

CARDINAL PELL IS ACQUITTED; JUSTICE FINALLY DONE

On April 6, Cardinal George Pell's conviction on five counts of sexual abuse was unanimously overturned by Australia's High Court. He was never guilty of these charges in the first place. The decision by the High Court cannot be challenged.

Pell has suffered greatly and has been the victim of outrageous lies. He has been smeared, spat upon, and forced to endure solitary confinement for crimes he never committed.

This was a sham from the get-go and should never have made its way through the Australian courts.

Pell was charged with abusing two boys in 1996. One of the boys overdosed on drugs but not before telling his mother—on two occasions—that Pell never abused him. The other boy's accusation was undercut by the dead boy's account: they were allegedly abused at the same time and place. There were no witnesses to an offense that supposedly took place after Mass in the sacristy of a church.

Here is what the High Court said about this matter. "The assumption that a group of choristers, including adults, might have been so preoccupied with making their way to the robing room as to fail to notice the extraordinary sight of the Archbishop of Melbourne dressed 'in his full regalia' advancing through the procession and pinning a 13 year old boy to the wall, is a large one." That is putting it mildly. It is preposterous.

We at the Catholic League have been defending Cardinal Pell for many years. We released to the media the title of 24 news releases we issued in our defense of the beleaguered cardinal. Our first statement, "Cardinal Pell Should Sue For Libel," was issued on March 12, 2013. Please see our website for more

information.

This will go down in history as one of the most egregious instances of injustice ever visited upon a high-ranking member of the Catholic clergy. Pell is a decent man who tried hard to combat sexual abuse, yet he became the poster boy of Catholic haters seeking to hang any big named cleric. What they did to him is unspeakable. Some were still bashing him after the High Court ruling.

Bill Donohue summarized the Catholic League's reaction to this story.

"This has been a terrible Lenten period with the coronavirus pandemic, but Lent 2020 will also be remembered by Catholics as one of great joy: Cardinal Pell has finally been exonerated. Those who tried to destroy him—and there were many all over the world—will have to answer one day for what they have done."

TLAIB RETREATS

In the last issue of *Catalyst*, we reprinted Bill Donohue's letter to the House Ethics Committee asking that Rep. Rashida Tlaib be formally reprimanded for her obscene assault on the sensibilities of religious Americans. We also listed an email contact for her. She got bombarded with angry emails from Catholics and she immediately started walking it back.

Recall that Tlaib retweeted a post by activist David Hogg saying, "Don't let this administration address COVID-19 like our national gun violence epidemic. F**k a National day of prayer, we need immediate comprehensive action."

Here is how Tlaib handled her imbroglio.

“Let me be clear as someone who has been praying through this all & as someone who attended the National Prayer Breakfast. My retweet was not to be an attack on prayer. It was to bring attention to the need for meaningful action to combat this public health crisis.”

Here is how Bill Donohue responded. “Let me be clear, Rep. Tlaib: You are fooling no one. You not only have a record of offending people, your anti-Semitic comments have mobilized friends of mine like Rabbi Aryeh Spero to hold a sit-in at Rep. Nancy Pelosi’s congressional office to protest your bigotry (and that of your fellow ‘Squad’ member, Rep. Ilhan Omar). Your record of hate speech is incontestable.”

To say that her retweet “was not an attack on prayer,” Donohue said, was “lame.” He minced no words. “Your point was to insult us. Mission accomplished.”

THE POWER OF PRAYER

William A. Donohue

The coronavirus pandemic led to thousands of deaths, overrun mortuaries, untold suffering, burnt-out hospital staff, economic hardship, and psychological distress. It also gave millions a time to renew their faith, or come back to it. But is prayer a reliable tonic? Yes. Is there scientific data to back it up? Yes.

