CENSORING VATICAN WEBSITE CANNOT STAND

Jody Ian Goeler, who is the Superintendent of Schools for Regional School District 14 in Connecticut, was forced to respond to accusations that the Vatican website was blocked in district schools because it promotes “hate speech.”

In the letter that Donohue issued to Superintendent Goeler, he asked Goeler to “please identify examples of ‘hate speech’ found on the Vatican’s website.” Goeler responded by saying that he never “stated or implied anywhere that the Vatican website promotes or has examples of hate speech.” This resolves nothing. In a public letter that was released, Goeler admitted that access is provided to liberal websites, but not conservative ones. Nowhere does he address the issue of censoring the Vatican (Islamic sites were okay).

Goeler would have us believe that some kind of technological glitch is at work; he asked the filtering service provider, Dell SonicWALL, for an explanation. But this condition is not a technological fluke—it was the work of a left-wing ideologue. Goeler’s big mistake was to state his tolerance for intolerance. “The district is trying to determine the reason for the inconsistency and *if bias is pervasive enough to justify switching to another content filtering provider*.” (My italics.)

Donohue spent 20 years in education, 16 as a professor, and he cannot believe that any seasoned educator would make such a remarkable comment. Goeler would have us believe that before he could rule on this matter, he needed to know if the “bias is pervasive enough to justify switching.” Just how many websites of a “conservative”—or for that matter a “liberal”—nature have to be blocked to merit a change? And how many Catholic websites have to be censored before action is

taken? The man is not suitable to work in education.

The Catholic League took this issue to Stefan Pryor, who is the Commissioner of the State Department of Education in Connecticut. This is a serious matter. Abridging the First Amendment can only be allowed when there is some competing interest of overriding importance. Stopping students from accessing the Vatican's website is not one of them.

SCHOOL THAT BLOCKED WEBSITES FAILS AGAIN

The School Board for District 14 in Connecticut issued a statement explaining why student access to the Vatican's website was blocked, as well as those deemed to be conservative.

This situation went from bad to worse. The Board of Ed told us that no one deliberately decided to block the websites. After consulting with the filtering service provider, Dell SonicWALL, the board concluded that the problem "was a function of how the parameters were set in the filtering criteria, and we are confident it has been remedied." In other words, it was Dell's fault.

No one with half a brain believes this to be true. Dell sure doesn't. Here is what it said: "A school had a policy [Nonnewaug] to block a category of sites rated as Politics/Advocacy Groups at their site using our content filtering product. It's important to note that our product does not come with that category turned on. The school actively turned it on."

Blocking the Vatican website, as well as others that are considered to be conservative, was the result of a conscious effort to censor the First Amendment rights of students. The person, or persons, who are responsible for this should be fired.

We are happy that the national media picked up on this story and gave it the attention it deserves. Had it been gay sites and Muslim sites that were blocked, the reaction would have been even greater. This issue was all about politics, from beginning to end.

We are also happy that the father of the student who alerted us to this story was pleased with our effort.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AFFIRMED

The June 30 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* is a smashing victory for religious liberty.

Though there is reason for joy, Bill Donohue cautions against celebrating too early. Indeed, he advises that more must be done now to ensure our First Amendment rights. Because of the unremitting hostility the Obama administration has shown to religious liberty, especially in its lust for abortion rights, Donohue says, Congress needs to pass the Health Care Rights of Conscience Act.

The Hobby Lobby ruling has important implications. It recognizes, for the first time, that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) applies to "closely held" businesses, or corporations owned by a few people. This law prohibits the federal government from any action that substantially burdens

the exercise of religion, unless that action is the least restrictive way of serving a compelling government interest.

Practically speaking, the ruling will have a limited effect on private sector employers. The vast majority of Americans work for companies that already provide for most forms of contraceptive coverage, including abortifacients. Nonetheless, this decision will further disable ObamaCare: Over 100 million are already exempt, and now we can add “Hobby Lobby” type businesses to the list. Not for nothing does Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg fear that this ruling may cause “havoc” to ObamaCare. Hope she’s right.

