

POPE AND PREZ MEET; OBAMA INVITES CHURCH'S FOES

On September 23, Pope Francis met with President Obama in the White House. The meeting was amicable. Incredibly, those invited by the president to be there were some of the most notorious foes in the Church. It is so fitting that the least friendly administration to religion in history would invite a collection of pro-abortion nuns, Catholic gay activists, assorted dissidents and religious rebels to attend Pope Francis' visit to the White House.

These include gay Catholic blogger Aaron Ledesma; Catholic gay activist and Church critic Nicholas Coppola; and Sister Jeannine Gramick, co-founder of the Catholic dissident group New Ways Ministry, who in 1999 was barred by the Vatican from working in ministry to homosexuals. Coppola and Gramick were both invited by GLAAD, which said the White House invited it and LGBT leaders to attend.

Vivian Taylor, who identifies as transgender, not only scored an invite, but was told to bring some friends. He did—including members of Dignity, a Catholic dissident group, and other “transgender and intersex people.”

Also attending was Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Episcopal bishop, who left his wife of 14 years for his male partner, then last year “divorced” that partner.

Also on hand was Sister Simone Campbell. She is the leader of the “Nuns on the Bus” who actively campaigned for Obamacare with its blatant pro-abortion provisions. We doubted an invitation would be sent to the Little Sisters of the Poor, the nuns being targeted by the administration for remaining true to their Catholic faith and refusing to comply with the pro-abortion mandate. We didn't expect to see them there.

Catholic-baiting is nothing new in Washington. Back in 1994, the Clinton administration's own Ambassador to the Vatican, Ray Flynn, wrote that he was "embarrassed" by the "ugly anti-Catholic bias that is shown by prominent members of Congress and the administration."

President Obama, however, has taken it to a new level. From inviting an aggressively anti-religious atheist organization to the White House; to trying to force Catholics, like the Little Sisters, to violate Catholic moral teaching; and now, to this attempt to exploit a papal visit to promote an agenda that is offensive to faithful Catholics, he has shown a religious intolerance that is mind-boggling.

President Obama just could not resist using his meeting with the Holy Father to make a political statement.

DONOHUE MEETS POPE

On September 23, Bill Donohue, and vice president Bernadette Brady-Egan, met with Pope Francis following a prayer service at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, D.C. It was an honor they will never forget.

The invitation to meet the pope was extended by Donald Cardinal Wuerl. He also invited them to the canonization Mass at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Timothy Cardinal Dolan invited Bill to the prayer service at St. Patrick's Cathedral, but he elected to stay in D.C. to do TV interviews.

Catholic League members know that we harbor no agenda: our only goal is to allow the Church to have a fair hearing. So it is times like these, when the pope is being exploited by those who clearly have their own agenda, that we can proudly stand

on principle.

It is not just those who seek to manipulate the pope who are a problem: it is his “fast friends,” those who never go to bat for him when he is being slammed, yet always manage to be there during a papal visit.

As we go to press, the rest of the pope’s visit has yet to unfold. We will report in the next *Catalyst* on any controversies that may have happened, and our response to them. Regrettably, no matter what this pope does—the same was true of his predecessors—it will never be enough to stop the Catholic bashers.

There is some consolation in the attacks on our faith: they know we cannot be ignored.

DISOBEYING THE LAW

William A. Donohue

Is it ever right to disobey the law in a democracy? This question has been raised a lot lately, especially in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage.

There are two concepts of law that need to be considered: the positive law and the natural law. The positive law is that which the government posits, or says, is the law. The natural law is the moral law, rooted in conscience. Government is obliged to uphold the positive law, but problems emerge when it can be reasonably maintained that a particular law is morally unjust. Must we obey it?

Aristotle is the father of natural law, or what he called the

“universal law.” He contended that all human beings, regardless of their culture or station in life, instinctively knew that some things were morally wrong. St. Thomas Aquinas agreed. He gave natural law a more Christian cast, saying that the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor, were the “first and common precepts of the natural law.” Both Aristotle and Aquinas believed that clear notions of right and wrong were inscribed in our hearts.