One leading researcher, Dr. Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School, holds that prayer and general stress management can reduce doctor visits by up to 50 percent. Most patients would

agree. In a national survey, it was revealed that 35 percent of respondents used prayer for health concerns; 75 percent of these prayed for wellness, and 22 percent prayed for specific medical conditions. Perhaps most important, 69 percent of those who prayed for specific medical conditions found prayer very helpful. With data like this, it makes moot the convictions of skeptics: what matters is that "Hail Marys" work.

Many of the skeptics, of course, eschew any evidence that does not comport with their view of reality. Dr. Jeff Levin, an epidemiologist and former medical school professor, contends that the "resistance and hostility that some scientists and physicians show to this topic stem, I believe, from an unwillingness to consider explanations that undermine a strictly materialistic worldview."

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of prayer and better well-being is whether praying for others actually has beneficial consequences. As it turns out, what is called "absent prayer," or "intercessory prayer," does yield positive outcomes. When people are asked to pray for a specific person, whom they do not know, but who is suffering from an illness, and the recipient of prayer has no knowledge that this is happening, most of these "double blind" studies show that patients who are prayed for improve better than those patients with the same condition but who did not have anyone pray for them.

One of the earliest and most prominent studies ever done on the health effects of intercessory prayer was conducted by Dr. Randolph C. Byrd in 1988. In a study of 393 people admitted to the coronary care unit at San Francisco General Hospital, the patients were divided into two groups.

Half the group was selected for intercessory prayer by devout Christians, and the other half received no such treatment; the patients were randomly assigned and neither the patients nor

the health staff had a clue which was the experiential group and which was the control group. The former fared significantly better than the latter.

Two explanations are possible: praying for others works, or the results were due to chance. However, the odds that this was due to chance were one in 10,000. Those who did the praying were all devout Catholics and Protestants. Dr. Byrd concluded that these findings "suggest intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God had a beneficial therapeutic effect in patients admitted to a CCU [coronary care unit]."

In a similar study done in 1999 of nearly 1,000 patients in the CCU at St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, it was found that those who were unwittingly prayed for fared better than those who got conventional care alone. In 1998, similar conclusions were reached with AIDS patients in a study published in the *Western Journal of Medicine*: those who were prayed for did better than their non-prayed for counterparts.

Numerous scientific studies have found that prayer lowers depression and suicide rates. It even lowers blood pressure. Researchers funded by the National Institutes of Health found that those who attend church at least once a week and prayed at least once a day or studied the Bible frequently were 49 percent less likely to have high blood pressure than those who did so infrequently.

There was a big study published in 2006 of 1,800 patients that did not confirm what these other studies found. It was led by Dr. Benson so it cannot be dismissed. The patients were broken up into three groups: two were prayed for and the third was not. Half the patients were told they were being prayed for, and half were told they might receive prayers. This time the researchers found no difference between the various groups.

In 2007, however, a new study published by a professor from Arizona State University found that prayer had positive

effects. It is an important study because it was a comprehensive analysis of 17 major studies on the effects of intercessory prayer.

The author, David R. Hodge, explained its significance. "This study enables us to look at the big picture. When the effects of prayer are averaged across all 17 studies, controlling for differences in sample size, a net positive effect for the prayer group is produced."

In other words, most studies done on the efficacy of intercessory prayer show the power of prayer—it works.

We should expect scientists to rigorously assess the data from all studies, regardless of what the subject is. That is their job. But we should also expect them to be open-minded enough to say that some findings cannot be easily explained. With a little prayer, maybe they can figure it out.

THE HISTORIC ROLE OF 20th CENTURY POPES

Bill Donohue

Russell Shaw, *Eight Popes and the Crisis of Modernity* (Ignatius Press)

Today we turn on the Internet to do our research. Those researching the Catholic Church would find their job easier if they simply called Russell Shaw. Not for nothing do I call him a walking encyclopedia of the Catholic Church.

Shaw has done it again. *Eight Popes and the Crisis of Modernity* is a masterful overview of how eight popes affected

the Church and left their mark on world history in the 20th century.

Shaw blends the historical record with interesting anecdotes, never shying from making fair criticisms, while always showing respect for the men who are his subject. His own faith shines through.

