

STATE OVERREACH THREATENS RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

On March 27, Bill Donohue addressed the conflict between public health restrictions and religious liberty protections. "Whenever religious liberty collides with public health, the government is obliged to put the least restrictive measures on religion."

On April 11, U.S. District Judge Justin Walker invoked a temporary restraining order blocking Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer's ban on drive-in church services. The Kentucky governor, Andy Beshear, did not support the ban but he still warned against drive-in church services.

The Catholic League stands with Judge Walker. The Louisville mayor's directive is a classic case of government overreach: his ban was clearly not "the least restrictive measure." Judge Walker called his decision "stunning" and "unconstitutional." Moreover, the mayor's reasoning is deeply flawed.

Once the coronavirus pandemic hit, and social distancing was recommended, the clergy from many religions acted prudently by discontinuing services in church. But some sought to be creative by allowing drive-in services in church parking lots. Instead of applauding these efforts where they made sense (they are impractical when the weather is cold), Louisville Mayor Fischer banned them.

What infuriated Christians in Louisville was the decision to allow drive-through restaurants and liquor stores. Judge Walker seized on this disparity, noting that parking lots of liquor stores were not prohibited.

"When Louisville prohibits religious activity while permitting non-religious activities," he said, "its choice 'must undergo the most rigorous of scrutiny.' That scrutiny requires

Louisville to prove its interest is 'compelling' and its regulation is 'narrowly tailored to advance that interest.'"

House Freedom Caucus Chairman Andy Biggs and Rep. Jody Hice have sent a letter to President Trump, Vice President Pence and Attorney General Bill Barr asking them to address restrictions placed on religious liberty. Barr said he is "monitoring" this issue and may take action.

The clergy have, for the most part, been reasonable in balancing public health and religious liberty interests, and so have most mayors and governors. But the exceptions are egregious, and none more than the decision by Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer to ban drive-in church services on Easter Sunday. The Department of Justice should weigh in without delay.

BIGOTS OPPOSE FUNDS FOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The apostles of inclusion always draw the line when it comes to houses of worship and religious non-profits. They have done so again now that religious non-profits qualify for financial assistance from the Small Business Administration. This bothers them: they want to discriminate against these entities.

The Trump administration does not believe it is proper to discriminate against any organization in the distribution of funds attendant to the coronavirus pandemic. American Atheists calls this an "unconstitutional giveaway" and Freedom From Religion Foundation says it is "alarmed" by the policy. Neither can match the bigotry of Charles Pierce, the veteran religion hater (he has a special hatred of all things

Catholic) who writes for *Esquire*.

Pierce objects to the funding of religious groups, saying it is unconstitutional “even if the Supreme Court’s Papist majority” may think otherwise. He has much in common with nativists and the Ku Klux Klan—they routinely called Catholics “papists.”

Pierce is angry that there are five Catholics on the Supreme Court. Yet proportionately there are more Jews: Jews are two percent of the population but make up a third of the high court, while Catholics are a quarter of the population and make up a little over half. No one but an anti-Semite objects to having three Jews on the Supreme Court, and no one but an anti-Catholic bigot is livid over having five Catholics.

It does not help the bigot’s case for him to invoke James Madison’s *Memorial and Remonstrance* as support for his position. If he were better read, he would know that Madison’s statement was nothing more than an argument against the government’s granting tax support for *only one religion*. Hence, Madison is on the side of the Trump administration.

Indeed, if the bigot knew something about the Founding he would know that the same Congress that passed the First Amendment accepted the third article of the Northwest Ordinance without emendation: “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and happiness of mankind, schools and the means of learning shall forever be encouraged.”

As Walter Berns said, “It is not easy to see how Congress...could promote religious and moral education under a Constitution that promoted ‘the absolute separation of church and state’ and forbade all forms of assistance to religion.”

Kudos to the Trump administration for its policy of inclusion and its rejection of intolerance and discrimination.

TERRENCE McNALLY DIES AT 81

Playwright Terrence McNally has died as a result of complications from coronavirus; he was 81. The four-time Tony award winner came to the attention of the Catholic League when his play, "Corpus Christi," was performed at the Manhattan Theatre Club. The play featured Christ having sex with the twelve apostles and was the source of a demonstration Bill Donohue led when it opened in October 1998.