Politically speaking, the ruling will have a dramatic effect: it sends an unmistakable message to the Obama administration that it cannot continue to run roughshod over the religious liberty rights of Americans.

Critics of Hobby Lobby have been trotting out horror stories about what will happen if their side loses. This is all nonsense. RFRA was passed 21 years ago, and no horror stories have been recorded. Scare tactics don’t work.

Next up are the Catholic non-profits. Sometime in the next session of the Supreme Court, the Justices will decide to hear a case involving the Health and Human Services mandate ordering Catholic non-profits to pay for abortion-inducing drugs in their health care policies.

Most of the Catholic non-profits have won in the lower courts, but we have lost some cases, too. The good news is that the Hobby Lobby case bodes well: if for-profit family-run businesses cannot be forced to pay for abortifacients, then it is highly unlikely that Catholic schools, hospitals, and social service agencies will be forced to cover them.

TEEN SEX DATA INCOMPLETE

The media are trumpeting the Guttmacher Institute's report showing that teenage pregnancies, births, and abortions have dropped to their lowest level since they peaked in the 1990s. This is good news, but the data is incomplete.

The teenage pregnancy rate in the United States is still 5.5 times higher than in Western Europe. Moreover, the report says nothing about rates of teenage oral sex, or same-sex sex. Also, it is entirely possible for pregnancy rates to decrease at the same time that "hooking up," or casual sex encounters, are increasing. We know, for example, that there has been an increase in pre-teen "hooking up."

Even more important, the Guttmacher Institute, and most other organizations that track sexual activity, never discuss the emotional effects of sexual experimentation among teenagers; among girls, in particular, the effects are serious. If we look at studies on teenage wellbeing—measures of their physical and mental health, coupled with their level of happiness—the results are not encouraging.

It is entirely logical that organizations bent on seeing technology as the great elixir to contemporary social problems would neglect to report on the wellbeing of teenagers. That is because wellbeing is tied to moral issues, and that is a subject that makes sexologists uncomfortable.

CHELSEA HANDLER BASHES GAYS

Chelsea Handler and guest Ryan Stout attacked homosexual priests during the June 4 edition of “Chelsea Lately” on the E! network. The occasion was Pope Francis’ recent statement advising young married couples not to see cats and dogs as an adequate substitute for children. Chelsea responded, “Yeah, that’s the point! And like you would know about having children—you’re a gay priest.” Stout followed up by saying that for these priests, “cats aren’t the same as kids.”

Just because homosexuals cannot naturally produce children, and priests take a vow of celibacy, this is no excuse for Handler to play into the stereotype that gay priests have no business counseling parents about childrearing. It is also no excuse for Stout to paint them as predators.

Such sweeping condemnations are not humorous. Had they simply confined their remarks to homosexuals, and not to gay priests, their gay bashing would appear more transparent. As it is, their comments are both anti-gay, and anti-Catholic. That’s quite a combo.

MEDIA PASSIONATE ABOUT ANTI-CATHOLIC BIAS

The following article by Bill Donohue was published by Newsmax on May 29:

Every demographic group can cite instances of media bias against them, but no group is more unfairly covered, on a consistent basis, than Catholics. Here are three examples

drawn from news stories published on May 29.

