

NORMALIZING ABNORMALITIES

TRANSGENDER

The greatest child abuse scandal of our day is the exploitation of minors who want to “transition” to the opposite sex. Genital mutilation, chemical castration, hormonal manipulation—the very stuff of sex-reassignment surgery—are being promoted and carried out by adults who are in it for ideological or financial profit, or both. Seeking to normalize abnormal conditions is cruel and needs to end.

There are lots of parties to this problem, but no one is more responsible for seeking to normalize transgender abnormalities than the Biden administration. To pave the way for acceptance of abnormal sexual expressions, his minions decided to pan normal sexual expressions.

For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs initially banned the iconic photo of a World War II sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square; the couple were celebrating the end of the war with Japan in 1945. The Biden folks branded it “inappropriate behavior,” claiming it no longer fits the “values” of the VA.

The “values” that the Biden team embraced were not the values that most Americans wanted. To take one example, consider Biden’s choice for Assistant Secretary for Health.

Biden chose a man who falsely claimed to be a woman, Richard Levine. He went by the name Rachel, dressed like a woman, and looked like one too. But he could never change his XY chromosomes. So he lived a fictional existence, and the “Catholic” president was proud to promote it.

Policy wise, the Biden team reinterpreted “sex” discrimination in Title IX to include “gender identity.” This meant that it was okay for boys to compete against girls in sports and to

use the same locker rooms and shower facilities. In a more sane time, this would be called misogynistic, but now it was being heralded by modern-day feminists.

Kamala Harris was so enthusiastic about this issue that she said illegal immigrants who were imprisoned, and wanted to “transition” to the opposite sex, should have their procedures funded by the American people. She said that in 2019. When asked in 2025 if she still held to that position, she said yes. In fact, she dedicated a whole chapter to this in her new book.

Everyone knows that only women can get pregnant, but to admit this is to ratify what nature has ordained. There’s the rub: the LGBTQ crowd is angry at nature, and at nature’s God, so they pretend that men can also get pregnant.

The 2024 Democratic Party Platform referred to pregnant women in prison as “pregnant inmates.” The legal and medical elite were already on board: the ACLU and the AMA both referred to “pregnant” people. The same logic led failed VP candidate and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz to put tampons in the boys’ bathrooms.

A Rasmussen survey found that 70 percent of Americans are concerned about school-age children being exposed to sexual material that is not age appropriate. But it is an uphill battle.

“LGBTQ+-inclusive” texts have been assigned to kindergarten students in some schools. Another storybook for the little ones that is being used is about a transgender child who is shown in a sex-neutral or sex-ambiguous bathroom. She boasts, “My friends defend my choices and place.” She makes it plain that she prefers to be referred to as “they/their/them.” Gay marriage is not just discussed in these books—it is celebrated.

Why do homosexual men dressed as women—so-called drag

queens—demand that they perform before children?

They went to court over this “right.” Their performances include sexually explicit acts. They sued Tennessee after the state restricted drag performances when children were present (the Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to the law). The drag queens said they were defending free speech, but what they were really defending was the right to engage in lewd acts in front of children. Why is this so important to them? This is one step away from pedophilia. It is not speech.

Harvard used to be a university where serious learning took place. No more. In the spring semester, a class will be offered on drag queens, and next fall there will be one on “Queer Ethnology.” They will be taught by a visiting professor, LaWhore Vagistan, a drag queen star.

The Emmy Awards are given each year to the best TV programming. This year the show featured several drag queens who crashed the red carpet. It had nothing to do with the purpose of the event, but it did have much to do with the kind of moral destitution that Hollywood is known for. The goal was to normalize abnormal behavior.

Those promoting this sick agenda are among the most intolerant people in America. In a recent study of free speech on college campuses, it was revealed that discussions about transgender issues are not welcome; students are afraid to speak about them. That’s because defending normalcy is considered taboo by the guardians of higher education.

Normalizing transgender abnormalities is a dangerous and despicable enterprise. It leads to the sexual exploitation of children, ruining them physically and psychologically. Indeed, it is evil.

HOMEOWNERS ASSOC. NOTICE: UPHOLD RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

We often get complaints from members who live in apartment complexes or condominiums that homeowners association managers are too restrictive in dealing with religious symbols at Christmas. We decided to do something about it. On November 19, we contacted over 2,000 of these officials, alerting them to the rights of their residents. Here is the text of the letter.

Now that the holiday season is upon us, it is important that the religious rights of owners be observed. The Federal Housing Act (FHA) of 1968 prohibits discrimination by housing providers on the basis of seven characteristics, one of which is religion. Before 1968, HOA managers had a lot of leeway in enforcing policies that restricted religious practices, but that changed when the FHA was passed.

