

# IRELAND'S "MASS GRAVE" HOAX; MEDIA SMEAR NUNS

**Bill Donohue**

Mass hysteria has gripped Ireland, England, and the United States over reports that nearly 800 bodies of children have been found in a mass grave outside a former home run by nuns in Tuam, near Galway. The Catholic Church has been hammered incessantly, and shrill cries of maltreatment abound. Fresh off the heels of horror stories about the Magdalene Laundries, and the torment of Philomena Lee (as recorded in the film, "Philomena"), the public is reeling from the latest report of abuse at the hands of cruel nuns.

None of this is true. There is no mass grave. Women were not abused by nuns in the Magdalene Laundries. And Philomena's son was never taken from her and then sold to the highest bidder. The evidence that the public has been hosed is overwhelming. Truths, half-truths, and flat-out lies are driving all three stories. That's a bad stew, the result of which is to whip up anti-Catholic sentiment. This is no accident.

Regarding the latest hoax, many reporters and pundits have charged that the "mass grave" story is "Ireland's Holocaust." The Nazi analogy belittles what happened to Jews under Hitler, and dishonors Irish nuns. The nuns never put kids into ovens; they did not starve them to death; and they did not torture anyone. Even if the most glaringly dishonest stories about children who died in Irish homes were true, they would not come close to approaching the monstrous atrocities that Jews endured under the Nazis. To make such a comparison is obscene.

It is true that 796 children died in the Tuam home between 1925 and 1961, and their whereabouts is uncertain. But that hardly merits the fantastic leap that wicked nuns dumped them

in a septic tank, treating them as if they were raw sewage. There is not a scintilla of evidence to back up this scurrilous accusation. Yet in May and June, this propaganda was disseminated on both sides of the Atlantic, treated as if it were an accurate account.

What is perhaps most striking about this story is the extent to which much of the mainstream media has had to walk back its inflammatory stories. The Associated Press even apologized in June for distorting the record. But the damage has been done: once again, the Catholic Church in Ireland has been unfairly blamed for persecuting innocent women and children.

Anti-Catholicism in Ireland, England, and the United States is fueling the “mass grave” hysteria. It’s a sick appetite, and there is no shortage of irresponsible persons feeding it.

[Click here](#) for more.

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## **GUINNESS BEING PINCHED**

June 17 marked the three month anniversary of our boycott of Guinness. We did an online survey of pub owners in several cities, and the results were as follows:

- 75 report a decrease in sales
- 24 report no difference
- 4 report an increase

From what we have determined, it appears that the decrease in

sales is due to three factors: (a) there is a drop off in sales following St. Patrick's Day (b) the increase in the sales of craft beers is hurting Guinness and (c) the boycott is working. Here is a sample of the responses:

"In April-May 2014, we sold 1,030 pints but in April-May 2013, we sold 1,245 pints"; "I have switched to other stouts"; "Holding back on buying Guinness"; "Our sales are down 3-4%"; "I was gonna pull Guinness but instead I put Murphy's in beside it"; "I own 12 bars in Manhattan and I will let you know that we are disgusted with Guinness"; "My Guinness sales have declined by about 40%"; "I sold my stock in Diageo when I first heard the news."

We notified officials at Diageo, the Guinness owner, of our results. We also sent them the names of thousands who signed our petition. Many thanks to everyone for participating in this boycott. Please keep it up. This concludes this phase of our campaign.

Look for future announcements. It is important that Guinness understands that it cannot treat Catholics with impunity.

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# **THE POWER OF HOPE AND PRAYER**

**William A. Donohue**

Lately, as the result of a new book I am finishing, I have given a lot of thought to the power of hope and prayer. So when I heard about the travails of Bret Baier and his wife, I knew I had to read it; their very personal ordeal is truly inspiring. What follows is a small excerpt from my new book.

Bret Baier, the Fox News chief political anchor, and his wife

Amy, know better than most what it is like to face adversity. Soon after their first child was born, they learned that Paulie had heart disease. "Heart disease can be simple or it can be complex," said the cardiologist. "Your son has a complex heart disease. He has a very complicated heart." The doctor then informed them that "If your son doesn't have surgery within the next two weeks, he's not going to make it."