An obvious example where the positive law violates the natural law occurred in Nazi Germany. Under Hitler, Nazis were obliged to murder Jews; the positive law demanded that they do so. After the war, at the Nuremberg trials, some high-ranking Nazis were put on trial. Their defense attorneys argued, quite rightly, that they were just following orders. But it was their contention that they should not therefore be prosecuted that proved debatable. This position was rejected by the courts: it was held that they knew that what they did was morally wrong.

Today we have another showdown between the positive law and the natural law. Enter Kim Davis. This Kentucky county clerk invoked her Christian-held beliefs as the basis of refusing to issue marriage licenses to gay couples. Was it fair to arrest her? Yes. Did they have to put her in jail? No. Was she right to refuse? Yes. I hasten to add that had she taken this job after the high court ruled on this issue, I would not defend her (to take a job one cannot in conscience do is indefensible). However, that was not the case: When she was elected to this post, gay marriage was illegal and those who elected her were opposed to it. The court changed, not her or her backers.

The authorities have a duty to arrest law breakers, independent of their motives. To argue otherwise is to sanction anarchy. So yes, she should have been arrested. But she could have been fined, or told not to return to work until a hearing was granted. In all honesty, I am delighted she was

thrown in the slammer. It only dramatized the issue.

Everyone knew that this decision by the Supreme Court would create religious liberty issues. In the oral arguments, held months before the ruling, the U.S. Solicitor General was asked if religious liberty problems would follow if gay marriage were legalized. He admitted they would. When the decision was rendered, justices on both sides warned that these problems would not go away. They haven't, and they won't.

Was the ruling a just one? In terms of process, it certainly was. But a good case can be made that the five unelected judges left us with an unjust law.

Nowhere in the Constitution do the words marriage, family, or sexual orientation appear. It has generally been understood that when rights are not mentioned in the Constitution, it is up to the states to rule on them, not the federal government. In his dissent, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote that the right of two men to marry was a "right imagined by the majority," one that is not "actually spelled out in the Constitution."

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was sent to a Birmingham jail for violating what he called "unjust laws." There he wrote a famous letter citing St. Augustine, who said, "An unjust law is no law at all." Well said.

The day the high court decision legalizing gay marriage was made, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, the president of the bishops' conference, said, "It is profoundly immoral and unjust for the government to declare that two people of the same sex can constitute a marriage." The *Catholic Catechism* is also definitive on this subject: "If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, such arrangements would not be binding in conscience."

If civil disobedience is to be legitimately exercised, those who violate what they hold is an unjust law must do so only

when there are no legal avenues of redress left. They must be non-violent and not resist arrest. Their goal is moral suasion, not intimidation. Ms. Davis met those conditions.

It is striking how little sympathy this woman is receiving from our elites. But when it came to the “Occupy Wall Street” thugs—urban anarchists who assaulted innocent persons, raped women, provoked the police, and defecated in the street—the same people criticizing Davis either defended these barbarians or said nothing.

Kudos to Kim Davis for standing on principle.

MEDIA GUIDE TO PHONY CATHOLIC GROUPS

Anti-Catholics and dissident Catholics sought to exploit Pope Francis during his recent American visit. The following is a list of some of these organizations who falsely market themselves as truly Catholic entities.

DignityUSA

- At their 2015 annual convention (7/2-7/5) in Seattle they had as the keynote Speaker, Dan Savage, radical gay activist and virulent anti-Catholic bigot. Here is a sampling of Savage’s remarks:
- When expressing his feelings on Pope Benedict’s opposition to gay marriage he said “the only thing that stands between my d*** and Brad Pitt’s mouth is a piece of paper.”
- On the retirement of Pope Benedict XVI, he wrote “That Motherf***ing Power-Hungry, Self-Aggrandized Bigot In

the Stupid F***ing Hat Announces His Retirement.”

- In an open letter to Dr. Ben Carson he wrote “suck my d***. Name the time and place and I’ll bring my d*** and a camera crew and you can s*** me off and win the argument.”
- He said sometimes he thinks about “f***** the s*** out of” Senator Rick Santorum.
- At a high school conference he called for Christians to “ignore the bulls*** in the Bible.”