Pope Saint Pius X (8/4/1903–8/20/1914) is known for “standing firm against the inroads of a modernity devoid of faith that he saw as the deadly foe of the ancient Church.” He was confronted, as Shaw rightly points out, with a world where the efforts of Darwin, Marx, and Freud left an intellectual trail of militant secularism in their wake. The pope could either succumb to the zeitgeist or confront it. We are fortunate that he chose to fight it.

It may be, as the future Pope Benedict XVI has said, that Pius X was “over-zealous,” but the deck was clearly stacked against the Church. That is why he responded to agnosticism with an Oath for priests. The Church was engulfed in a blitz of secular attacks, and not to insist on fidelity was not something the pope would chance. Meanwhile, he never sought to disengage the Church from the world around him, for had he done so, 4,618 French priests would not have died fighting in World War I.

Under Pope Benedict XV (9/3/1914–1/22/1922), the Church had no place at the table when the Treaty of Versailles was held following the war, which meant, as Shaw notes, “at least no one could blame the pope for the disastrous peace that was no peace that emerged from the talks.” While the pope continued to resist the worst elements of modernity, he was, understandably, consumed with World War I and its aftermath.

It was under his pontificate that the “Roman question” was first broached. The issue of how to deal with the relationship between the papacy and the Italian government had been on the

back burner—it dated to 1870 when Italian troops seized Rome and Pius IX sought refuge behind Vatican walls—but the time had come to seek reconciliation.

Benedict was against the war, and while he did not take sides, he authorized humanitarian efforts. He also opposed the harsh reparations that the Versailles accord mandated, proving that he was more prescient than secular leaders who put the squeeze on Germany. Shaw is right to mention that the events of Fatima in 1917 happened on his watch, even if he had no direct role in them.

If his predecessors were faced with serious threats, Pope Pius XI (2/6/22–2/10/39) was faced with monumental ones. The Great Depression and the rise of the totalitarian twins—fascism and communism—set off the alarms everywhere. So did the moral collapse that paved the way for Hitler in the Weimar Republic. The pope responded by unapologetically defending the Church's sexual ethics.

The pope's response to the economic crisis was to criticize both socialism and capitalism, though by promulgating the principle of subsidiarity—those closest to events are best suited to address them—he tilted away from the social engineering and consolidation of power that marks socialism.

Pius XI fought the anti-Semitism of Hitler's regime. He issued an important encyclical condemning racism and anti-Semitism, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern), that was smuggled into Germany; priests read it from the pulpit. He also condemned the Soviet regime and the threat it posed to the Catholic Church.

Catholic League members are well aware of the yeoman work of Pope Pius XII (3/2/39–10/9/58), one of the most maligned figures in the 20th century. It was he who played a major role in writing his predecessor's encyclical against anti-Semitism. His first encyclical was a fierce denouncement of the German

and Soviet invasions of Poland, and their immense threat to human rights. He also kept his eye on Soviet ambitions in Eastern Europe.

Now that the Vatican archives on World War II are open, it is hoped that the distortions and out-and-out lies about Pope Pius XII will be put to rest. No leader in the world, religious or secular, did more to stand up to Hitler and save Jews than the pope. The lies that began with the KGB and made their way into a despicable play, *The Deputy*, have already been written about by Ronald Rychlak and others, but now they will be given new light.

The pope could have been more outspoken, but to what end? The Dutch bishops who spoke up triggered a vicious Nazi reaction, which is why Jews pleaded with the pope not to be too strident in his condemnations. Pius XII played it smart: everyone knew where he stood, and that is why he chose to be prudent in his resistance. Once the war was over, he issued his infallible edict on Our Blessed Mother's bodily Assumption into heaven.

Pope Saint John XXIII (10/28/58–6/3/63) launched Vatican II, which Shaw says was "perhaps the most *religious* event" of the 20th century. It certainly was a momentous one. Indeed, it has been the subject of much distortion, and much debate, the result of which was to transform the Church on many fronts. It pitted traditionalists against reformers.