Before the surgery, the Baiers had Paulie baptized. "Wiping away a few tears," Bret said, "I prayed, 'Dear Lord, thank you for all the blessings you have given us, and the biggest of our lives, the birth of our son, Paul Francis. We now turn him over to your care for his upcoming surgery and the recovery that will follow. Please be with all of us gathered here and help us get through this challenging time. Lord, please give us strength. Amen.'" Paulie survived, underwent many more heart operations, and is now a happy young boy. You can read about this marvelous story in Bret's book, *Special Heart: A Journey of Faith, Hope, Courage and Love*.

The Baiers are practicing Catholics. What would they have done had they been atheists? It must be tough going it alone, and indeed the evidence shows exactly that. But Bret and Amy were not alone—they were one with the Lord. Bret's prayer was quintessentially Catholic: he was not angry with God—he thanked the Lord for the gift of his son and asked for his help. But most of all, he did not despair. By praying for Paulie's "recovery that will follow," he evinced optimism and hope.

Dr. Aaron Kheriaty, a Catholic psychiatrist, draws our attention to a biblical story on the subject of despair that is particularly enlightening. He notes that both St. Peter and Judas sinned against Jesus, but with different outcomes. "The contrast between St. Peter's repentance and Judas' despair illustrates this: both men sinned grievously, but Peter repented with tears of contrition. He did not abandon hope. Peter's repentance led him to become one of the greatest

saints. Judas despaired, and this despair led him to take his own life."

"There are two things which kill the soul," wrote St. Augustine, "despair and presumption." Despair takes command when hope is jettisoned, when we give up on God. Presumption is more typically a characteristic of atheism, the conviction that we have no need of God, and are quite capable of going it alone. It is an expression of pride, a sin that carries with it the seeds of self-destruction. Both despair and presumption leave no room for hope. "To be utterly without hope is to be in a hellish state," notes Dr. Kheriaty. He reminds us what is written over the gates of hell in Dante's *Inferno*: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

Jesus said at the Last Supper, "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy." How can this be? It is not something atheists can grasp. It eludes the secular mind. New York Archbishop Timothy Cardinal Dolan put it in a way that really drives home the essence of Jesus' words. He explored what he called "the theological reasons for laughter." Why are people of faith happy, he asked. "Here's my reason for joy: the cross. You heard me right: the cross of Christ!" The death of Jesus was not the last word. His resurrection was. After Christ was crucified, Dolan says, it "seemed we could never smile again...But, then came the Sunday called Easter! The sun-S-U-N-came up, and the Son-S-O-N-came out as He rose from the dead. Guess who had the last word? God!" There is probably nothing more baffling to an atheist than this "theology of laughter." It is a theology grounded in hope, and hope is the natural antidote to despair.

When Pope John Paul II died, I happened to be at the studios of the Fox News Network in New York City. I knew he was dying, but I had no idea that I would be the first guest to go on the air when he passed away. When asked by Shepard Smith what my thoughts were, I answered, "On the one hand, great sorrow. On the other hand, great joy. Sorrow that he's no longer with us.

Joy that he's with God, with his Lord."

How sad it is that atheists can only accept the first half of my response. Even more perplexing to them is what Mother Teresa said about a man who knew he was dying. He turned to her and said, "Sister, I'm going home to God." She was more than moved by this—she exclaimed that she had never seen "such a radiant smile on a human face as the one I saw on that man's face." Tragically, no atheist could ever account for this man's happiness.

We Catholics are so lucky. We face just as much adversity as anyone, but we have at our disposal the power of hope and prayer. If you want proof of how it works in real life, pick up a copy of *Special Heart*. You won't be disappointed.

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## DEBUNKING THE "MASS GRAVE" STORY

*To read Donohue's full account of this story, see the "Special Reports" section on the Catholic League's website. [[Click Here](#)]*

One of the key players in the "mass grave" story about the Tuam home is Catherine Corless, a local historian. Her research "suggested 796 babies were buried in a tank outside the former Tuam Mother and Baby Home, in Co. Galway, once run by the Bon Secours nuns in Galway." Research that suggests an outcome is hardly unimportant, but it is not dispositive. Furthermore, while it is entirely fair to surmise what happened, it is quite another thing to declare exactly what happened.