Catholics for Choice

- Previously known as Catholics for a Free Choice, it is the most anti-Catholic pro-abortion organization in the nation. Funded by the Ford Foundation, Warren Buffett, and their ilk, it has no members: it is a front for elite anti-Catholics. It is such a fraud that it has twice been denounced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as a phony Catholic group.
- Marjorie Reiley Maguire, once one of CFC’s most prominent activists, broke with the letterhead group in 1995. She labeled it “an anti-woman organization” whose agenda is “the promotion of abortion, the defense of every abortion decision as a good, moral choice and the related agenda of persuading society to cast off any moral constraints about sexual behavior.” She also admitted that its leaders never go to Mass, thus providing more proof that it is anything but Catholic.

Chicago-Women Church

- “A past in Catholicism is common to many of us, but we reject that church’s sexism and hierarchal structure.”

CORPUS

- The founder of CORPUS and keynote speaker at the upcoming CORPUS 2015 conference, ex-priest Anthony Padovano has written: “Selective Catholicism is the only

way to become a comprehensive Catholic. Selective Catholicism respects conscience and the integrity of others. Total Catholicism is toxic. It makes a Church a slave plantation and it is terrified by the thought of freedom. Reforming the institutional Church is another form of abolition.”

- CORPUS was one of the signatories of a March 30, 2015 letter to Barack Obama urging him to stop implementing the Helms amendment, which said: “As such, we urge you to change your administration’s unduly harsh implementation of the Helms amendment to a policy without special exemptions for those entities that would cite religious beliefs as the basis to deny women abortion care in legally permitted circumstances. Any proposal that would allow exemptions for groups asserting religious beliefs to deny abortion access creates a dangerous precedent, erodes the separation of religion and state and endangers women’s lives.”

A Critical Mass: Women Celebrating Eucharist

- In 1997 co-founder, Victoria Rue “con-celebrated a feminist, inclusive Eucharist with 12 other women...on the former site of the Oakland cathedral in California. With this act we claimed that we are all priests.”

National Coalition of American Nuns

- In 1984, they opposed formal U.S. diplomatic relations with the Holy See.
- In 1989, they signed an amicus brief in Webster v. Reproductive Health Services in favor of unrestricted legal abortion.
- In 2005, they blasted the selection of Pope Benedict XVI.
- In 2006, they issued an “open letter” to Catholic voters in support of abortion and gay marriage.
- In 2010, when the Catholic League protested the decision

by the owner of the Empire State Building not to light the tower in recognition of Mother Teresa's centenary, these nuns signed a letter in support of the owner (so much for the bonds of "sisterhood").

Roman Catholic Womenpriests USA, Inc.

- They argue that "The ordinations of Roman Catholic Womenpriests are valid because of our apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic Church. The principal consecrating Roman Catholic male bishops who ordained our first women bishops are bishops with apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic Church."

Call to Action

- In 2006 Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, supported Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz's decision to excommunicate members of Call to Action in the Diocese of Lincoln, saying that belonging to or supporting Call to Action is "irreconcilable with a coherent living of the Catholic Faith," due to their anti-Catholic activities and stances.
- In a press release praising the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, Jim FitzGerald, Executive Director of CTA, said: "For far too long committed LGBT partners and families have endured discrimination and marginalization. This has come from many places – but none more forceful than from some members within the Catholic hierarchy. This decision, however, reverberates God's love of everyone and celebrates the dignity and holiness of all loving families."

Fortunate Families

- In the newsletter, *Voices for Justice*, founders Casey and Mary Ellen Lopata wrote an open letter to Pope Francis affirming support for active homosexuality

saying “We don’t believe God would create humankind with a range of sexual orientations yet forbid a segment to physically express their love in relationships in ways natural to their given orientations.”

- FF’s application to exhibit at the World Meeting of Families 2015 was denied and the following reason given by the Director of Content and Programming, Dr. Mary Beth Yount: “Fortunate Families (FF) was not accepted as an exhibitor because the FF website and associated links claim that the organization is meeting parents where they are at but then proceeds to indicate that if parents give any sense of disapproval of behavior at all (or even ambivalence), they are harming their children and even setting them up for greater risk of suicide.”