Was Vatican II necessary? Some said it was—the Church needed to confront new challenges—while others questioned the logic of fixing something that wasn't broken. Would an ecumenical council clarify or complicate matters? "One of the few things everyone agrees on is that the council was followed by a period of intense and sometimes raucous controversy and dissent," Shaw notes, "a dismaying number of noisy defections from the priesthood and religious life, numerous flagrant abuses in liturgical practice, and much else of a similarly alarming nature."

The fact that we cannot agree today on what Vatican II did is not a good sign. There are the “textualists” who insist on fidelity to the sixteen documents as written, and those who speak about the “spirit of Vatican II”; they prefer a more elastic interpretation. Some in the “spirit” camp, unable to justify their grandiose vision by appealing to the text, took a rather boundless approach. This philosophical split led to major divisions within the Church. They still exist.

The war within the Church hit a new high with the papacy of Pope Saint Paul VI (6/21/63–8/6/78). The “spirit of Vatican II” devotees hit stride. It was a time when the Church sought to maintain allegiance to traditional moral values while the Western world railed against them. Some of the priests and nuns who sided against the Church left their ministry and joined the ranks of the laity; others stayed put and rebelled from the inside.

Much has been written about the cultural fallout of *Humanae Vitae*. If more of the critics actually read the encyclical, there would be fewer of them. It was a brilliant statement on the need to preserve marriage and the family, with a particular concern for the sexual exploitation of women. But in the minds of secular-leaning ideologues, it was an antiquated document that made little sense in the Age of Aquarius.

Pope John XXIII had established a commission to advise the Vatican on what to do about artificial birth control, lifting the expectations of reformers. When Paul VI turned down their advice and ratified the status quo, it set off a firestorm. “Looking back,” Shaw writes, “it is clear that *Humanae Vitae* could hardly have come at a worse time. In 1968 a cultural—and sexual—revolution was well underway in the United States and other countries, creating a tidal wave of rebellion that threatened to sweep aside whatever smacked of authority and tradition.” He does not exaggerate.

Pope John Paul I (8/26/78–9/28/78) served for only thirty-three days before being taken by the Lord, so he obviously didn't have time to leave his mark. With good reason, he is not counted among the eight popes that Shaw chose to write about.

John Paul I was succeeded by a towering figure in the annals of the Catholic Church. Pope Saint John Paul II (10/16/78–4/2/05) was a first-class intellectual and a man of enormous courage. The youngest pope since Pius IX, he terrified the Soviet Union. His historic trip to his native Poland in 1979 set the stage for the ultimate demise of the U.S.S.R. When he told the millions who turned out to see him live or on television, "Be Not Afraid," those in the Kremlin, as well as the Polish people, knew what he meant. The communist dictators were placed on life support.

The pope made five trips to the United States promoting interreligious harmony. His authorization of a new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was well received by everyone, save for the "spirit of Vatican II" crowd. Those who tried to portray him as outdated were knocked on their heels when he audaciously published the "Theology of the Body," a cogent and original interpretation of human sexuality.

To my mind, John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* ranks with the greatest expositions on liberty ever written. His sociology was as impressive as his theology. Though it is not certain whether he wrote this partly as a rebuke of John Stuart Mill's 1859 essay "On Liberty," it certainly had that effect on me. Mill was top heavy on individual rights, paying lip service to individual responsibilities. For John Paul II, they were bound together.

The Soviet-inspired assassination attempt in 1981 by a Turkish gunman took a toll on him in many ways, but to our benefit he rebounded nicely. Beloved by millions across the globe, Pope Saint John Paul II was an extraordinary man.

The Catholic Church's role in shaping the world in the 20th century is the story of some very determined men faced with incredible challenges, both inside and outside the Church. They had their weaknesses, but they also rose to the occasion and delivered some of the most timely and effective encyclicals ever written. They were also leaders on the world stage, pioneers for natural law and natural rights.