What is not in dispute is the fact that between 1925 and 1961, 796 children died at this home in Tuam. An initial investigation concluded that "No one knows the total number of babies in the grave." On June 5, the *New York Times* said the local police discounted the "mass grave" story as myth. "These are historical burials going back to famine times," the police said. They added that "there is no confirmation from any source that there are between 750 and 800 bodies present." Yet that is precisely what many media outlets, and activists, said.

Eamonn Fingleton, writing in *Forbes*, notes that "experts believe that the babies were buried in unmarked graves within the grounds of the orphanage." This was not uncommon in Ireland in the first half of the 20th century; this is the way church-run orphanages and workhouses buried their dead.

In many ways, the observations of Brendan O'Neill are the most impressive. He is an Irish atheist with no dog in this fight, save for telling the truth. O'Neill is anything but politically correct. He saw through the malarkey about the Magdalene Laundries, and he has been equally courageous in challenging tales of "mass graves."

"On almost every level," O'Neill said in his June 9 article in *Spiked*, "the news reports in respectable media outlets around the world were plain wrong. Most importantly, the constantly repeated line about the bodies of 800 babies having been found was pure mythmaking. The bodies of 800 babies had not been found, in the septic tank or anywhere else." The myth was the product of Corless' "speculation" that the children who died in the home were buried in a mass grave.

O'Neill is adamant in his conviction that "it's actually not possible that all 800 babies are in this tank-cum-crypt, as pretty much every media outlet has claimed." He cites a story in the *Irish Times* that says "the septic tank was still in use up to 1937, 12 years after the home opened, during which time

204 of the 796 deaths occurred—and it seems impossible that more than 200 bodies could have been put in a working sewage tank.”

Tim Stanley is another reliable source from the U.K., and he is also convinced that the popular understanding of what happened is false. “It is highly unlikely, if not physically impossible,” he wrote on June 7, “that 796 bodies would have been placed into one septic tank.” He takes note of the fact that “the tank was only in use between 1926 and 1937,” thus undercutting wild accusations that the vile nuns treated dead children like raw sewage for decades.

Fingleton draws on his own experience to question the veracity of the conventional wisdom. He does not mince words: “For anyone familiar with Ireland (I was brought up there in the 1950s and 1960s), the story of nuns consciously throwing babies into a septic tank never made much sense. Although many aforesaid nuns might have been holier-than-thou harridans, they were nothing if not God-fearing and therefore unlikely to treat human remains with the sort of outright blasphemy implied in the septic tank story.”

Adding considerable weight to the observations of O’Neill, Stanley, and Fingleton is Dr. Finbar McCormick. He teaches at the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology at Queens University in Belfast. He berates the media for using the term “septic tank” to describe the child burials at the home. “The structure as described is much more likely to be a shaft burial vault, a common method of burial used in the recent past and still used today in many parts of Europe.” He specifically says that “Many maternal hospitals in Ireland had a communal burial place for stillborn children or those who died soon after birth. These were sometimes in a nearby graveyard but more often in a special area within the grounds of the hospital.”

So if the public has been duped, how did this story begin? It



began innocently enough in 2010, but it took on a strong ideological bent in early 2014. The key players are Corless and Martin Sixsmith.

In 2010, Catherine Corless read an article in the *Tuam Herald* that caught her eye. The piece, "Stolen Childhoods," recounted the fate of a former resident in the Mother and Baby home in Tuam that was run by the Bon Secours Sisters. She had already done research on this home, so she naturally followed up and contacted the man identified in the article. This provided her with other leads. Two years later, in November 2012, Corless published her findings in a local journal.

What is most striking about Corless is not what she said in 2012, but what she is saying today. In her journal article, there is no professed anger at the nuns, or the Catholic Church. But today she is in rage. While she does not explain her change in tune, it is evident that her encounter with Sixsmith earlier this year proved to be a game changer.

Sixsmith is the English atheist who wrote the patently dishonest book about Philomena Lee; the movie about her life was based on his work. Since then, he has taken every opportunity to fan the flames of anti-Catholicism, and even arranged to include the "mass grave" hoax in a documentary about the horrors of Irish nuns. Once he hooked up with Corless, she became increasingly strident in her denunciations of the nuns and the Catholic Church.