As interpreted by the U.S. Department of Justice, the FHA permits religious decorations on doors and in common areas. This would include a Jewish mezuzah and a cross. "Similarly, when condominiums or apartments have a common room that can be reserved by residents for private activities like parties or book studies, residents seeking to hold a Bible study or other private religious activity may not be discriminated against."

It should be noted that the Eleventh Circuit has stated, "the Supreme Court has repeatedly instructed us to give the Fair Housing Act a 'broad and inclusive' interpretation.'" In other words, the religious rights of residents are presumptively protected.

What the courts take seriously is any selective enforcement of

HOA rules. For example, to allow a menorah but not a nativity scene, or vice versa, is a clear violation of the FHA. Furthermore, the Supreme Court has ruled that a menorah is a religious symbol (even if it is not solely religious in nature). The crèche is also religious, but a Christmas tree is not—it is a secular symbol. This needs to be said because every year there are instances where these kinds of violations occur.

HOA managers have greater latitude in adopting restrictive rules for balconies. Balconies can be kept clear from displaying religious symbols; they are not analogous to doors or common areas. However, even if the rule is “facially neutral,” there can be a violation of the law if there is evidence of an underlying intent to discriminate.

In conclusion, there should be no attempt to favor one religion over the other, nor should there be any intent to discriminate.

Wishing everyone a happy holiday season.

William Donohue, Ph.D.

President

Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

We hope this will minimize these problems this year. They now have no more excuses.

BILLBOARD NIXED

We wanted to display a Christmas message on billboards, but we got shot down. So we came up with a new idea—alerting

Homeowners Association Managers to the religious rights of residents. Here's what happened to our billboard idea.

In September, we contacted a company that deals with outdoor marketing in Washington, D.C., hoping to run a Christmas message on billboards, the back of buses, bus shelters, etc. We wanted to take advantage of the new religious-friendly atmosphere in the nation's Capitol.

Unlike the Biden administration, which allowed the FBI to spy on faithful Catholics, the Trump team has not only put an end to this tyrannical scheme, it has promoted a host of religion-friendly policies. We wanted to capitalize on this without being too partisan, which is why we never mentioned anything specifically about the current administration. Here was our proposed message:

Christians Take Note. *Religious Liberty is Thriving Again.* Celebrate Christmas Like Never Before!

The woman we spoke to thought it would be okay, but knowing that we were dealing with D.C. officials, we asked for it to be cleared with their lawyers first. She got back to us, saying, "It looks like that messaging is about 50/50 in terms of being approved. I think if you took out 'Christian' in the 'Christians Take Note' and just had 'Take Note' it would have a better chance."

We refused to bend to these anti-Christian bureaucrats. They really do fear us.

“MAMDANI WATCH” LAUNCHED

The Catholic League has launched a new project, “Mamdani Watch,” that will track the words and deeds of Zohran Mamdani, the left-wing extremist who will become mayor of New York City on January 1. It is posted on our website. So who voted for this 34- year-old inexperienced left-wing radical? His only true competitor was Andrew Cuomo, the former state governor.

Mamdani won 50.4 percent of the vote; Andrew Cuomo received 41.6 percent; and Curtis Sliwa picked up 7.1 percent.

The two most important demographic segments who voted against him were Jews and Catholics. Jews voted for Cuomo over Mamdani by a margin of 63 percent to 33 percent; Catholics split the vote 53 to 33 percent, respectively. Among those with no religious affiliation—who are second in size to Catholics—Mamdani won 52 percent of them.

Mamdani walloped Cuomo with the two least sophisticated segments of the voting population, namely first-time voters and young people. He won 65 percent of the former and 62 percent of voters under 30. The older the voter the more likely he was to vote for Cuomo. No matter, seniors were outdone not only among the youngest voters, middle-age voters also broke for Mamdani.

The socialist led the field among those of every race and ethnicity, save for white voters (Cuomo won by 1 percent). An impressive 62 percent of Asians voted for the man of mixed African and South Asian ancestry. Blacks voted for Mamdani over Cuomo 57 percent to 38 percent, and the split for Latinos was 52 to 39 percent.

Men did not turn out to vote (they are 48 percent of the New York City population but they made up only 44 percent of voters) and they chose Mamdani (50 percent) to Cuomo (41 percent). Women are 52 percent of the NYC population, but they

accounted for 55 percent of the voters; 50 percent voted for Mamdani, and 43 percent went for Cuomo. Mamdani creamed the field among young women voters—they are the most radical segment of the electorate—winning an astonishing 84 percent of them.

Mamdani tapped into a lot of economic fears. For example, New Yorkers said that their number-one issue was the cost-of-living, and Mamdani ran on a campaign to make New York “affordable.” Yet it was the affluent—upper-middle class voters not pinched by living expenses—who voted for him in high numbers (some polls said he lost those in the highest income bracket but others called it a dead heat).