Combating moral destitution in a world where freedom is defined as genital liberation is not easy. This was evident in Weimar Germany, and it is evident in Western societies today. The Church is called to pursue the truth, not fashion, making it an outlier among global institutions.

Similarly, combating the rise of genocidal regimes, especially under Hitler and Stalin, is something that our supreme leaders did not shy away from; they handled themselves with wisdom and honor.

Russell Shaw has given us a book that is informative and easy to read. It will make Catholics proud of the eight popes who faced adversity in the last millennium, and succeeded in doing so.

PELL'S RELEASE TRIGGERS BACKLASH

Most people are normal and desire justice. Abnormal people prize revenge. A case in point is the reaction to the release of Cardinal George Pell from an Australian prison. Normal people are happy with the news, but there are always the abnormal ones.

Neither the *Boston Globe*, *New York Times* nor the *Washington Post*—the three most critical newspapers of the Catholic Church—put the Pell story on the front page (the latter two buried it on p. 19), but it is a sure bet they would have had his conviction been upheld.

The first reaction to the acquittal of Cardinal Pell from the *New York Times* was to hammer the justice system in Australia. There is too much secrecy in their system, the two reporters said. They are right. The Australian courts are not nearly as transparent as the American courts. But if this were a problem, why did the newspaper not sound the alarms when the vector of change was moving against Pell? Why did they wait to register a complaint only when he won?

The reporters cited as an example the court's decision to pull from bookstores a work by Louise Milligan, *Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of George Pell*. The judge wanted to avoid a contempt of court charge.

Who is she? Milligan is a hero in anti-Catholic circles in Australia, which are quite big. Speaking of Pell, she once said, "He's a man for years was telling the rest of us how to live our lives—not the least how to live our sex lives." There it is again: It's always sex that drives Church haters over the edge. For them, the three most dreaded words in the English language are "Thou Shalt Not."

The first article Milligan ever wrote about Pell appeared in the April 16, 2001 edition of the *Australian*. It was about gay fascists who tried to storm St. Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne. They were screaming, "George Pell, Go to Hell." Like Milligan, the gays objected to his defense of Catholic moral theology. [NOTE: Australian media reported that "Rot in Hell Pell" and "No Justice" were scribbled on the doors of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne following Pell's acquittal.]

BishopAccountability is the favorite source of left-wing

journalists who don't like the Catholic Church. It's idea of priestly justice is to leave the names of exonerated priests on its website, suggesting to readers they may be guilty. One of its officials, Anne Barrett Doyle, said in relation to Pell's release that "it is distressing to many survivors, the decision doesn't change the fact the trial of the powerful cardinal was a watershed."

One can almost hear her groan. Not a word about putting an innocent man in solitary confinement for crimes he never committed. It was a watershed, alright—it was one of the most egregious cases of injustice ever endured by a high-ranking member of the Catholic hierarchy.

SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests), which the Catholic League played a major role in crippling in the United States, spoke for its Australian members saying, "We are dismayed and heartbroken that Cardinal George Pell has successfully challenged his conviction for sexually abusing two choirboys and will be freed from prison." In other words, justice doesn't matter. Punishing the Catholic Church is what matters. They are abnormal.

Voice of the Faithful, another mostly moribund American letterhead, said, "The court's ruling leaves clergy abuse survivors and supporters wondering where justice lies." This proves once again that this pitiful band of elderly Catholic dissidents was never interested in Church reform. Justice, according to them, is when the person they hate gets punished, independent of his innocence. They are abnormal.

We stand with what Pope Francis tweeted right after Cardinal Pell was freed.

"In these days of #Lent, we've been witnessing the persecution that Jesus underwent and how He was judged ferociously, even though He was innocent. Let us #PrayTogether today for all those persons who suffer due to an unjust sentence because of

someone had it in for them.”

ARE BANS ON CHURCH GATHERINGS KOSHER?