Corless was now on a tear. Her previous comments on the possibility of a mass grave, which were tentative, gave way to absolute certainty. "I am certain there are 796 children in the mass grave." Just as important, she was now convinced of the mendacity of the Catholic Church. "I do blame the Catholic Church," she said. "I blame the families as well but people were afraid of the parish priest. I think they were brainwashed." No longer a Catholic, she confesses, "I am very, very angry with the Catholic church."

The notion that a mass grave existed in the site of the Home is oddly enough credited to the same person who says there never was one. His name is Barry Sweeney. Here's what happened.

In 1975, when Sweeney was 10, he and a friend, Frannie Hopkins, 12, were playing on the grounds where the home was when they stumbled on a hole with skeletons in it. Corless had heard about some boys who found skeletons there, but did not know their identity until this year. On St. Patrick's Day, Sweeney was drinking at Brownes bar, on the Square in Tuam, when he learned of Corless' research. The two subsequently met.

In her journal article, Corless makes mention of a "few local boys" who "came upon a sort of crypt in the ground, and on peering in they saw several small skulls." So how did she make the leap in 2014 that she is "certain" there are 796 bodies in a mass grave when just two years ago she wrote about "several small skulls"? The leap, it is clear, was not made on the basis of the evidence.

More important, Corless did not jump to the conclusion that "the bones are still there" because she learned from Sweeney about some new evidence. We know this because he contradicts her fantastic story. He is quoted in the *Irish Times* saying "there was no way there were 800 skeletons down that hole. Nothing like that number." How many were there? "About 20," he says.

It is a credit to Douglas Dalby of the *New York Times* that he did not bury this new information the way most other media outlets did. On June 10, he wrote that "some of the assumptions that led Ms. Corless to her conclusion [about the mass grave] have been challenged, not least by the man she cited, Barry Sweeney, now 48, who was questioned by detectives about what he saw when he was 10 years old. 'People are making out we saw a mass grave,' he said he had told the detectives.

'But we can only say what we seen [sic]: maybe 15 to 20 small skeletons.'

It does not speak well for Corless that she is flatly contradicted by one of the few persons whose credibility no one questions. Any objective researcher would have adjusted his thesis after encountering a central figure such as Sweeney. Even more bizarre, her initial assessment was sober in analysis. But meeting Sweeney was too late to matter: Corless had already met Sixsmith, and she wasn't about to let the facts get in her way. Ideology, as we have seen repeatedly in history, has a way of trumping the truth.

It is not just writers such as Fingleton who see an anti-Catholic bias at work (he calls the whole story a "hoax"). Dalby quotes a member of the committee that was organized to memorialize the dead children, Anne Collins, as saying she has had it with the ideologues. "Ms. Collins said the news media and 'church bashers' had hijacked the situation, and she disagreed with the widespread condemnation of the nuns."

Tim Stanley is right to finger a double standard that is present among elites. "Whenever a Muslim does something cruel or barbaric (such as female genital mutilation), politicians and the media are quick (rightly) to assert that this is a cultural practice rather than a religious one. But whenever a Catholic is guilty of a crime, it is either stated or implied that it is a direct consequence of dogma."

Finally, let's assume that a mass grave of dead babies on the grounds of the Tuam home were found. This would be cause for harsh criticism. But why is it that when aborted babies are taken to a "waste to energy" facility, and then incinerated as "clinical waste" by British hospitals, there is little outrage? This isn't a horror story out of the early 20th century: It was reported on March 14, 2014. The headline in *The Telegraph* read, "Aborted Babies Incinerated to Heat U.K. Hospitals."

The Sixsmiths of this world are not at all angry about the mass killings and the mass burnings of unborn babies going on today right before our eyes. No, they are too busy fabricating stories about nuns sexually assaulting young women, stealing their kids, and dumping their bodies in septic tanks. It tells us a great deal about the current state of anti-Catholicism that such bull is not only accepted, it is welcomed as affirmation of the venality of the Catholic Church.

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## **PELOSI'S ARROGANCE**

## **UNMITIGATED**

Rep. Nancy Pelosi does not simply reject the Catholic Church's teachings on marriage, abortion, and contraception—she is a rabid foe of the Church's positions. Recently, she went beyond her usual stance by lecturing her archbishop on the folly of marriage, properly understood.