New Ways Ministry

- 1999 – Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger issued an order at the approval of Pope John Paul II that “permanently prohibited” the two leaders (Sr. Jeannine Gramick/Fr. Robert Nugent) “from any pastoral work involving homosexuals.”
- 2010 – Francis Cardinal George, then president of the bishops’ conference, said that “in no manner is this organization authorized to speak on behalf of the Catholic Church or to identify itself as a Catholic organization.”
- 2011 – Donald Cardinal Wuerl and Bishop Salvatore J. Cordileone issued a statement reaffirming Cardinal George’s 2010 statement.

WATER (Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual)

- On August 8, 2009, WATER co-director Mary Hunt wrote an article for Religion Dispatches titled “American Nuns Under the Vatican Microscope.” When discussing the investigation of dissident group Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the Religion Dispatches article,

Hunt said that not only does WATER reject the Church's teachings on ordination and marriage, but the group also does not accept the fact that Jesus is the only road to salvation:

- "Areas of concern are the group's views on homosexuality, the ordination of women, and the Vatican declaration Dominus Iesus, which asserts that Jesus is the unique and only road to salvation. The Cardinal's [William Cardinal Levada] assumption is that American nuns are accepting of same-sex love, supportive of feminist ministry (including ordination of women), and embracing of persons of many and no faiths. I only hope he is as right about their views as he is wrong about how to evaluate them."
- "It appears that the intention of the investigation is to maintain control over women and to preserve the Vatican's Catholic view of the world via the hot-button issues that are contested in the Church at large."
- "That does not deter the Vatican from its tactic to divide and conquer women in what I predict is a futile effort to consolidate its waning power."
- In 2010, WATER signed a statement affirming the decision by officials from the Empire State Building not to light the towers on Mother Teresa's centenary.
- On September 26, 2011, Hunt signed onto an open letter to HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius titled "What the Bishops Won't Tell You."
- The letter was in regards to the Affordable Care Act of 2010 and stated "we respectfully request that you eliminate the proposed religious exemptions because they are unnecessary and unjust."

The Women's Ordination Conference (WOC)

- WOC unequivocally rejects the Catholic teaching on marriage, declaring: "Supporting marriage equality is the right and just thing to do."

- October 23, 2014 WOC Press Release about Extraordinary Synod on the Family: "A group of men who fail to protect the children of our Church from sexual abuse, and who repeatedly sacrifice children to shield the offenders, has no credibility saying anything about what families need. A group of men who have no need for contraception has no standing to deny women access to appropriate reproductive health services. A group of men without experience of wedded life has no right to legislate who should and should not be married."
- WOC was one of the signatories of a March 30, 2015 letter to Barack Obama urging him to stop implementing the Helms amendment, which said "Any proposal that would allow exemptions for groups asserting religious beliefs to deny abortion access creates a dangerous precedent, erodes the separation of religion and state and endangers women's lives."

8th Day Center for Justice

- One of their goals is "To uphold the right to dissent against oppressive structures in church and society."
- In September 2011 they co-sponsored an event featuring Fr. Roy Bourgeois, radical proponent of women's ordination, who was laicized in October 2012 for his participation in an invalid ordination of a woman in August 2008.

Ecumenical Catholic Communion

- They reject in toto the Church's teachings on sexuality: "We uphold the ideal of committed relationships blessed by the sacred rites of the church. We believe that all questions of sexual morality are best addressed through pastoral care and counsel."

Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference

- "The church, by allowing women access to all roles and

positions, will cease to perpetuate discrimination, devaluation, and tacit approval of other forms of violence toward women in its structures and society.”

LITTLE KNOWN POPE FRANCIS QUOTES

It's great that the media have finally found a pope that they like, but if they were sincere they would report on statements made by Pope Francis that don't quite fit the narrative they have spun about him.

The teachings of the Church generally lean toward the liberal side on social and economic matters, and generally lean conservative on cultural and moral issues. In this regard, Pope Francis is no different from his predecessors. But one would never know this by reading mainstream media accounts of him.

Pope Francis has made many comments on issues the media have either ignored or underreported. Below is a list of some of the pope's strongest statements.

Abortion

- “It is God who gives life. Let us respect and love human life, especially vulnerable life in a mother's womb.”
- “A pregnant woman isn't carrying a toothbrush in her belly, or a tumor...We are in the presence of a human being.”