In Michigan, New York, and Ohio, churches are exempt from bans on large gatherings at this time due to the coronavirus. Indiana, Louisiana, and Virginia have decided to extend the ban to churches. This is definitely a state issue: the Trump administration has wisely stayed out of it.

At the state level, this is a difficult issue. Our first impulse is to defend religious liberty, but like any freedom, it is not absolute. For example, in New York, it was reasonably decided, after much discussion, not to exempt religious bodies from mandated vaccinations.

Whenever religious liberty collides with public health, the government is obliged to put the least restrictive measures on religion. If that is done, and the motive is purely to protect the public, then in a crisis situation, temporary bans may be legitimate.

Motive counts. Why? Because we must always consider the source of an objection to religious exemptions. If the source is the medical community, and reasonable temporary restrictions are called for in a crisis situation, that is one thing; if the source is a hostile force, that is another. Unfortunately, there are plenty of examples of the latter.

Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the Center for Inquiry have all issued statements against allowing religious

exemptions for bans on large gatherings at this time. Their motives are not benign.

The best way to proceed with this issue is for religious leaders to work with state officials in coming up with a compromise during these difficult times. What we don't need is the advice of those who are anything but religion-friendly.

ABORTION ACTIVISTS ENDANGER PUBLIC HEALTH

Should abortions be considered elective surgery and therefore not be permitted during the coronavirus pandemic, or are they an essential healthcare issue that should be permitted? Predictably, in pro-life states like Ohio and Texas officials are saying abortions constitute elective surgery and should therefore not be allowed, while in pro-abortion states like Massachusetts and Washington, officials are defending them.

This issue has even split those in the medical community working in the same facility. Nearly 300 doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center recently sent a letter to management asking them to "postpone procedures that can be performed in the future" so that they can accommodate the expected surge in patients due to the coronavirus.

The central issue in this case transcends the usual abortion debate: any elective surgery that is being performed during this crisis uses resources that are needed to help those who are hospitalized with the coronavirus.

Chethan Sathya is a pediatric surgeon and journalist in New

York City. Here is his analysis of what is at stake. "Surgeries are resource-intensive—requiring surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, transport teams, medical beds and equipment such as ventilators. Suspending elective surgeries will free up those doctors, other medical personnel, and rooms and equipment."

Dr. Sathya is also concerned about the effect that doing elective surgeries is bound to have on medical staff. "Because of the number of health-care workers required to work close to one another for each surgery," he writes, "I have no doubt that continuing to perform non-urgent surgeries would lead to further spread of the virus among health-care workers."

In other words, those who are pushing for abortions during the coronavirus are endangering the lives of healthcare workers. But do they care?

Here is how Planned Parenthood has responded. "We're closely monitoring the spread of the new coronavirus, or COVID-19. The health and safety of our patients, staff, and communities is our top priority."

Notice that Planned Parenthood is only interested in its own agenda. It says not a word about tying up resources needed by those who are truly sick. By taking away needed personnel, gear and equipment from servicing those who are infected with the coronavirus, it is jeopardizing the lives of those at risk.

The heart of this dispute rests on the question of whether abortion is elective surgery or not. Planned Parenthood, NARAL, and others in the abortion industry argue that abortion is not elective surgery and must be provided at all times. But is it?

Take two women, Joy and Jane. Joy has a life-threatening heart problem and is scheduled for surgery. Jane wants an abortion. No one in his right mind would equate the two. If Joy doesn't get heart surgery, she will probably die. If Jane is denied her abortion, she lives (as does her baby).

It comes down to this: Joy has a need; Jane has a want. No woman wants to have heart surgery—they either need it or they don't. Conversely, no woman needs an abortion—it is, as they like to say, a matter of choice.

Does that mean that abortion is like any other elective surgery, such as a facelift (rhytidectomy) or a tummy tuck (abdominoplasty)? No. In those cases, only the person's face or tummy is affected. In the case of an abortion, another person is affected. And there is nothing elective about that person's fate.