Ironically, low income voters wanted nothing to do with him—they voted for Cuomo. Did they sense that Mamdani was a phony who could not deliver on his Alice-in-Wonderland economic policies? If so, perhaps they can give the rest of New Yorkers a reality check and explain why socialism always cripples the poor.

More ironies. Mamdani’s basket of goodies—free bus fare, free child care, a rent freeze—cannot be done without raising taxes. Yet 60 percent of voters said raising taxes will “hurt the economy.”

So is Mamdani being realistic when he sports his budget-busting policies? No. Only 44 percent of voters said his policies are realistic. Cuomo, by contrast, was believable—58 percent said his policies were realistic.

In other words, a majority of New Yorkers voted for a man whom they believe (a) can’t do the job (b) will pursue measures that will hurt the economy, and (c) will promote policies that are unrealistic. Hard to find more irrational voters.

We know from survey data that the poor are more patriotic than middle class and upper-class Americans. Maybe they can run another tutorial for them on this subject. Consider what

happened on Veterans Day.

New Yorkers voted for a man who has a very hard time celebrating America's greatness. He did not march in the New York City Veterans Day Parade, as did the current mayor, Eric Adams. Virtually every mayor in NYC has marched in this parade, but Mamdani did not want to be seen honoring our veterans. His base would not like that. So he shared a meal with veterans in the Bronx.

Patriotic Americans will always be horrified by what happened on 9/11. For Mamdani, the nearly 3,000 who were killed by Islamists are a footnote to what this day means. He sees "Islamophobia" as the number-one problem. "Growing up in the shadow of 9/11, I have known what it means to live with an undercurrent of suspicion in this city."

More recently he has said that his aunt was too afraid to wear her hijab in public after 9/11. Besides the fact that she is his cousin, not his aunt, it is striking what really bothers him about that fateful day. To be exact, what radical Muslims did to innocent Americans seems not to bother him as much as alleged incidents of anti-Muslim bias.

Let's face it. Mamdani is more at home smiling with his friend, Siraj Wahhaj, the Islamist linked to terrorist activity in the U.S. than he is smiling with veterans marching up Fifth Avenue. That says it all.

Our "Mamdani Watch" is being launched because the Marxist Muslim Millionaire is now the new face of the most radical members of the Democratic Party. But don't worry about him becoming president—he was born in Uganda.

NEWSOM INVOKES THE BIBLE TO SLAM VANCE

On November 9, California Governor Gavin Newsom called out Vice President JD Vance for allowing the poor to go hungry. He invoked the Bible to make his case. He made his comments to Jake Tapper on the CNN show, "State of the Union."

The Daily Beast, a left-wing media outlet, said, "Newsom Rips New Catholic Vance for Denying Food to Poor." It noted that Newsom was a "Tried-and-tested Catholic," and Vance was a "newbie" Catholic.

What prompted Newsom to lash out at Vance was the suspension of SNAP benefits, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. He never mentioned that SNAP has run out of money. With good reason: for 15 consecutive times, the Democrats in Congress voted to keep the government closed. Only now are they back in the game.

This kind of bickering is commonplace among politicians, but what is different this time is that Newsom brought religion into the mix, essentially saying he is the model Catholic, not Vance.

"I mean, Old Testament, New Testament," he told Tapper. "What's the fundamental thing that connects every—I mean, from John to Matthew to Proverbs? It's this notion of hunger, feeding the poor, the sick, the tired...it's not an option, it's central to advancing God's will."

The Daily Beast is wrong. Newsom is not a "Tried-and-tested Catholic." Even he admits he is not. In fact, he calls himself a "secular Catholic." Those must be the type who play bingo in a Church basement while rarely going upstairs.

There is good reason why Newsom is not a real Catholic. Real

Catholics do not pretend to be interested in the welfare of children, as Newsom does, and then champion child abuse in the womb. Mr. "Cultural Catholic" has never found an abortion he couldn't justify, and loves to brag how he is the strongest advocate of abortion in the nation. In October, he took \$140 million of California taxpayer's money and gave it to Planned Parenthood, the behemoth abortion mill.

Newsom is shameless. He even invokes God's name to justify the killing of innocent unborn children. In 2022, after Mississippi and Oklahoma passed restrictive abortion laws, he promoted billboards in those states that wrapped his support for abortion in Scripture. "Love your neighbor as yourself. *There is no greater commandment than these.*" Mark 12:31.

Other children who are not safe from Newsom's policies are those who are sexually confused and seek to undergo sex-reassignment surgery—the governor argues that these minors should be allowed to go through with this madness over the objections of their parents. Removing the genitals of children is something he finds humane.

