholicism and portrayed a priest abusing the Eucharist.
- In 2011, the Ford Foundation sponsored an anti-Catholic exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, "Hide/Seek." Included in the exhibit was a video that the Catholic League had previously protested when it was shown at the Smithsonian. The video, which featured large ants running across the body of Jesus on the Cross, was pulled from the Smithsonian after we protested.
- Another recipient of Ford Foundation largesse is the Faith and Reproductive Justice Leadership Institute of the Center for American Progress (CAP). CAP claims to "affirm the sacredness of conscience...as a foundation of religious liberty." Yet in 2013 Sally Steenland, director of CAP's Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative, cheered when Catholic conscience rights were nixed by the HHS mandate requiring Catholic health care providers to pay for abortion-inducing drugs.

Then there is the Arcus Foundation, founded in 2000 by billionaire heir Jon Stryker. Arcus has been quite generous to dissident Catholic activists opposed to Church teaching on issues like abortion and homosexuality.

- In 2014 Arcus kicked in \$250,000 to the coffers of Catholics

for Choice, for the purpose of “challenging religious opposition to LGBTQ rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights.” It followed that up with \$125,000 in 2016 to help Catholics for Choice “to oppose discriminatory religious exemptions”—in other words, to work against the religious freedom of the Catholic Church to defend unborn life and traditional marriage.

- Arcus has been a regular contributor to DignityUSA: \$200,000 in 2010, \$200,000 in 2014, and \$250,000 in 2016. Dignity says it is a Catholic gay group, but it openly rejects Church teachings on sexuality and is properly regarded as a dissident, if not anti-Catholic, group. This was underscored when they welcomed radical gay activist and virulent anti-Catholic bigot Dan Savage as keynote speaker at their 2015 annual convention in Seattle.

- In 2017 Arcus gave a grant of \$35,000 to New Ways Ministry, “to connect the work of pro-LGBT Catholic organizations in every region of the world.” Founded in 1977 as a “gay Catholic” entity, New Ways Ministry has been repeatedly rebuked by Catholic bishops and the Vatican. In 2010, Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago and president of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, stated that “New Ways Ministry has no approval or recognition from the Catholic Church and they cannot speak on behalf of the Catholic faithful in the United States.” He cited the group’s continued denial of Church teachings as the reason for his injunction.

Besides funding efforts to foment dissent within the Catholic Church, Arcus has also lavished large sums of money on efforts to attack religious freedom.

- In February 2015, Catholic News Agency (CNA) reported that “the Ford Foundation and the Arcus Foundation have committed over \$3 million in combined spending to target religious exemptions and other protections for religious freedom.”

- Since that report, CNA found in November 2017, Arcus had “given an additional \$2.8 million in grants earmarked for

projects aimed at restricting legal protections for religious freedom, especially religious and conscience exemptions in state and federal law.”

- Among the recipients of these anti-religious liberty grants were the ACLU, which has a long history of anti-Catholic bias, and the Center for American Progress, founded by John Podesta, Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign manager. In the Wikileaks documents revelations, Podesta was exposed as having plotted to foment a “revolution” within the Catholic Church, designed to bring it in line with left wing ideology.

WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE CHILD VICTIMS ACT

The following is an excerpt from a report written by Bill Donohue; the original version is available online.

Under current New York State law, victims of child sexual abuse must press charges against the institution where the offense took place by age 21; they have until 23 to file charges against the attacker. The Child Victims Act would allow victims to sue until they turn 50, and would allow criminal charges to be filed until they turn 28. This is a positive step that most applaud.

However, the provision in the Child Victims Act that allows a one-year window to bring suit—for offenses extending back decades—is simply wrongheaded. It not only would make it extremely difficult to render a just decision, it would place in jeopardy the rights of the accused.

To be sure, everyone wants justice for victims, but it can never come at the expense of justice for the accused.

Moreover, while this bill is being driven by those who want to sue the Catholic Church, the real problem with sexual abuse today is in the public school.

Catholic Church

The Catholic Church has had its share of sexual abuse problems, even if the enormity of it has been greatly exaggerated. For example, between 1950 and 2002, 4 percent of the clergy had an allegation made against him, though almost half that number was found to be unsubstantiated, meaning “an allegation that was proven to be untruthful or fabricated.” Also, a small minority of priests, 3.5 percent, accounted for 26 percent of the victims.

The vast majority of those offenses took place between 1965 and 1985, the time of the sexual revolution. Since that time, matters have changed dramatically, thanks to a plethora of steps taken to curb abuse.