The *New York Times* got a copy of the script during the summer, before the play debuted. It said that "from the beginning to the end [the script] retells the Biblical story of a Jesus-like figure—from his birth in a Texas flea-bag hotel with people having profane, violent sex in the room next door to his crucifixion as 'king of the queers.'" It added, for good measure, that the Christ-like character, Joshua, "has a long-running affair with Judas and sexual relations with the other apostles." The script ended with a statement to Christians. "If we have offended you, so be it."

The play, interestingly, was replete with gay stereotypes, ranging from the sexual to the scatological. There was crotch grabbing and a clear obsession with the male sex organ. The Christ-like figure pretended to urinate in front of the audience, and he was joined by three of the apostles, complete with sounds of urination piped into the theater. No doubt this was considered creative.

Joshua had sex with Judas at a high school prom and then another romp with Philip. At one point, Philip said to Joshua, "I hope you have rubbers." He then asked the Jesus-figure to perform oral sex on him.

According to the *New York Times*, the demonstration Bill Donohue led drew 2,000 on a rainy night; only 300 joined a counterdemonstration. "The protest began with a fiery speech by William A. Donohue, the president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights," the newspaper said. "Mr. Donohue shouted criticisms at the opposition. 'You are the real authoritarians at heart. We're the ones that believe in tolerance, not you phonies.'"

The counterdemonstration was organized to protest the free-speech rights of the Catholic League. Donohue never called for censorship. Our critics were led by People for the American Way. They were joined by the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, the National Coalition Against Censorship, and the PEN American Center. All of these organizations were founded to defend freedom of expression, and all were there to condemn our free-speech rights.

The play turned out to be a bomb. Fintan O'Toole of the *New York Daily News* called it "utterly devoid of moral seriousness or artistic integrity." Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* said it was "dull," and David Lyons of the *Wall Street Journal* rebuked it for its "fatheadedness." The *Washington Post* said "the play plummets to a whole new level of grandiosity," and the *New York Times* pronounced the writing "lazy" as well as "flat and simpleminded." None were critical of the play's Christian bashing, or the fact that McNally singled out Catholics for special treatment.

McNally is gone. Let him rest in peace.

NOAH ATTACKS GAY PRIESTS AGAIN

There is a picture of Trevor Noah on the homepage of “The Daily Show” which shows him with a photo of the Easter Bunny on one side and the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the other. He looks like an unshaven filthy pig.

Noah is not just a dirty looking man, he has a thing about homosexual priests. No, he doesn’t come right out and attack these priests by name—he’s a liberal—so he prefers innuendo as his weapon.

On the April 13 edition of “The Daily Show,” Noah commented that on Easter Sunday it was hard on many church-goers who are used to attending services, “but for the Catholic Church, this is a good thing—keeping the priest separate from the congregation might not be the worst idea.”

Now we know he was not talking about heterosexual priests: the John Jay studies on clergy offenses report that almost all the sexual misconduct committed by priests were male-on-male sex. Moreover, almost none of it involved kids—over 95 percent involved adolescents. In other words, homosexual priests are responsible for most of the sexual abuse, and almost all of those cases are from the last century.

Noah wallows in the dirt. As a black man, he would take offense if someone portrayed black men as thugs. Yet he has no problem portraying homosexual priests as abusers, even though most homosexual priests are not molesters. The man is a bigot. He also needs to take a bath.

TRUMP WARNS OF DRUGS, DEPRESSION, SUICIDES

In his March 29 briefing on coronavirus, President Donald Trump alluded to the social consequences of not taking seriously the threat it poses. He mentioned the “massive” rates of drug use, depression, and suicide that might happen if he took a more relaxed approach to the disease.

Trump’s critics have played their “fact check game,” questioning how accurate his statement is. Even if we allow for hyperbole, Trump is right to call attention to these often neglected side effects associated with the stress and isolation engendered by a pandemic.