Was it also humane when he killed his own mother? The night before he and a few others put her down in 2002, Newsom was so kind as to make her dinner. He gave her hard-boiled eggs. He finished her knowing that assisted suicide was against Californian law (it wasn't legalized until 2016).

Now, of course, Newsom is lecturing Vance about what the Bible has to say about caring for the "sick." Evidently, in his book caring for the sick includes killing them.

If Newsom had any guts, he would tell us what he really thinks about Catholicism and stop repairing to it to justify his passion for killing the innocent. But he is not man enough to do so. That's what we would expect from a "cultural Catholic." Bingo anyone?

TRANSGENDERISM DIVIDES RELIGIONS

Transgenderism, the pernicious ideology that holds that sex is a social construction and the sexes are interchangeable, was formally rejected again by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on November 12 at their biannual meeting in Baltimore. On the same day—this is not a coincidence—ten “progressive” religious bodies, consisting of some Protestants and Jews, signed a statement affirming everything the Catholic bishops rejected.

The USCCB made it clear that Catholic medical care will do what it can to serve those who are suffering from gender dysphoria, but it cannot approve operations that deny what God has ordained. The directive explicitly says that “Catholic health care services must not provide or permit medical interventions, whether surgical, hormonal, or genetic, that aim not to restore but rather to alter the fundamental order of the human body in its form or function.”

In other words, Catholic health services do not include sex-reassignment surgery, genital mutilation, chemical castration, puberty blockers and all procedures that are inimical to our God-given nature.

By contrast, the “landmark” statement signed by ten “progressive” religious groups, which include the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Union for Reform Judaism, embraces “transgender, intersex, and nonbinary people.”

It would be more accurate to say that they embrace those who *identify* as such, because in reality sex is binary. Gender ideology, or transgenderism, is anti-science and should

therefore not be given a mantle of legitimacy. The Catholic Church has its share of problems, but given the contrast between what the USCCB has reaffirmed about nature and nature's God—as compared to what these anti-science religions teach—we are delighted to stand with the bishops.

MEET THE NEW MISOGYNISTS

On November 4, at New York's Plaza Hotel, *Glamour* magazine held its 2025 "Women of the Year" ceremony. But no one really cared about the celebrities being honored, and that's because all of them were women. It's just too mundane to matter.

What sells is honoring men who falsely claim to be a woman. That is what the November U.K. *Glamour* did: on the cover are photos of men who pretend to be women; they are being honored as "Women of the Year."

Why do those who work at the U.K. offices at *Glamour* hate women? It cries out for an honest answer.

If there were a cover story recognizing the achievements of blacks, featuring "African Americans of the Year," and every one of the honorees was white, wouldn't this be labeled racist? Why, then, is it not misogynistic to honor men who are deemed to be "Women of the Year"?

Aside from J.K. Rowling in the U.K., and Megyn Kelly and Allie Beth Stuckey in the U.S., there has been little pushback against this attack on women. Where are all the feminists who for years have been telling us that men occupy positions of privilege, denying women equal rights? In a perverse shift, it is now feminists who are championing the evisceration of women's rights, promoting the interests of men who are out to

destroy them. These are the new misogynists.

This fall, *Glamour* writer Stephanie McNeal blasted the men who harassed Irish golfer Rory McIlroy, and his wife Erica Stoll, at the Ryder Cup golf tournament held on Long Island. Many of them were rude beyond belief. McNeal didn't hold back. "Let's call a spade a spade: The behaviour was pure misogynistic abuse, and it's a growing movement in American culture right now."

Yes, it is time to call a spade a spade. We can begin by explaining why it is misogynistic to mistreat McIlroy's wife, but it is not misogynistic to mistreat women who would make splendid candidates for "Women of the Year," instead recognizing men who falsely claim to be a woman. What's worse—catcalls or discriminating against women?

It is not as though McNeal hasn't thought about this subject. Back in January she wrote a piece for *Glamour* titled, "Misogyny Is 2025's Biggest Trend." She gave as an example Mark Zuckerberg telling Joe Rogan that companies need more "masculine energy." Another example of misogyny is removing tampons from men's bathrooms (she did not say why the guys never complained). Abortion restrictions, which protect females in the womb as well as males, are also labeled misogynistic.

"Masculine energy" shows contempt for women. Removing tampons from men's bathrooms shows contempt for women. Protecting the unborn shows contempt for women. But denying high-achieving women the right to be considered "Women of the Year"—awarding that right exclusively to men—does not show contempt for women.

Mainstreaming delusion has never been more chic.

Kara Dansky is a left-wing feminist activist of the old school, meaning she does not suffer from delusion. She is the author of *The Abolition of Sex: How the 'Transgender' Agenda*

Harms Women and Girls. She maintains that transgender is “a made-up concept,” one that it is really a “*men’s rights* movement.” Indeed, she says, “It is left-wing misogyny on steroids.”