Anti-Catholicism

- “The world does not tolerate the divinity of Christ. It

doesn't tolerate the announcement of the Gospel. It does not tolerate the Beatitudes. And we have persecutions: with words, with insults, the things that they said about Christians in the early centuries, the condemnations, imprisonment...But we easily forget. We think of the many Christians, 60 years ago, in the labor camps, in the camps of the Nazis, of the communists: So many of them! For being Christians! And even today...But [people say] 'today we are better educated and these things no longer exist.' Yes they do!...They are condemned for having a Bible. They can't wear a crucifix."

Catholic Dissidents

- "Those with alternative teachings and doctrines [have] a partial belonging to the church. [They] have one foot outside the church. They rent the church."

Catholics and Politics

- "A good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of himself, so that those who govern can govern."

Euthanasia

- "A civilization whose technological advancements do not seek to protect the most vulnerable, from conception until natural death, fails to live up to its responsibility."

False Compassion

- "The dominant thinking sometimes suggests a 'false compassion,' that which believes that it is: helpful to women to promote abortion; an act of dignity to obtain euthanasia; a scientific breakthrough to 'produce' a child and to consider it to be a right rather than a gift to welcome; or to use human lives as guinea pigs presumably to save others. Instead, the compassion of the Gospel is that which accompanies in times of need,

that is, the compassion of the Good Samaritan, who 'sees,' 'has compassion,' approaches and provides concrete help."

Freedom of Expression (*Charlie Hebdo*)

- "If someone says a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. It's normal. It's normal. You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others."

Gay Marriage

- "At stake is the identity and survival of the family: father, mother, and children."
- "At stake are the lives of many children who will be discriminated against in advance, and deprived of their human development given by a father and a mother and willed by God. At stake is the total rejection of God's law engraved in our hearts."

Gays

- "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?"
- "You have to distinguish between the fact of a person being gay, and the fact of a lobby. The problem isn't the orientation. The problem is making a lobby."

Gender Ideology

- "I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards."
- "The crisis of the family is a social reality. Then there are ideological colonizations of the family, modes and proposals from Europe and also from overseas. The error of the human mind that is gender theory creates a

lot of confusion.”

- “Gender ideology is demonic!”

Marriage and the Family

- “Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child’s development and emotional maturity.”

Marxism

- “The Marxist ideology is wrong.”

Priestly Sexual Abuse

- “On this path, the Church has done much, perhaps more than all others. The Catholic Church is perhaps the only public institution that has moved with transparency and responsibility. No one has done more, and yet the Church is the only one that is being attacked.”

Women

- “We cannot forget the irreplaceable role of women in the family. The qualities of gentleness, of particular sensitivity and tenderness, which is abundant in the female soul, represent not only a genuine force for the life of families, for the irradiation of a climate of peace and harmony, but also a reality without which the human vocation would be unfeasible.”

Women Priests

- “The Church has spoken and said: ‘No.’ John Paul II said it, but with a definitive formulation. That door is closed.”

DISSIDENTS AIM TO BLOCK PUBLIC'S ACCESS TO POPE

Poll after poll has shown that Pope Francis is very popular these days, with millions of Americans—of all religions or no religion—who clamored for an opportunity to welcome him when he arrived on our shores recently. Two groups—the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) and Americans United for Separation of Church and State—were predictably unhappy about that, and did all they could to limit the public's access to the pope.

Americans United was unhappy that the city of Cape May, New Jersey planned to broadcast the pope's September 27 Mass from nearby Philadelphia at the Cape May Convention Hall to accommodate "people who can't attend in person." The city, which has waived charges at the Convention Center for other non-profit events, organized this one in conjunction with the Cape May Ministerium, a group of clergy representing different denominations. When Americans United threatened to sue the city, the Cape May Ministerium stepped up as the sole sponsor, and the event went ahead as scheduled.

FFRF got similarly exercised about New York City's giveaway of tickets to see Pope Francis in Central Park September 25. This, the group said, made New York City appear "to be endorsing Pope Francis' sectarian religious message."

FFRF was also in high dudgeon over Pope Francis' scheduled meeting with inmates at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia September 27. As prisons are "public-supported," the group complained, the pope should not have been invited to meet with inmates; nor should inmates have been permitted to hand carve a chair to present to the

pontiff, even though they volunteered to do so.