What Trump did not say is that one of the greatest tonics guarding against these conditions is religion; it is also true that those most at risk are non-believers. This is not a grey area: the studies are numerous and the findings are impressive. [The evidence is cited in Bill Donohue’s book *The Catholic Advantage: Why Health, Happiness, and Heaven Await the Faithful*.]

Dr. Harold G. Koenig is the nation’s leading scholar in the study of well-being. He teaches psychiatry and medicine at Duke University, and is the director of Duke’s Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health. He and his associates examined 278 studies on the relationship between religion and alcohol and drug use. They found that 86 percent of the studies concluded that the more religious a person was, the less likely he was to indulge. They also found that of the 185 studies on religion and drug abuse, the inverse relationship between religion and drugs was found 84 percent of the time.

Frank Newport is editor-in-chief of Gallup, and his surveys disclose that “very religious Americans are less likely to

report that they have been diagnosed with depression than those who are moderately religious or nonreligious.” Dr. Koenig and associates found that in 61 percent of the studies, religious Americans are less likely to be depressed than nonbelievers, and are more likely to recover at a faster rate from depression. Atheists, they learned, are more likely to be depressed. Worse, the secular care they choose leaves them more likely to be stuck in their condition longer than those who avail themselves of religious care.

Wayne State University sociologist Steven Stack did a study in which he rated twenty-five nations on a scale that measured religious commitment, and then sought to see if there was any relationship with suicide rates. He found that the more religious a person is, the less likely he is to commit suicide. Sociologist Rodney Stark looked at the data in America’s largest metropolitan areas and found that the higher the church membership rate, the lower the suicide rate. Similarly, one review of more than 100 studies found that in 87 percent of them, religion was related to a lower incidence of suicide.

None of this is to suggest that people treat religion as some sort of mental-hygiene drug. Make no mistake about it, the beneficent effects of religious convictions and practice are dependent on their sincere application. But if they are, chances are that in times of stress and isolation such persons will fare much better than their nonbelieving counterparts.

It would be great if President Trump were to call attention to these findings. It might inspire many Americans to reconsider their personal relationship with God.

CELEBRITIES LEARN TO COPE WITH CORONAVIRUS

In times of adversity, most Americans turn to God for relief, but there are segments of society that are so thoroughly enmeshed in a culture of secularism that even something as horrific as the coronavirus pandemic is not enough to change them. Hollywood is a case in point. The advice that celebrities are being given is only complicating their condition.

The *Hollywood Reporter* recently interviewed three therapists about the advice they are giving celebrities.

Dennis Palumbo is a former screenwriter-turned-psychotherapist who works almost exclusively with those in the entertainment industry. He tells his patients that they need to adjust to their new environment by letting themselves “process what a change this is” and learn to deal with it. “I think rather than try to get right back on the horse,” he advises, “I would suggest walking alongside the horse for a week.” Besides being hopelessly vague, and therefore almost useless, this is classic self-help advice. Self-help aficionados, of course, have no need for God.

Dr. Jenn Mann is a psychotherapist and host of VH1’s “Couple’s Therapy” and “Family Therapy.” She can’t bring herself to advise her Hollywood patients to pray—that would be too extreme—but she does come close: meditation is okay. But meditation must have an object. Meditation about what? Given her patients’ subculture of self-absorption, we have a good idea it won’t be about anyone save themselves.

Philip Pierce is a producer and Beverly Hills psychologist and he recommends that his patients “reflect on one’s values, and what is truly meaningful.” Those values, however, are

hopelessly secular to begin with, thus doing nothing to alter their condition.

Even those celebrities who have been moved to rethink their relationship with God have a hard time breaking away from their narcissistic condition. For example, Miley Cyrus says the coronavirus pandemic has inspired her to reconsider her rejection of religion.

Hollywood would benefit more if they dashed their therapists for a clergy member.

THE PLIGHT OF FALSELY ACCUSED PRIESTS

In 1987, Raymond Donovan, former Secretary of Labor under President Ronald Reagan, was acquitted of charges that he conspired with the mafia for a business transaction. When he walked out of court a free man, he was asked by the media how he felt. He famously quipped, “Which office do I go to get my reputation back?”