On June 19, San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone spoke at a Washington rally that was organized by the National Organization for Marriage. Pelosi urged him to cancel his plans because the event was not supported by her homosexual friends. Her unmitigated arrogance was on full display when she invoked a remark by Pope Francis. "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will," the Holy Father said, "then who am I to judge him?"

The pope's comment had absolutely nothing to do with the institution of marriage; he was addressing homosexual individuals. Moreover, he said nothing that any of his predecessors would have found disagreeable. Here is what he has said about marriage: "The image of God is the married

couple: the man and the woman; not only the man, not only the woman, but both of them together.” Someone ought to read that to Pelosi. The pope did not say that the image of God is the married couple of a man and a man, or a woman and a woman. That’s because such unions have been denied by nature, and by nature’s God, of creating a family.

When gays go naked in the streets of San Francisco, and mock Catholicism in patently obscene ways, Pelosi is never offended. What offends her is her archbishop’s public defense of the Church’s teachings on marriage. Nice to know what her moral compass looks like.

What is astonishing about Pelosi’s remarks is that she crossed the one line she reveres as sacred: the line separating church and state. For her, it is okay for an agent of government to tell a bishop what to do, but a bishop should not be allowed to even speak about a public issue.

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## **KUDOS TO ARCHBISHOP CORDILEONE**

A motley group of public officials, community activists, religious leaders, and gay advocates are upset that Archbishop Cordileone supports marriage, properly understood. It is a striking sociological moment when elites stage a protest of an archbishop in the Roman Catholic Church simply because he believes—as the whole world has believed for thousands of years—that marriage is the union of a man and a woman. It is not a good cultural sign that this commonsensical position is considered controversial, even hateful.

Those who are quick to brand support for traditional marriage

hateful need to look in the mirror. As Archbishop Cordileone said in his excellent response to his critics, “for those who support the conjugal understanding of marriage, the attacks have not stopped at rhetoric. Simply for taking a stand for marriage as it has been understood in every human society for millennia, people have lost their jobs, lost their livelihoods, and have suffered other types of retribution, including physical violence.”

Archbishop Cordileone, who is chairman of the bishops’ Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, offered to meet with those offended by his participation in the march. He asked “before you judge us, get to know us.” But will they?

Kudos to Archbishop Cordileone for standing on principle. Let’s also give a shout-out to his courageous spokeswoman, Christine A. Mugridge, for exclaiming, “We don’t hate-monger, we don’t pander to bigots.” We are not accustomed to such straight talk coming from those in her position.

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## **MEDIA            SMEAR            ARCHBISHOP CARLSON**

On June 9, attorney Jeff Anderson released video clips from a May 23 deposition transcript of St. Louis Archbishop Robert Carlson. It was vintage Anderson: he misrepresented the truth. The media and editorial board of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* followed his lead.

The *Post-Dispatch* editorial said the following: “Mr. Anderson asked the archbishop if at the time [1984], he knew it was a crime for an adult to engage in sex with a child. ‘I’m not

sure whether I knew it was a crime or not,' Archbishop Carlson replied. 'I understand today it is a crime.'" The editorial then hammered Carlson for his response.

What actually happened was quite different. The lead question in this exchange was never shown on the video clip. The question was: "Well, mandatory reporting laws went into effect across the nation in 1973, Archbishop." At this point, Carlson's lawyer, Charles Goldberg, interjected, "I'm going to object to the form of that question." Anderson said he wanted to finish the question, and Goldberg agreed. Anderson then said to Carlson, "And you knew at all times, while a priest, having been ordained in 1970, it was a crime for an adult to engage in sex with a kid. You knew that right?" Goldberg jumped in again: "I'm going to object to the form of that question now. You're talking about mandatory reporting." Anderson agreed to rephrase it.

The *Post-Dispatch* editorial picked up at this point, never indicating that the question was predicated on Carlson's knowledge of mandatory reporting laws in the 1980s. Moreover, the video clip was rigged by Anderson to make the archbishop look as if he didn't know it was a crime for an adult to have sex with a kid, and the media, led by the *Post-Dispatch*, published Anderson's propaganda as if it were true. It's obvious the media never independently verified Anderson's selective account. Worse, the *Post-Dispatch* has refused to apologize to the archbishop. The editorial board is a professional disgrace.