Freedom *From* Religion is an apt name for this group. Obviously they care nothing for the Freedom *of* Religion of those who are incarcerated.

CATHOLIC CHURCH CONFOUNDS NEWSWEEK

To say the Catholic Church confounds *Newsweek* is an understatement: they just don't know what to make of it. The September 10 *Newsweek* article began by praising Pope Francis as a progressive, then went on a lengthy rant against San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, only to finish with a mixed review of the Holy Father. In other words, the good pope was compared to the bad archbishop, but instead of hailing the pope at the end, it closed by noting its uncertainty.

The comparison failed. Cordileone's criticisms of gay marriage and Bruce-Caitlyn-Jenner are actually quite mild when contrasted to what the pope has said. Pope Francis has called gay marriage the work of "the Devil." He has also warned against "gender ideology," and attempts to "cancel out sexual difference." In fact, he holds, "Gender ideology is demonic!"

It is also false to claim that there is a difference between Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis on homosexuality. Both of them have expressed their allegiance to the Church's teaching: the act of homosexuality is an "intrinsic moral evil." Therefore, to rail against Cordileone for expecting Catholic teachers to uphold this teaching made *Newsweek* look plainly stupid. It is just as dumb to say the Bible doesn't condemn

homosexuality.

The article said with glee that in 1968 Benedict gave primacy to conscience over papal authority. More homework would have disclosed that in 1991 he explicitly noted that to say “the judgment of conscience” is “always right” would “mean that there is no truth.” Indeed, he warned against “the identification of conscience with superficial consciousness,” which reduces “man to his subjectivity.”

This confused piece ended by commending the pope for being “a superb communicator” but was unsure of who he really is. In point of fact, Francis and Cordileone have more in common than *Newsweek* was willing to acknowledge.

PRO-ABORTION DEMOCRATS LOBBY POPE

A couple of weeks ago, Rep. Rosa DeLauro, a rabidly pro-abortion Catholic, sent a letter to Pope Francis – signed by 93 of her House Democratic colleagues – that urged him to focus on certain topics when he addressed Congress Sept. 24. And they were not content to have him speak in general terms about concerns like economic justice or the environment. They wanted him to advance specific items on their agenda, like paid sick leave, a higher minimum wage, and climate change. Nowhere, of course, did they express openness to what he may have said on marriage, family or the sanctity of life. Indeed, if he addressed any of these issues from the House rostrum, we surely would have heard these same voices caterwauling about separation of church and state.

Speaking of which, Americans United for Separation of Church

and State warned cities who hosted the papal visit to respect church-state separation. We didn't hear them rebuke DeLauro and company. Although this was not the first time she sought to involve religious leaders in her political causes – she once urged Cardinal Timothy Dolan to mobilize the U.S. Bishops behind her anti-poverty agenda – she has received a 100 percent rating from Americans United. Why? Because their criteria primarily oppose religious voices exerting influence on public policies. No problem, apparently, for government officials to use their offices to try to influence religion or religious leaders.

Interestingly, there was no similar correspondence to the pope from Congressional Republicans – so often accused, by political opponents as well as groups like Americans United, of trying to use religion to their political advantage.

CATHOLIC LEAGUE SURVEY OF CATHOLICS

Introduction

Over the summer, the Catholic League commissioned a survey of Catholics, in anticipation of the media surveys we knew would precede the Holy Father's visit to the United States. In addition to the usual questions, we probed issues that the media generally ignore. We also dug deeper, seeking a more comprehensive examination of Catholic attitudes and beliefs.

Methodology

In the first week of August 2015, The Polling Company, headed by Kellyanne Conway, conducted a nationwide scientific survey

of 1,000 Catholics. They were randomly chosen from telephone sample lists, using both landline and cell phones.

Sampling controls ensured proportional representation of Catholic adults, drawn from such demographic data as age, gender, race and ethnicity, and geographic region. Data were weighted slightly for age and race. The findings are accurate at the 95% confidence interval, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1%

Findings

Role of Catholicism

Respondents were asked about their religious formation. Childhood lessons were identified by 56%, while teachings from Catholic schools were cited by 45% of those questioned. Most striking, 70% of those who spent 11+ years in Catholic schools cited education as a primary source of Church teachings.