She agrees with J.K. Rowling that we are living in the one of the most misogynistic times in recent history. That the biggest misogynists are feminists, working to promote men’s rights at the expense of women’s rights, is something previous feminists never fathomed.

On the cover of the October edition of *Ebony* magazine, the prominent black publication, eight young men and women were featured in a story on “The Next Wave of HBCU Leaders in Beauty.” HBCU stands for “Historically Black Colleges & Universities.” All of the young men and women were black. Had they been white, *Ebony* would fold.

But *Glamour* will survive, and that’s because the new misogynists have proven to be triumphant. To put it differently, if the savants who work there can’t tell the difference between a man and a woman, then how can they be sure they are right when they complain that women are being mistreated? How do they know they’re a woman?

RELIGIOUS-SECULAR DIVIDE IS DRAMATIC

The divide between Americans who are religious and who are secular (religiously unaffiliated) is dramatic: it is evident in all aspects of the culture. That is one conclusion that can easily be drawn by the data provided by the Pew Research Center’s 2023-24 *Religious Landscape Study*. This is the third

such national study, the earlier ones being in 2014 and 2007.

Demographic Profile

Christians comprise 62% of the population; 40% Protestant, 19% Catholic and 3% other Christians. Another 7% belong to a religion other than Christianity, and 29% are religiously unaffiliated.

While the share of those who are Christian has declined since 2014, it has slowed and may even have leveled off.

Among the 7% who belong to a non-Christian religion, approximately 2% are Jewish and 1% each are Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu.

Among the religiously unaffiliated, 5% are atheist, 6% are agnostic and 19% identify as “nothing in particular.”

Here are some of the findings that detail the secular-religious divide.

Political Ideology

Consistent with other surveys, this study found that “The most highly religious Americans are also the most Republican, conservative.” Conversely, secularists are overwhelmingly Democrats.

When it comes to Americans who identify as conservative, moderate and liberal, overall 33% are conservative, 38% are moderate and 24% are liberal. The only groups with a majority who identify as liberal are atheists (67%) and agnostics (57%). As we shall see, this has significant consequences.

Science and Religion

Is there a conflict between science and religion, as is often portrayed by the media and those in education? Religious Americans do not see it that way—it is those without a

religious affiliation who believe there is. “Among Americans with low levels of religious engagement, 73% say science and religion are mostly in conflict, roughly twice the share of highly religious Americans who take the same position (35%).”

While the authors of this study do not say why, from a Catholic perspective there is no inherent tension between believing what God has created and a scientific understanding of the universe. Indeed, it was Catholic scientists during the Scientific Revolution who sought to appreciate the scientific basis of God’s creation.

But for atheists and agnostics, who discount the existence of God, all they have to fall back on is science, which they believe has nothing in common with God’s creation of the universe. This belief is central to their dogma.

Government and Helping the Poor

Do secularists care more about the poor than religious Americans? Many of those in the chattering class, who tend to be secularists, believe this is the case. They point to reports like this Pew study as proof.

It is true that this study shows that “Highly religious Americans are less likely to say the government should give more help to people in need.” It is also true that “Two-thirds of U.S. adults with low levels of religious engagement favor a bigger government that provides more services.” In fact, “72% of atheists say the government should provide more assistance to those in need.”

Not so fast. As Bill Donohue pointed out in his book, *The Catholic Advantage: How Happiness, Health and Heaven Await the Faithful*, the social science evidence is clear: religious Americans are the most charitable and altruistic; secularists are the least generous and the least altruistic.

The reason why secularists score so poorly on these variables

has much to do with their belief that government—not private individuals or religious organizations—should provide for the poor. So of course they *appear* to be more concerned about the poor when they say government should do more to help them. They are the least likely to write a check or volunteer their services.

Morality

On moral issues, the religious-secular divide is astounding. Is it better for one parent to stay at home to focus on the family? Most Americans (55%) say it is, and the more religious someone is the more likely he is to agree. The only ones who disagree are those who score “low” on this variable. So telling.

Should homosexuality, transgender people and abortion be accepted by society? Christians are the most likely to disagree. It is secularists who are the most accepting. This speaks to the premium which secularists put on individual autonomy, in contrast to the premium which religious Americans put on traditional moral values.

The more religious someone is, the more likely he is to say there are “clear and absolute standards for what is right and wrong.” Secularists are naturally moral relativists: to admit there are clear moral standards is to beg the question—according to whom? By definition, they cannot answer, “God.”

Religious Americans are the most likely to believe that public school teachers should lead their classes in nonsectarian prayers; secularists, of course, disagree. Secularists also oppose religious displays on public property. It’s too bad respondents weren’t asked if they opposed them on private property.