Whenever a Catholic does something good, such as a police officer or firefighter who risks his life for someone, his religion is never mentioned. Nor should it be. But when he does something bad, we all learn of his religious affiliation. To wit: Lukas Iorio went on a drunken rampage on the Jersey Shore last Sunday—he was arrested for carjacking, assault, burglary, driving under the influence, criminal mischief, and resisting arrest. Here is how the media played it:

• "Former Bergen *Catholic* Wrestling Star Charged with Assault, Carjacking in Manasquan." *Star-Ledger*

• "Ex-Bergen *Catholic* High School Wrestling Star Lukas Iorio Accused of Wild Rampage on Jersey Shore." *The Record*

• "Former Bergen *Catholic* Wrestler Charged with Attacking 5 in Jersey Shore Rampage." Cliffviewpilot.com

• "Manasquan Charges ex-Bergen *Catholic* Wrestler with Beach Carjacking, Wild Behavior." Myfoxny.com

All the italics were added. To its credit, CBS reported it fairly: "New Jersey High School Wrestling Champ Accused in Bizarre Rampage." It is not biased to mention in a news story that Iorio went to a Catholic school, but to put it in the headline is a different story.

"Female Catholic Priest Celebrates Mass at St. Francis House" is the headline in today's *Columbian Missourian*. Of course, this never happened. What happened is that yet another woman—a senior citizen, of course—played make-believe and had herself "ordained." The *Harbor Country News* ran a story billed as "Wife, Mother & Now Priest." MLive, a blog post, told readers, "Michigan's First Woman Priest in Dissident Catholic Sect: 'My Job is to Give Witness.'" At least it mentioned "dissident Catholic Sect."

The *Columbian Missourian* not only ran the most dishonest headline, it ran a totally biased story. The caption to her photo begins by saying, “Janice Sevre-Duszynska, a female priest, led a mass at St. Francis House.” The first paragraph of the story said the following: “In the middle of a living room, a table is set like an altar, with wine and bread prepared for Holy Communion. At the head is a priest dressed in a black shirt, jeans and sandals, hair tied behind the head revealing a gold earring hanging from her ear. She has a purple stole around her neck, which rests on her lap as she sits.”

In the next paragraph we learn that she is “an ordained Roman Catholic priest with one exception: The Roman Catholic Church does not recognize her status as a priest.” Of course, the only thing that counts is the “one exception.” It could also be said that the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize those who dress up as the pope on Halloween to be the pope. The media game, naturally, is to whip up public sentiment against the Catholic Church for its teaching on ordination. It never does the same with regards to the role of women in the Orthodox Jewish community, or in Islam.

It was reported today in the *New York Times* that New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio spoke before an Orthodox Jewish gathering on Tuesday night. He singled out for praise a lawyer who is chief counsel to Agudath Israel. Now it is true that David Zwiebel has a good record of interfaith dialogue with Catholics, but it is also true, as reporter Michael Powell said, that he has played a pivotal role in arguing that those who learn of rabbis in the Orthodox community who sexually molest minors should not report these crimes to the authorities. The extent of this scandal, and the reprisals taken against those who break ranks and go to the authorities, is huge, yet receives comparatively little media coverage.

Can anyone imagine de Blasio congratulating a prominent Catholic lawyer in the Archdiocese of New York for instructing

Catholics not to report cases of priestly sexual abuse to the authorities? More important, Zwiebel's advice is, in fact, followed. So why aren't the media all over this? If Cardinal Dolan said that all such allegations will be handled in-house, and not reported to the authorities, it would be front-page news *around the world*.

These are just three examples from today. All the Catholic League has ever wanted is a level playing field. We are nowhere near achieving it.

HAWAII GOVERNOR SIGNS BILL

Much to our disappointment, Hawaii Governor Neil Abercrombie signed a law that extends by two years the statute of limitations on the sexual abuse of minors. Nominally, it applies to both the private and public sectors, but everyone knows who the lawyers are gunning for.

U.N. REPORT ON HOLY SEE ISSUED

The U.N. Committee Against Torture's report on the Holy See was released a couple of weeks ago. For the most part, there is nothing in this report that merits criticism, though two matters must be addressed: there is a glaring inconsistency between the way the hearings were held and the concluding observations by this committee; and calls for the Holy See to

encourage redress by religious orders for the “victims” of the Magdalene Laundries are unjust.