Asked to choose from a list of characteristics about what constitutes a good Catholic life, the majority chose “living an honest and moral life” and “helping your neighbor.” African Americans, 59%, and widowers, 63%, were more likely to choose the latter.

Roughly 68% of Catholics say their commitment towards their faith has not been altered in any significant way in the recent past. Those who are the most educated tended to feel the most excited about or committed to their Catholic faith; those who rarely attend Mass were the least excited.

A staggering 95% of Catholics say their faith plays a significant role in their everyday lives. When it comes to the impact that their faith has on their political decisions, 69% reported that their Catholicism matters. Nearly half of Catholics, 48%, believe that if more people practiced the teachings of the Catholic Church, our society would be better off. Those who attend Mass more than once a week, 72%, are the

most likely to agree with this proposition.

Pope Francis, the Bishops, and the Media

The findings show that 83% of Catholics approve of the overall job that Pope Francis has done. He gets his highest approval ratings from African Americans, 93%, and those who have a post-graduate education, 92%. Similarly, 79% say that he has changed the Church for the better, drawing more support from women than men.

Catholics would prefer that the bishops stick mostly to internal Church matters; 64% feel this way and only 27% think they should address public policy. But the more a Catholic attends Mass, the more likely he is to say the bishops should speak out more about policy issues.

When it comes to the pope, however, things are different. A plurality of 48% prefer that he speak to public policy matters; 45% say he should address mostly internal Church concerns.

Respondents were asked about their reaction to media coverage of papal events. "During the previous Pope's visit to the United States, Pew Research found that during the week of Pope Benedict's visit, over half of the news coverage on the Pope focused on the clergy sex abuse scandal. Knowing this, do you think that the media coverage is mostly fair or mostly unfair toward the Catholic Church?"

Nearly six in ten, 58%, said that the media coverage was mostly unfair; 34% said it was mostly fair.

One of the issues that the Catholic League has been quite critical about over the years is the media habit of including non-Catholics in polls about Catholicism. We had pollsters ask respondents if they had ever heard of a survey that asked non-Jews and non-Muslims if they agree with the teachings of Judaism or Islam. Not surprisingly, 90% said they never heard

of such a poll.

By a margin of 52% to 39%, respondents agreed that “Gay couples receive more respectful/favorable treatment in popular culture like books, TV and movies than do Catholic figures like priests and nuns.”

Catholic Church Teachings

The media are obsessed with issues of sexuality when writing about the Catholic Church. Too often, in their surveys, they ask simple “yes or no” questions, thus eliciting information that is not particularly useful. We allowed for a more nuanced approach.

Our survey found that roughly four-out-of-five Catholics at least partly accept the Church’s teachings on abortion.

To be specific, respondents were asked if they agree with the Church that “all life is sacred from conception until natural death, and the taking of innocent human life, whether born or unborn, is morally wrong.”

“I accept part of this teaching but not all” was the response of 39%, and 38% said, “I accept this teaching completely.” Conservatives and those with 11+ years of Catholic education were more likely to subscribe to the Church’s teaching.

When asked to identify themselves as pro-life or pro-choice, 50% said they were pro-life and 38% said they were pro-choice. But it appears that even among those who say they are pro-choice, few are zealots.

For example, 17% said abortion should be prohibited in all circumstances; 17% said it should be legal only to save the life of the mother; and 27% said abortion should only be legal in cases of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother. That’s 61% who are mostly pro-life.

Among those who are pro-choice, only 5% said that abortion

should be allowed for any reason and at any time; 4% said any reason was okay but there should be none after the first six months of pregnancy; and 17% said abortion should be legal for any reason, but not after the first three months of pregnancy. That's 26% who are mostly pro-choice.

Another way of looking at it is to consider how many are happy with current abortion law. In the U.S., abortion is allowed for any reason and at any time; we have the most liberal abortion laws in the world. The survey data yield an impressive finding: if only 5% agree with current law that means that 19 out of 20, or 95%, of Catholics disagree with the status quo.

When it comes to marriage, 58% believe it should be between a man and a woman only; 38% do not agree. Those from the Northeast are the most liberal on this; frequent church-goers the most conservative.