A strong majority of Americans believe that churches and religious organizations enhance community bonds, help the poor and strengthen morality in society. That says a great deal.

We are a divided country, and much of it is reflected, if not caused, by the religious-secular divide.

GETTING TO KNOW POPE LEO XIV

Bill Donohue

Paul Kengor, *American Pontiff: Pope Leo XIV and His Plan to Heal the Church* (Humanix Books)

Most people, including Catholics, know little about Robert Francis Prevost of Chicago, the Augustinian who became Pope Leo XIV. Thanks to Paul Kengor, Grove City College professor, author and editor-in-chief of *The American Spectator*, we now know a great deal about him. He has written the most compelling biography of our new pope in print.

Inheriting a Mess

Leo inherited a mess. It was intentional. It didn't take long before his predecessor, Pope Francis, implored the young people in Rio de Janeiro to "make a mess of things." He said to the crowd, "What is it that I expect as a consequence of World Youth Day? I want a mess." He explicitly demanded, "I want trouble in the dioceses!"

This was not a throwaway line. Francis meant what he said. On Christmas Eve, 2019, in his midnight Mass homily, he stated that God loves even those who make "a complete mess of things." In 2024, he told another audience to "make a mess." No one doubts that he succeeded. Australian Cardinal George Pell spoke for many when he labeled Francis' pontificate as "a disaster," "a catastrophe" and a "toxic nightmare."

Some experienced the mess more than others. Those who prefer

the “old Mass,” or the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM), were undercut when Francis issued his apostolic letter *Traditionis custodes*. “When Pope Francis had said with a grin that he wanted to ‘make a mess of things’ with his pontificate,” Kengor writes, “*Traditionis custodes* was a perfect case in point.” The restrictions that this document imposed was seen by traditionalists as a statement of rebuke, if not hostility.

The traditionalists were not overreacting. Francis called them “rigid” Catholics, “full of rottenness, therefore of greed, or wickedness.” Kengor notes how bizarre this name-calling was. “The typical TLM types gave birth to large families that were so serious about their faith that they were producing religious vocations: priests and nuns.” So if the goal is to marginalize them, where are we going to find new recruits? “Did the pope hate them?”, Kengor asks. “Did he see them really as Pharisees? Why was he restricting them?”

It was left to the next pope to start the cleanup.

Electing a New Pope

Some observers thought that after Francis died, the new pope would be Francis II. They reasoned that since Francis had expanded the number of cardinal electors to 135, adding 15 new electors to the previous maximum of 120, that the next pope would be much like himself. Others disagreed, emphasizing that many cardinals felt Francis had moved too far from the center, alienating millions of Catholics. As events unfolded, the latter perspective proved triumphant.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin was the odds-on favorite. Other serious contenders included Cardinal Tagle of the Philippines, Cardinal Pizzaballa and Cardinal Zuppi (both from Italy), Cardinal Turkson of Ghana and Cardinal Erdő of Hungary. Cardinal Raymond Burke of the United States was a serious candidate as well.

There was another American, Robert Prevost of Chicago, who

caught the eye of some observers. Edward Pentin, rightly regarded as the most competent of all Catholic journalists, listed him in his top ten, albeit near the bottom. Pentin noted that Prevost was seen as a possible compromise candidate, someone whose lengthy missionary service in Peru allowed him “to be seen more as an international candidate than an American.”

Kengor nicely captures the drama that led to a three-way race: Parolin, Erdő and Prevost. “In other words,” Kengor says, “Prevost had never been an underdog.” What helped him enormously was the role played by New York Archbishop Cardinal Timothy Dolan. Dolan convinced his colleagues that Prevost was really a “citizen of the world,” not merely an American.

Pope Leo XIV sent unmistakable signs of unity right from the start. When he greeted the crowd at St. Peter’s Square, his demeanor was calm, and he was wearing traditional papal attire. For Kengor, this was convincing, it meant the “new Holy Father showed signs of stability, order, of quelling the chaos.” This was in stark contrast to what Francis yielded.

Prevost the Man

Prevost hailed from Chicago, attended a minor seminary in his high school years, St. Augustine Seminary, and chose an Augustinian-founded institution for his college experience, Villanova University. He received his doctorate at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome, writing his dissertation on an aspect of the Order of Saint Augustine. In 1977 he joined the Order of Saint Augustine as a novice.

No matter where he was, Prevost struck his associates as someone who was smart, humble and holy. He was also a good listener, someone who sought to learn from those whom he interacted with. A priest, who was one of his seminary schoolmates, said he “listened intently.” He was “never flippant” in response, and “never ‘off the cuff.’”