BLAMING CHRISTIANS FOR THE VIRUS IS PARANOID

It is not unusual for authors of a new book to seize opportunities to plug their work. But the March 27 op-ed in the *New York Times* by Katherine Stewart breaks new ground. After inventing a bogey man—"Christian Nationalists"—she then blames them for the coronavirus. Here is some background information.

When George W. Bush won reelection in 2004, no issue brought voters to side with him more than "values." These "values voters" sent a shock wave through the ranks of the secular elite in the Democratic Party, and they responded by founding rogue lay Catholic groups such as Catholics United and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. They also discovered the virtue of "God talk" and an expressed interest in government faith-based social programs (absent the faith element, of course).

Those phony tactics were buttressed by an onslaught of bigoted

attacks that branded conservative Christians “theocrats.” It didn’t get them one vote. Now the same crowd is back arguing that “Christian Nationalists” are a threat to the country.

In July 2019, those who hate religious conservatives released a document, “Christians Against Christian Nationalism.” They said this new enemy “demands that Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian.” One wonders why these nefarious Christians settled for *implying* that everyone be a Christian—why didn’t they *demand* it.

Stewart is one of the proponents of this crazed idea. In her op-ed she drops a few anecdotes citing some wild-eyed remarks made by a few pastors, and then unloads by blaming Trump for listening to these people, resulting in an allegedly poor response to the coronavirus.

This is a cheap game. It would be like conservatives blaming left-wing cable television channels for the coronavirus. How so? By suggesting, and in some cases stating, that Trump is a bigot for putting a ban on travel from China. He did that on January 31, ten days after the first case of the virus hit the U.S. This led the Chinese-Communist friendly head of the World Health Organization to label Trump a “racist,” and Joe Biden responded by saying he was fomenting “xenophobia” and “fear-mongering.”

The medical community acknowledges that Trump saved an untold number of lives by making this decision. Would it now be fair to blame his left-wing critics for the coronavirus? No, only a Christian conservative who thinks the way Stewart does would blame them.

Finally, to show how much Stewart hates religious conservatives, consider that she is upset with Trump for saying he hopes we are “just raring to go by Easter.” What’s wrong with that? “He could have said, ‘by mid-April.’” Yup,

this is proof that Christian Nationalists are running the country.

This is the level of intellectual scholarship that the *New York Times* fancies these days. The newspaper of record is now mainstreaming paranoia.

ATHEISTS RIP PENCE FOR CHURCH DONATION APPEAL

Organized atheists, unlike most Americans who are non-believers, are more often than not driven by hatred of religion and the faithful. Their impulses are totalitarian: they would ban all religious expression if they could. A classic case is Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF).

FFRF has gone ballistic because Vice President Mike Pence recently implored Americans to make donations to their church, even if they cannot attend during the coronavirus crisis.

The atheists said that no American public official “should lend the power and prestige of their office to a particular church or to religion in general.” They even accused Pence of being un-American. “Leveraging a global pandemic to drum up church donations is an egregious betrayal of the country’s founding principles in order to benefit religion.” The atheists added that Pence “should not further encourage Americans to give their money to those who least deserve it.”

Their reasoning is bankrupt. Here are three reasons why.

First, Pence was exercising two of his First Amendment rights: freedom of speech and freedom of religion (religious

expression is a core constitutional right). Even vice presidents maintain those rights.

Second, Pence did not order anyone to give to their church or offer new tax incentives if they did. His terms were purely volitional.

Third, what Pence said not only did not betray America's founding principles, it affirmed them. Every president in American history has made public appeals expressing the critical role that religion plays in society, especially during times of adversity.

During the Civil War, Lincoln once told his secretary, "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." Similarly, William McKinley, struggling with his decision to seize the Philippines, said to a group of ministers, "I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night."

Atheists like those at FFRF are poorly educated. There is a profound difference between the government sponsoring religion and freedom of religious expression, but they don't understand—or don't want to understand—the difference.