The report made no mention of abortion, canon law, or any Church teaching on sexuality, yet these subjects were grist for attacks on Church officials during the hearings. Why, then, was committee member Felice Gaer allowed to conduct what amounted to, at times, a show trial? If none of her highly politicized remarks were even tangentially addressed by the report, it calls into question her continued service to this committee. She should be asked to step down immediately.

Pressuring the Holy See to force four Irish religious orders to provide “restitution, compensation, [and] rehabilitation” for the so-called victims of the Magdalene Laundries is wholly unjust. Has anyone on the committee even bothered to read the authoritative “McAleese Report on the Magdalene Laundries”? Had they done so they would know why Bill Donohue refers to the “so-called” victims. The Irish body that examined this issue, chaired by Senator Martin McAleese, did a full statistical analysis of all available data; it also interviewed 118 women who lived in the asylums, along with many physicians who cared for these women.

Here is what the McAleese Report found: Not one woman said she was tortured while working in the Laundries, and there is no evidence that a single nun ever sexually abused anyone. Conditions were harsh—they were harsh for many throughout Ireland at the time—but there is a profound difference between harsh conditions and torture.

The U.N. Committee on Torture issued a mostly balanced report, but it needs to do more to empty its proceedings of politics. Its animus against the Holy See must end.

JOAN RIVERS' FILTHY HIT ON THE POPE

There was a time when Joan Rivers delighted audiences with her humor, but that was a long time ago. Now her filthy antics make even her panelists recoil in embarrassment. That's what happened on E! during her May 30 episode of "Fashion Police."

The occasion for Rivers' vulgarity was a picture of singer Solange Knowles (Beyonce's sister) with her hair sticking up, looking particularly messy. Rivers quipped, "From the looks of Solange's hair that comb gets used less frequently than the pope's penis."

Moreover, Rivers took another stab at Catholics during the June 27 edition of "Fashion Police" when she remarked on a short plaid skirt worn by Katy Perry. "She is so much a Catholic schoolgirl that three priests stopped her to say 'you're cute, do you have a brother?'"

This is the way Rivers wants to be remembered; she just celebrated her 81st birthday. Hardly a week goes by that she doesn't sport her anti-Catholic bigotry, typically in a patently obscene manner. At least her panelists didn't find her remark humorous. Too bad they didn't walk out on her. The fact that Joan Rivers' daughter is the executive producer of the show suggests that this is a family problem.

POPE'S TRIP ENDS WITH MEDIA

CIRCUS

Pope Francis spent three historic days in the Middle East trying to bring Christians, Jews, and Muslims together, and on the plane ride home he fielded 11 questions on nine issues. Two dealt with his trip: there was one question on Jewish-Muslim relations, and one on the status of Jerusalem. But there were three on sexual issues: priestly sexual abuse, celibacy, and divorced and remarried Catholics.

It's actually worse than this. On the "Today Show" the following day, only two issues were discussed: sexual abuse and celibacy. In Nicole Winfield's AP story on the subject, about half the article was on sexual abuse; in a later version, this was the only issue covered. Almost all of CNN's coverage was on sexual abuse. John Allen of the *Boston Globe* covered many topics, but most of his reporting was on sexual abuse. The *Boston Herald* showed no interest in anything but sexual abuse.

In England, the *Guardian* only discussed sexual abuse and celibacy. Almost all the coverage by the BBC was on sexual abuse. This subject dominated the coverage in the *Daily Mail*.

There is no mystery here. The big media lean left, and what interests them is pressuring the Catholic Church to change its teachings on sexuality. Their obsession with priestly sexual abuse, which as a problem is mostly a non-starter these days, is a function of their desire to discredit the Catholic Church's moral authority.

It's too bad that Pope Francis did not take the time to ask any of these reporters to explain their disinterest in his critically important trip. He might then ask them to explain their obsession with matters sexual. Unless the reporters are called out on this issue, the media circus will never end.