At Villanova, his decision to major in math was something that greatly impressed Kengor. "The fact that Pope Leo XIV is a mathematician says something about his mind—his very orderly mind." It paid good dividends when he became pope. "Prevost inherited a Francis papacy that confused the faithful with its disorder. Math, on the other hand, seeks to bring order out of chaos. Mathematicians are problem solvers." This will serve him well, for as Kengor observes, Leo is poised to "tidy up the Francis 'mess of things' that frustrated all."

Prevost chose the name Leo XIV largely because he was so impressed by Pope Leo XIII's historic encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. The 1891 encyclical was a social-justice statement that pointedly rejected socialism. Leo XIII knew how socialism undermined marriage and the family, the key cells in society. He was well aware of what Marx and Engels had wrought, and wanted nothing to do with the communist schemes. "As Leo XIII put it," says Kengor, "these socialists, communists, and nihilists 'leave nothing untouched,'" debasing marriage and the family.

Kengor is a student of communism, having written extensively about it. That is why his analysis of *Rerum Novarum* is so important. He debunks the myth that because it focuses on social justice that somehow that means it embraces socialism. Indeed, Leo XIII condemned socialism many times in his famous encyclical. His staunch defense of private property— an anathema to socialists—removes all doubt about his alleged affinity for socialism. Moreover, socialism's interest in elevating the state over the primacy of the family was another reason to reject it wholeheartedly.

Pope Leo XIV saw firsthand how Marxism works. His tenure in Peru in the 1980s was a time when liberation theology was in vogue. It is a pernicious blend of Marxism and the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church, with a decided edge given to the former. He also witnessed the rise of communist-inspired guerrilla groups. Kengor writes that "Latin America

had become a cauldron of toxic liberation theology and violent Marxism exported and sponsored throughout the region by Fidel Castro's Cuba and the Soviet Union." In fact, Prevost was almost victimized by these thugs. This surely had a profound effect on him.

Steadying the Ship

There are some Catholic commentators who sharply dislike discussions about "liberal Catholics" and "conservative Catholics." Be that as it may, it cannot be denied that there is a "progressive" wing and a "traditionalist" wing in the Catholic Church; the former reject many Church teachings, especially those governing marriage, the family and sexuality; the latter uphold them. Both sides closely examined every move the new pope made, hoping to see which side he was favoring.

Given his Augustinian roots, it was no surprise that one of Leo's first comments reflected Augustine's natural law teachings. He made no bones about his defense of marriage as the exclusive reserve of a man and a woman. Following Pope Benedict XVI, he made plain his concerns over the threat that moral relativism embodies.

Kengor wryly notes, "The world was learning—to the regret of many—that the Catholic pope was, well, Catholic. He proclaimed Catholic truths and teachings on matters like marriage, abortion, and the scourge of relativism."

One of the first tests for Leo was what to do about the problems that Francis had created at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family. This institute, founded by John Paul II, was staffed by some prominent traditionalists, and enjoyed a stellar reputation. But the first chance Francis had to make changes, he moved quickly to radically transform it into a place that few admirers would recognize.

The turmoil that ensued, putting Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia

in charge, made headlines in the Catholic press, and beyond. Paglia and his new team introduced a “new pastoral theology” that was anchored more in the social sciences than in moral theology. Well respected conservative scholars went public with their criticism; they were especially concerned about the change in personnel at the institute. Some spoke about a “betrayal” of the institute’s founding mission.

This was not lost on Leo. He moved with dispatch to replace Paglia with a relatively young 54-year old, Cardinal Baldassare Reina, signaling a return to the institute’s theological roots.

Next up was what to do about TLM. This issue was foisted upon Leo from the beginning as two American bishops took aim at Latin Mass Catholics. Bishop Michael Martin of Charlotte, North Carolina led off, followed by Detroit Archbishop Edward Weisenburger.

Martin said he was “purifying and unifying the celebration of the Mass,” though traditionalists did not see it that way. They greeted his restrictions on TLM as an attack on them. Charlotte clergy and laity both expressed their concerns, and there were many. Sunday Latin Masses were drawing a big turnout, so it appeared not only to be mean-spirited to restrict TLM, it was counterproductive. It was this kind of consternation that provoked a response from Leo. Bishop Martin announced that he was putting his new policy on ice.

The situation with Archbishop Weisenburger, who fired respected faculty members at the Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, and banned TLM at the end of June, remains undecided. He is obviously pushing the envelope, beckoning a response from Leo.

Another serious problem facing our new pope is how to deal with *Fiducia supplicans*, the declaration by Pope Francis allowing blessings of same-sex couples. On the same day that

edict was given, homosexual activists like Fr. Jim Martin began blessing legally married homosexual men. Another New York priest, Fr. Gerry Murray, pushed back, noting what Francis did was wrong. “We do not bless sin,” which means priests “have no authority to bless homosexual couples.”