DE BLASIO FEARS "CHRISTIAN VIRUS"

Rev. Franklin Graham could have chosen to simply ask his people to pray for New Yorkers hit hard with coronavirus. But instead he recruited 72 doctors, nurses and other medical

personnel from Samaritan's Purse, an evangelical group, to set up a 68-bed facility in Central Park; it is operated in partnership with the Mount Sinai Health System and is equipped with ten ventilators.

How was he received? Many New Yorkers welcomed Graham's efforts, but some have reviled him. Militant secularists have bombarded him with vitriol, including such notables as New York State Senator Brad Hoylman and playwright Paul Rudnick. Hoylman called Graham a "notorious anti-gay bigot" and Rudnick branded him a "vicious homophobe."

Hoylman should not throw stones. In 2018, he wrote an insulting anti-Catholic tweet. Bill Donohue slammed him for it and he quickly called Donohue to apologize. Donohue accepted it. But he should know better. As for Rudnick, he is known for his filthy anti-Christian play, "The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told." So he has no leg to stand on—he knows a thing or two about bigotry.

All of this attack on Graham stems from his belief that the institution of marriage was designed for the only two people who can naturally make a family, namely a man and a woman. Up until about a week ago yesterday, figuratively speaking, every normal person believed the same, all over the world.

Anyone is free to disagree with Graham, but to portray him as a hater is malicious. Graham explained who his medical staff serves. "We do not make distinctions about an individual's religion, race, sexual orientation, or economic status." More important, *there is zero evidence that any of his ministries discriminates against anyone.*

No one is to blame for these attacks on Graham more than New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. When he first learned of the relief efforts of Samaritan's Purse he acted as if New York had been invaded by a hostile force.

"I said immediately to my team that we had to find out exactly

what was happening. Was there going to be an approach that was truly consistent with the values and the laws in New York City, that everyone would be served and served equally?" He wasn't done. "We're going to send over people from the Mayor's Office to monitor" the park facility. That is the mindset of an authoritarian.

What makes de Blasio's attack on Graham most despicable is his failure to take coronavirus seriously. His record is an utter disgrace. Consider the following.

- "While de Blasio said he will announce new restrictions on large gatherings in the coming days, leaders in other cities and states across the U.S. have already enacted measures to slow the spread of the infectious disease." [www.foxnews.com, 3-12]
- "New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said Saturday he plans to keep schools in the country's largest school system open as long as possible, standing in stark contrast to the majority of the country's largest city school districts and governors in more than a dozen states who have shuttered their entire K-12 education systems to stem the spread of the coronavirus." [www.usnews.com, 3-14]
- "De Blasio's decision to keep New York City's schools open goes against guidance released Friday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which recommended that all schools close for a period of six to eight weeks, especially in states with high numbers of cases." [www.usnews.com, 3-14]
- "New York City is one of the few large school districts left in the country that has yet to cancel classes due to the coronavirus outbreak and the teachers that run the classroom say they're 'furious,' according to Facebook posts and statements from the teachers themselves." [www.nbcnews.com, 3-15]
- "New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio started rebuffing any effort to close schools last week saying, 'we are going to do our damndest to keep the schools open.' By the end of last

week, the second and third largest education systems, Los Angeles and Chicago, had announced the suspension of classes. Several large states such as Florida and Ohio have announced the cancellation of classes, too. On Sunday, it was announced that Nassau and Suffolk county schools will be closed for two weeks." [www.nbcnews.com, 3-15]

- "'Because of his irresponsible decision to keep the public schools open, Mayor Bill de Blasio can no longer assure the health and safety of our students and school communities,' wrote Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers, in an email to its members. 'The mayor is recklessly putting the health of our students, their families and school staff in jeopardy by refusing to close public schools.'" [www.nypost.com, 3-15]

This same delinquent mayor is now worried that someone who is sick with coronavirus may catch the "Christian virus," simply because he was attended to by one of Franklin Graham's volunteer corps of medical professionals. Is he paranoid? Or just a bigot?

De Blasio is an embarrassment. No wonder his presidential bid fell flat. Who in his right mind would want him to run anything?