Over the last ten years, the average number of credible accusations made in the previous year against over 52,000 priests and deacons was 7.1. The most recent year for which data are available found that there were two credible abuse accusations made, nationwide, between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016. Translated, that means that .004 percent of the clergy had a credible accusation made against him.

As a sociologist who has published in international journals on this subject, I came to the conclusion that “we know of no other institution in the United States, secular or religious, which has a better record than the Catholic Church does today when it comes to the sexual abuse of minors by adult employees.” Here is what others have said.

Thomas Plante is a psychologist at Santa Clara University who has studied this issue for years.

- “The crisis in the Catholic Church has led to a decade of

research, policies, and procedures to keep children safe within the Church. Much can be learned from this decade of crisis and other organizations can take a page from the Church playbook to help keep children safe within their organizations.”

David Gibson is an award-winning journalist who is the director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University.

- “Whatever its past record, the Catholic Church in the U.S. has made unparalleled strides in educating their flock about child sexual abuse and ensuring that children are safe in Catholic communities.”

Francesco C. Cesareo is president of Assumption College and chairman of the U.S. bishops’ National Review Board (on the sexual abuse of minors).

- “If society takes an honest look at what the church has done in the last 10 years and the seriousness with which the bishops have taken this issue, they have to acknowledge the Catholic Church is the only institution that has such a clear mechanism to protect children and to deal with the whole sexual abuse issue.”

What are those mechanisms?

At the national level, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has instituted a variety of measures to stem the sexual abuse of minors.

They include a Safe Environment training program in the nearly 200 dioceses throughout the nation; millions have gone through the program. Background checks are routine for everyone, including volunteers. Intensive background screening, as well as psychological testing, of prospective seminarians has been implemented. And a Zero Tolerance policy has been in place for well over a decade.

At the local level, the Archdiocese of New York has hired former law enforcement officers to do spot-checks of parishes and schools. It has conducted over 110,000 background checks on seminarians, deacons, religious, and priests. It has also launched the Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program, an initiative to compensate eligible victims. This is an unprecedented outreach to victims.

Public Schools

When the story on the scandal in the Catholic Church was unfolding in 2002, Diana Jean Schemo, a reporter for the *New York Times*, decided to see how the public schools were handling this problem nationwide.

“When teachers are accused of sexual abuse,” she wrote, “educators and law enforcement authorities say, districts often rid themselves of the problem by agreeing to keep quiet if the teacher moves on, sometimes even offering them a financial settlement. The practice, called passing the trash, avoids the difficulties of criminal prosecution or protracted disciplinary proceedings.”

In her piece, Schemo mentioned the work of Charol Shakeshaft, a professor who was just completing the most comprehensive study of the sexual abuse of minors in the United States. Her work would eventually be published by the U.S. Department of Education.

Shakeshaft found that in only one percent of the cases that she studied did superintendents take steps to see that the offending teachers did not continue teaching elsewhere. The majority of the cases were settled by accepting a teacher’s resignation or retirement. Administrators knew for certain that 16 percent moved to other districts to teach.

Unlike the Catholic Church, which keeps exhaustive records on this subject, there is no centralized databank in the U.S. that tracks teachers who sexually abuse minors. This is due to

several reasons. Importantly, Shakeshaft found that the teacher unions have resisted all such efforts. Furthermore, "There is no research that documents teacher union attempts to identify predators among their members." This is certainly not true of the U.S. bishops—they have led the nation in insisting on measures to identify molesters.

In 2007, the Associated Press published the findings of an extensive report on this subject. In 2016, USA Today released another comprehensive report. They came to many of the same conclusions that Shakeshaft had first identified.

Both of the documents fingered three major problems: secrecy agreements that protect abusive teachers; inaction by state governments; and a lack of a national databank to identify and track abusive teachers.

Both investigative reports cited three major culprits: school and school district administrators who pursue settlements and secrecy agreements to avoid lawsuits; teacher unions that resist reform efforts; and state lawmakers reluctant to deal with the issue.

By contrast, there are no more secret agreements in the Catholic community. Both the dioceses and the Catholic schools refuse to make secret deals with accused teachers or staff members. Transparency is the rule in Catholic institutions—not the exception.

The *USA Today* report also tracked where public school teachers who lost their credentials found employment. They looked at ten different institutions and occupations, and at the top of the list was in another public school!

Conditions in New York are no better. Shakeshaft, who taught at Hofstra University when she was doing her research, found that none of the abusers in New York whom she studied were reported to the authorities. Moreover, only *one percent* lost their license to teach. She also cited another study which

concluded that in New York City, “60 percent of employees who were accused of sexual abuse were transferred to desk jobs at offices inside schools, and 40 percent of these teachers were repeat offenders.”