At some point, Leo will have to decide whether Fr. Martin or Fr. Murray is right. We know that at a 2012 synod, Prevost spoke strongly against “anti-Christian lifestyle choices,” including the “redefinition of marriage” and “alternative families composed of same-sex partners and their adopted children.” If he were to pick up on that position, it would allay the fears of the faithful.

Kengor ends his magnificent book by quoting an impressive young New York priest, Fr. Brian A. Graebe. It is “time to heal,” and no one is better situated to do that than Pope Leo XIV.

WHY IS MASSACHUSETTS SO ILLIBERAL?

The short answer to this question is because Massachusetts is so liberal.

To be a liberal used to mean being tolerant, especially of free speech. No more. Today it means being an authoritarian. This has been confirmed by many surveys, including ones sponsored by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE). In other words, many—not all—self-identified contemporary liberals are illiberal in their words and deeds.

Among the most illiberal states in the nation is Massachusetts. One recent example of this verity is the recent lawsuit brought by more than a dozen residents in Quincy objecting to the display of St. Michael and St. Florian on the new police headquarters. The town mayor, Thomas Koch, chose these two figures to adorn the building because they are the patron saints of police and firefighters, respectively. A judge has granted a preliminary injunction stopping the installation of the statues.

The lawsuit argues that the statues violate religious neutrality, as required by law. Mayor Koch responds by saying they were chosen "to honor Quincy's first responders, not to promote any religion." The legal issues are critical, but it is not fidelity to the law that is spurring the lawsuit—it is intolerance to anything Christian.

St. Michael was chosen as the patron saint of the police because of his role, as described in Scripture, of being a warrior angel who protected the people. Florian was a third-century military officer who was responsible for assembling an elite corps of firefighters. That's why the two of them were chosen as exemplary representatives of first responders.

The Supreme Court has several times understood that religious figures can have secular connotations, meaning their non-religious activities can be appreciated independent of their religious status. One example of this would be the many schools, streets and statues named after Martin Luther King. They are a tribute to his civil rights efforts. He was also a minister, yet no one says they should be renamed because he was a man of the cloth.

Corpus Christi is a city in Texas. It means "Body of Christ." Should it be renamed? Throughout California there are towns and cities that start with "San," meaning "saint." Should they be renamed? We are coming into the holiday season: the word "holiday" means "holy day." Should we cancel that as well? Or

are we not being deliriously sensitive?

What is going on in Quincy is a state-wide problem. Take Boston, barely ten miles away.

From 2006 to 2018, the city of Boston authorized 284 flags to fly atop a city flagpole outside of city hall, representing a myriad of government and private interests. But in 2018 it turned down a request by Camp Constitution to fly what they described as a "Christian" flag, maintaining that to do so would amount to government endorsement of religion. But Gay Pride flags were allowed: only Christian flags were banned.

Eventually, the Supreme Court resolved the Christian lawsuit in their favor. The high court ruled that the flagpole represented a public forum, and therefore the government could not discriminate on the basis of religious viewpoint.

Why did secular elites in Boston decide to cherry-pick one group and deny it the right to fly their Christian flag when they had no problem honoring the flags of Communist nations? Why was rejecting the Christian flag so important to them that they appealed lower court rulings to the highest court in the land? Let's face it, they did so because of their deep-seated animus against Christianity.

The same hostility is at work today in Quincy. Historically, this is bizarre.

The last state to abandon state churches was Massachusetts. That was in 1833. But in 2016, a Pew Research Center poll found that the Bay State was tied with New Hampshire as the least religious state in the nation. In 2007, 81 percent of the residents of Massachusetts identified with a religion; in 2024, it was 63 percent. The decline was driven largely by a decrease in adults who identified as Christian. Moreover, the percentage of adults who identified as religiously unaffiliated jumped from 17 percent in 2007 to 37 percent in 2024.

One major reason for the secularization of Massachusetts is the proliferation of elite colleges and universities; it ranks second on this measure to California. This matters greatly as higher education is one of the most significant drivers of secularism in the nation. Regrettably, these days it is associated with illiberalism.

In its 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, FIRE rated 257 colleges and universities. Harvard University ranked 245, Boston College placed 251, and Northeastern University came in at 253. The study concluded that "Massachusetts is home to some of the most speech-restrictive campuses in the country." Thus does it represent a textbook case of how liberalism has evolved into illiberalism.

Those who spend their days on campus, as administrators, faculty or students, surely consider themselves among the most enlightened and fair-minded people in America. Nonsense. They are precisely the kind of people who get exercised about the statues that adorn the Quincy police headquarters.

The same people who tell us to be tolerant of men who use women's locker rooms and showers—falsely claiming to be a woman—exhibit nothing but intolerance toward our values. Their duplicity is astounding.