The same question is being asked by falsely accused priests, though they don’t garner much attention from the media. Ask yourself this: How many times have you seen an exonerated priest interviewed on TV?

Everyone knows when charges are made against a priest—it’s all over the news—but aside from a few stories about priests whose case has been tossed, there isn’t much interest in detailing what these men have gone through. It’s sexy to report accusations; it’s unattractive to report acquittals.

The following is a list of priests in the first quarter of 2020 whose case was either found to be unsubstantiated by a church review panel or was thrown out by the courts.

- A Valley County, Nebraska jury found Fr. John Kakkuzhiyil not guilty of first-degree sexual assault. He was accused of forcible sexual assault of a woman in 2018. ["Priest Cleared of Sexual Assault," www.theindependent.com, January 9]
- Two Buffalo priests, Monsignor Peter J. Popadick and Fr. Paul M. Nogaro, were returned to ministry after the Diocese of Buffalo was unable to substantiate allegations of child sexual abuse against them. The accuser refused to cooperate with the diocese. ["2 Buffalo Diocese Priests Accused of Sex Abuse Returned to Ministry," *Buffalo News*, January 18]
- Another Buffalo priest, Fr. Roy T. Herberger, sued his accuser for lying about charges of sexual abuse against him (the accuser is suing the diocese but not the priest); the priest is charging him with slander. The alleged offense took place in the 1980s and no charges were made until 2018. The accuser said he was a student at St. Ann School in the mid-1980s, but there is no record he ever attended the school. Herberger said "there is no proof, no evidence, not even an inkling, just an accusation and all of a sudden, people like me are put on the front page of papers, picture, name on television, and I mean, that's just not fair." ["Priest Files Defamation Suit Against His Accuser," *Buffalo News*, January 23]
- A Kentucky priest, Fr. David Glockner, was accused of inappropriately touching two teenage girls, and had the charges dropped both by an independent investigation by his religious order and a grand jury. ["Northern Kentucky Catholic Priest Cleared of any Wrongdoing," www.cincinnati.com, February 5]
- Fr. Paul Angelicchio was reinstated by the Diocese of Syracuse after it was determined that charges of sexually abusing a boy in the early 1980s could not be substantiated. The accuser refused to cooperate with the diocese. ["Accused

Priest Reinstated by the Diocese," *Post-Standard*, February 6]

- In September, 2019, a Wisconsin judge dismissed one of six counts of sexual misconduct against Fr. William A. Nolan, and the jury found him not guilty of the remaining counts. But the Diocese of Madison commenced its own investigation of him and in March, 2020 it deemed all allegations against him not credible. ["Priest Accused of Sex Abuse Cleared by Madison Diocese," www.gazettextra.com, March 7]

- Fr. Hugh Lang, former schools superintendent of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, had his conviction of February 6 tossed when an Allegheny County judge agreed with a post-sentencing motion filed by his attorney. The initial judge, who was removed from the bench over alleged racist remarks, was found to have erred when he allowed spurious evidence to be used against the priest. ["Ex-Pittsburgh Priest Accused of Sexually Abusing Child Has Conviction Tossed," www.triblive.com, March 9]

- An independent investigation of an Augustinian priest from Andover, Massachusetts, Fr. Peter Gori, found charges of sexual abuse from 30 years ago to be unsubstantiated. The accuser could not recall details of what happened, and his account was at variance with facts about the priest's assignment history. The attorney for the accused is Mitchell Garabedian of "Spotlight" fame; he has had previous cases against priests thrown out. ["Andover Priest Reinstated After Sexual Abuse Investigation," www.bostonglobe.com, March 30]

Then there is the case of Fr. John Onderko from Illinois. The 83-year-old priest was removed from ministry by the Diocese of Peoria for alleged sexual abuse dating back decades ago. He says he was never told of the accusations, which he denies. He has sued the diocese saying he was denied due process. ["Accused Priest in Rock Island Sues Peoria Diocese," <https://qctimes.com>, March 10]

As Ray Donovan put it, how do these priests get their reputation back?