The data speak for themselves: The sexual abuse of minors is not a major issue for the Catholic Church today, but it is a major problem for the public schools. We need legislation that will fix this now—not grandstanding initiatives that seek to uncover what happened in the past.

Look-Back Provision

There are those who say the Catholic Church should not oppose the one-year window because states that have implemented such a policy have not hurt the Church in any substantial way. A recent editorial in the New York Times, and a column in the Times Union, said exactly that. They are both wrong.

In 2002, the look-back provision in California cost the dioceses \$1.2 billion. In 2009, the same provision forced the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware to file for bankruptcy. In 2015, the window to bring old cases led the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis to file for bankruptcy.

Some will say that if Catholic institutions have been hit hard, it is only just. They were guilty, weren't they?

The weakness in this argument is that it assumes that all of these past look-back provisions were equally applied to all institutions. They were not. In almost every state that has either considered, or adopted, changes in the statute of limitations, the public schools have been exempt. Why do they get a pass? Because under the doctrine of sovereign immunity, they are not covered by such legislation.

Interestingly, in those instances where the public schools have been explicitly blanketed, as happened in Colorado in 2006 and New York in 2009, the pushback from public school administrators and unions was so strong that it killed the

bills. They understood the implications of what happens when attempts to turn the clock back succeed.

Governor Andrew Cuomo's budget includes the Child Victims Act, and this time the public sector is not being given a pass. This is certainly an improvement, though there are important differences in how this is likely to play out if the measure is adopted.

Unlike the Catholic Church, the public schools have never faced a well-organized group of adversaries seeking to cash in on changes in the statute of limitations. There are many reasons for this, ranging from the alleged deep pockets of the Church to anti-Catholic bigotry. No matter, if a window is granted to pursue old cases of sexual abuse, it is highly unlikely that the public schools will be targeted the way Catholic schools will be. That is simply a fact of life. It smacks of injustice.

Young people who are abused should have recourse to justice, and that is why extending the age they can sue to 50 makes sense. But it makes no sense to attempt to adjudicate cases that occurred as far back as the mid-20th century. Just as critical, some institutions would be more vulnerable than others—even *though their record may be empirically better than those less likely to be affected*—making this a travesty of justice.

Finally, we need to ask who stands to benefit the most if the look-back provision is adopted? Is it the adults who were victimized decades ago? Or is it the lawyers who are waiting in the dock to file suit against the Catholic Church?

POPE'S PERFORMANCE RATINGS SLIP

Pope Francis has celebrated his fifth anniversary as pontiff. Pew Research Center recently published a survey of his tenure, giving us a good idea of how he is doing.

Most news reports focused on his high favorability rating—84 percent among Catholics—with Republican Catholics slightly less inclined (79 percent) to see him that way. That analysis masks some deeper problems for the pope.

Regarding the pope's favorability rating, he compares well against his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, but fares poorly against Pope John Paul II. Unfortunately for Benedict, John Paul II was a hard act to follow—his favorability rating hit over 90 percent in the mid-1990s. Moreover, unlike Francis, the media never warmed to Benedict, and in some quarters were openly hostile.

Favorability ratings are not unimportant, but they tell us nothing about a leader's performance on important issues. This is where Pope Francis' numbers have been slipping.

Have the changes made by Pope Francis been for the better or the worse? Five years into his papacy, the percent who say he is a major change for the better has fallen from 69 percent to 58 percent. The percent that say he is not a major change for the better grew from 17 percent to 26 percent (7 percent say he is a major change for the worse, up from 3 percent).

These changes are statistically significant; they are also troubling. What accounts for the falloff?

The percent of Catholics who think he is "too liberal" has grown in five years from 19 to 34 percent; during that same time, the percent who dub him "naive" has spiked from 15 to 24

percent.

In 2013, 84 percent of Catholics said the pope was doing an “excellent or good job,” but today that figure is 70 percent. Five years ago 10 percent said his performance was “only fair or poor,” but today it has climbed to 25 percent.

How is he doing with “standing up for traditional morals”? Not well—his numbers are going south. In 2013, 80 percent rated him “excellent or good,” but in 2018 the figure dropped to 70 percent. Those who say he is doing “only fair or poor” rose from 13 percent to 26 percent.

What about addressing the sex abuse scandal? When he began his tenure, 55 percent rated his work as “excellent or good,” but now only 45 percent feel this way. Five years ago 34 percent said he was doing “only fair or poor,” but now that figure is 46 percent. Even worse, the Pew survey was taken before the pope’s disastrous trip to Chile (the sex abuse scandal blew up during his visit).