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# COMMONWEAL INDICTS ARCHBISHOP CARLSON

It was pathetic to read how *Commonweal*, home to Catholic dissidents, was straining to put the worst possible face on St. Louis Archbishop Robert Carlson's exchange with Jeffrey Anderson. Every objective observer who has ever tracked Anderson knows that this lawyer has a pathological hatred of the Catholic Church. So when he locks horns with an archbishop—any bishop will do—we know what to expect. Sadly, we also know what to expect from some on the Catholic left: when in doubt, side with Anderson's interpretation.

On June 11, Dennis Coday at the *National Catholic Reporter* essentially offered the account by the St. Louis Archdiocese regarding a controversial exchange between Anderson and Carlson. He should've stopped there. Instead, later in the day he walked back his piece, saying Grant Gallicho at *Commonweal* may have been right when he accepted Anderson's version.

At issue is whether Carlson was responding to a question regarding mandatory reporting laws, or a question about the criminal nature of sex between an adult and a child. Carlson has maintained that he was responding to the former question; Anderson has claimed he was responding to the latter.

This entire controversy erupted because of something that neither *Commonweal* nor the *Reporter* addressed: Anderson intentionally clipped that part of the video exchange he had with Carlson so as to convince the public that Carlson didn't know it was against the law for an adult to have sex with a child. Instead of blasting Anderson for his unethical distortion, Gallicho not only takes Anderson's side, he speaks with derision against Carlson's lawyer (e.g, "defense attorneys aren't too keen on compound questions").



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# ARCHBISHOP CARLSON HAS BEEN FRAMED

According to attorney Jeffrey Anderson, *Commonweal*, and other media outlets, the transcript of the exchange between Anderson and Archbishop Carlson revealed that the archbishop did not know it was a crime for an adult to have sex with a child. They are all wrong.

Prior to the controversial exchange (which began with a question regarding mandatory reporting laws—see pp. 108-09 of the transcript), Anderson asked Carlson several questions about Tom Adamson (a homosexual priest who had sex with teenage males). Carlson said, “I remember he was accused of sexual abuse. That’s the trial I participated in.” (See p. 34.) Having said as much, it is simply impossible to believe that Carlson did not know it was against the law for an adult to have sex with a minor.

Anderson also asked, “And you also knew when first degree criminal sexual conduct is written and recorded, that is the most serious of the sex crimes against a child. You know that?” To which Carlson said, “Correct.” (See pp. 98-99.) This is further proof that Carlson knew what the law was; this was also said prior to the controversial exchange.

After the exchange in question, Anderson asked Carlson, “But you knew a priest touching the genitals of a kid to be a crime; did you not?” Carlson answered, “Yes.” (See p. 145.)

Further exculpatory proof can be found on pp. 17, 23, 34, 74, 113, 114, 115, and 132. On eight different occasions Carlson restated to Anderson that he told relatives of the victims to go to the police. He wouldn’t have done so unless he knew a

crime may have been committed.

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## VATICAN WEBSITE CENSORED BY SCHOOL

Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury, Connecticut, allegedly implemented a firewall blocking some websites that it deemed as “politically oriented.” Among those blocked was the Vatican’s website. Also blocked were the websites of the National Right to Life, National Rifle Association, Christianity.com, and many others. Websites that were not blocked, apparently because they were not considered to be “politically oriented,” include Islam-guide.com, Planned Parenthood, and lgbtqnation.com.

According to a complaining student, Andrew Lampart, a senior, he was told by Jody Ian Goeler, the Superintendent of Schools, that it was necessary to block certain websites in order to “prevent hate-speech from leeching into the school.” Lampart took his complaint to the Board of Education, and was told that his concerns merit a probe.

Bill Donohue emailed Superintendent Goeler the following letter:

*“It is alleged that you support censoring students at Nonnewaug from accessing the Vatican’s website on the grounds that it promotes ‘hate speech.’ Would you please identify examples of ‘hate speech’ found on the Vatican’s website?”*