It won’t be easy for the pope to change these numbers. If a third of Catholics see him as “too liberal,” and a quarter label him “naive,” the prospects for him to pivot are not auspicious.

CATHOLIC AUTONOMY UNDER FIRE

A student at a Catholic school in Greenwich, CT showed her support for Planned Parenthood by posting one of its stickers on her laptop. She was told to remove it.

A teacher at a Catholic school in Miami was fired following news that she “married” her girlfriend.

A Catholic school in Michigan told a lesbian softball coach that she could not keep her job if she decided to “marry” another woman.

And a lesbian couple is suing after being told they could not adopt a child through a Catholic foster care agency in Texas.

What is troubling about these cases—there are many across the nation—is the contempt that some in the media, and some activists, have for the First Amendment rights of Catholic institutions to practice their teachings.

Catholic teaching maintains that life begins at conception. Therefore, elective abortion is immoral. Planned Parenthood is the leader of the pro-abortion industry in the United States. To support it is to support abortion.

The Texas couple has neither federal nor state law on its side. Catholic non-profits like Catholic Charities can receive public funds distributed to the bishops’ conference and go about their business—in this case running a foster care program—without crossing state and church lines, provided they do not engage in “intrinsically religious” activities, e.g. religious worship. Last year, Texas passed a religious liberty law protecting the right of agencies like Catholic Charities to turn away LGBT couples as prospective parents.

Catholic teachings do not recognize a union between two people of the same sex as a marriage. Teachers who choose to work at a Catholic school typically sign a contract, as the lesbian teacher at the Miami school did, saying they will uphold Church teachings.

The lesbian coach in Michigan was not told that she was in violation of Catholic teachings because she was a lesbian. But when she went public with her intent to “marry” another woman, everything changed.

“When someone is living outside of Church teaching or

participating in behavior not in line with Church teaching and makes it known publicly,” the school said, “they cannot fulfill their primary mission to lead by example.”

Why is it that homosexuals are almost never seen trying to crash the schools and social service agencies run by Orthodox Jews and Muslims? After all, both have similar strictures to Catholic entities on these matters.

We all know why—gay activists have decided to target the Catholic Church. If they had any respect for the diversity that Catholic institutions offer, they wouldn’t be so busy trying to shove their secular values down the throats of Catholics.

CNN’S SKEWED SERIES ON PAPACY

CNN’s six-part series, “Pope: The Most Powerful Man in History,” which debuted on March 11, was promoted as a comprehensive account of the history of the papacy. While the first two parts were mostly fair, there were important exceptions. More important, the series suffered from a skewed orientation, one which highlighted the incredible power of a “hierarchal” institution: the influence and reach of the Catholic Church was central to the documentary.

The documentary featured distinguished persons such as Cardinal Donald Wuerl, but it also profiled strident enemies of the Catholic Church. For example, Anthea Butler, a professor who has called God a “white racist,” was given much exposure. Surely if CNN were doing a series on gays it would not invite gay bashers to opine, even if the commentary aired in the show proved to be inoffensive.

CNN chose Liam Neeson to be the show's narrator. He says he was "raised" Catholic, and we all know what that means. Today he is more well known for his lobbying efforts against the Catholic Church: He wants abortion legalized in Ireland. He is also obsessed with the Church's power and hierarchy.

It appears that CNN's obsession with power and hierarchy more accurately reflects what it has become, more than what the Catholic Church is.

In 2015, *Business Insider* concluded that the Vatican was worth about \$3 billion. In 2014, Morgan Stanley estimated CNN's worth around \$10 billion. And while the Catholic Church is a global institution, so is CNN. It has two dozen branded networks and services accessible to more than 2 billion people in more than 200 countries and territories. That's a lot of power and hierarchy.

The first installment of the series was a mostly even-handed account of the evolution of the papacy. But its coverage of the Crusades was flawed.

To be sure, the show featured some cogent observations from St. Louis University professor Thomas Madden. He pointed out that "the Crusades were, first and foremost, an act of piety," undertaken to stop Islamic invaders who were violently attacking nuns, clergy, and pilgrims; the Christians also sought to liberate the holy city of Jerusalem from its Muslim conquerors.

But Madden's observations were drowned out by the overriding theme of this segment: that the Crusades were little more than a power grab by Pope Urban II.

Such assertions are nothing new. Princeton's Bernard Lewis, one of the world's most noted historians, has written, "At the present time, the Crusades are often depicted as an early experiment in expansionist imperialism." Yet, "To the people of the time, both Muslim and Christian, they were no such

thing.”

Rather, Lewis explains, “The Crusade was a delayed response to the jihad, the holy war for Islam, and its purpose was to recover by war what had been lost by war—to free the holy places of Christendom and open them once again, without impediment, to Christian pilgrimage.”

Just as important, as Madden has pointed out many times before, “All the Crusades met all the criteria of a just war.” But one would never know this by watching this episode on CNN. There is no question that the uninformed viewer was presented with a jaundiced view of the Crusades.

The second part of the series focused on Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. Some of the commentary was sophomoric, substituting conjecture for more rigorous analysis.

For example, we were told that Pope Benedict XVI resigned because he realized that the problems of the Vatican “were simply too great for him”; and that his resignation was “a devastating comment on the last five or six years of his predecessor,” St. John Paul II, who remained pope as his health failed.

Most outrageous was Butler’s assertion that having two living popes means having “to decide who you listen to.” Benedict, by voluntarily resigning and then retiring quietly, left no confusion as to his successor’s full authority as pope.

Let’s hope the rest of the series is more balanced than the first two episodes.

HANNIBAL BURESS AND HIS CATHOLIC FANS

When stand-up comedian Hannibal Buress recently performed at Loyola University Chicago they pulled his microphone when he started portraying all priests as child molesters, using vile obscenities.

Why did a Catholic university invite Buress in the first place? They knew what they were getting. Indeed, they even asked him to abide by certain rules as a condition of performing. He agreed. Of course, he then intentionally violated the agreement, making fools of his host.

Even more bizarre was the reaction of the student audience. They didn't boo at his obscene jokes—they booed when his mic was cut. Yes, they wanted Buress to continue his assault on priests.

To top things off, Buress was allowed to come back on stage 15 minutes after he left. He got a standing ovation from his Catholic fans. That's right, the students at this Jesuit-run institution treated this filthy-mouthed bigot as a hero.

It would have been interesting to see how these enlightened students would have reacted if Buress had started talking about all the homosexual priests who did the molesting.

EVERYONE KNOWS ABORTION KILLS

Conor Lamb just won the open congressional seat in a Pittsburgh suburb. As a professed Catholic, he says, "We

believe that life begins at conception, but as a matter of separation of church and state, I think a woman has the right to choose under the law....” He went on to say that his personal opposition to abortion would never allow him to vote for a single ban, including those in the late term.

By making his personal decision grounded in Catholicism, Lamb missed a great opportunity: it is science that tells us that life begins at conception. That Catholicism agrees with this scientific fact is commendable, but lacks the persuasive power necessary to win this argument in a diverse society. He should have simply referenced Biology 101, punctuated by his religious beliefs.

It must also be said that the pro-choice position on racial discrimination—"I am personally opposed but will not impose my views on others"—would be read as a flat-out endorsement of discrimination. That is why Lamb's position is so lame. Moreover, referencing separation of church and state is downright silly: no Catholic opposed to the death penalty worries about imposing his religious beliefs on others.

But it is not Lamb's convoluted thinking that is most interesting. It is the reaction it has had with the champions of abortion.

In his March 16 column in the *New York Times*, David Leonhardt has a reasonable commentary on this subject. Speaking of pro-life Americans, who oppose aborting children because they suffer from Down syndrome (as well as other reasons), he writes, "They're more likely to believe that babies with the syndrome have as much right to life as those without it." Then he writes, "That last sentence probably offends some readers—which helps make the point that personal opposition to abortion means something."

Which raises the question: Why would it offend anyone to say that all babies have a right to life? Why wouldn't they simply

disagree? Because that would make them out to be what they are—people who get exercised just hearing about a child's right to life. And what that makes them is not the subject of polite conversation.

Christina Cauterucci, writing for Slate, is more than exercised over this issue—she is ready to stick it to Lamb. “By broadcasting his belief that, lawmaking aside, a fertilized egg is a human life, he's essentially scolding women who've had abortions. ‘I believe you've killed someone, but I will fight for your right to do it!’”

She's touched on something real. Anyone who believes that life begins at fertilization, yet opposes laws to protect it, is morally challenged, to say the least. But it is her anger at Lamb that is most striking.

It's not good enough for her to have a congressman who will vote against all abortion bans. No, she loathes Lamb's personal conviction that life begins at conception because it ineluctably reminds people of what abortion is. She's right about that.

This is why the pro-abortion crowd is losing the argument. Their outrage over merely voicing the obvious—that life begins when the sperm and the egg unite—is proof positive that Lamb has hit a nerve. They know, deep down, that abortion kills. The only weapon left in their arsenal is to intimidate, if not muzzle, those who make public declarations of it.