On the subject of women priests, 58% say they agree that the Church should ordain women as priests; 36% disagree (African Americans and those widowed were the most likely to disagree). Even though a majority are okay with women priests, the data indicate that what is being measured is more of a preference than a demand: just 35% say they agree strongly that women should be priests. Which means that two-thirds either oppose women's ordination or it doesn't mean that much to them.

This last interpretation of the data may be too generous. It is not at all uncommon for people to be conflicted: on the one hand, they want the Church to change certain teachings; on the other hand, they admire the constancy of Church teachings.

In the black-and-white world of the media, there is no interest in probing the respondent's conscience. This may make for good commentary, but it lacks a scientific basis.

Here's an analogy Bill Donohue often uses when speaking to the media. If asked if he would prefer "God Bless America" to the

“Star Spangled Banner” as our national anthem, he would choose the former. That’s his preference. But is he going to get exercised about it if there is no change? Of course not. Similarly, when Catholics are asked whether they want the Church to change its teachings on certain subjects, they may say yes, but few are prepared to take to the streets over it.

It is because of these concerns that Donohue crafted a question to get right to the heart of this issue.

Respondents were asked if the Catholic Church should “remain true to its principles and not change its positions,” or should it “change beliefs and principles to conform to modern customs?” The majority, 52%, agreed that the Church should not change; 38% disagreed. It is likely that some of those who are okay with women priests also admire the steadiness of the Church’s teachings. This becomes even more apparent when the issue of the conflicted Catholic is teased even further.

Here is the actual question, and the responses, that address this issue:

- 31% I differ with the Catholic Church’s position on some issues but the Catholic Church shouldn’t change its beliefs or positions just because of public opinion
- 28% I agree with most every position the Catholic Church takes and the Catholic Church should remain true to its principles and not change its position
- 26% I differ with the Catholic Church’s position on some issues and the Catholic Church should modernize its beliefs by changing its position to reflect current public opinion
- 9% I disagree with most every position the Catholic Church takes and the Catholic Church should absolutely change its positions to reflect modern day beliefs
- 2% None of the above
- 4% Don’t know; cannot judge

This data indicate that 6-in-10 Catholics want the Church to stay true to its principles; only 35% want it to conform to modern culture. Again, this suggests that many of those who might differ with the Church on women priests, or some other issue, also prefer a Church that doesn't change with the winds of the dominant culture.

This is nothing new. In a 1995 survey of Catholics, commissioned by the Catholic League, we asked an almost identical question. It yielded practically the same results.

Religious Liberty

By a healthy 2-1 margin, Catholics support laws that protect religious liberties. To be exact, 63% oppose compelling private businesses to provide services that violate their religious beliefs; 30% are not opposed. When asked specifically about forcing wedding-related businesses to provide services like taking photos or baking cakes for same-sex marriages if it violates their religious beliefs, 62% say it is mostly unfair; 29% say it is fair.

Similarly, 60% agree that "Religious freedom laws are only meant to protect religious freedom, and the threat of these laws is exaggerated by the media and allies." Only 32% believe that religious freedom laws are worrisome and could be used by businesses to discriminate based on sexual orientation.

Respondents were also questioned about the Health and Human Services mandate. They were asked if they agree or disagree with the federal government forcing Catholic organizations "to pay for health care coverage that covers contraceptive drugs, including those that can destroy a human embryo, even if it is against their religious beliefs?" Fully 68% disagreed; only 27% agreed.

Conclusion

It is entirely legitimate for survey researchers to question

Catholics about their religion, probing their beliefs and attitudes. But when non-Catholics are asked to pass judgment on Church teachings and/or no attempt is made to distinguish between practicing Catholics and non-practicing Catholics, the results are ineluctably skewed towards a more critical outcome. This explains why the Catholic League survey was conducted: we sought a more accurate picture of the status of Catholicism today.

PEW SURVEY IS UNIQUE BUT NOT A GAME-CHANGER

On September 2, the Pew Research Center released a survey on Catholics.

In terms of methodological precision, the Pew Research Center has no rival. Its latest survey is no exception: it offered an in-depth picture of Catholics. But its decision to examine those who are no longer Catholic, or never were, is of questionable utility.

The title and subtitle of the report reflected its discontinuity. The title read, "U.S. Catholics Open to Non-Traditional Families." The subtitle, "45% of Americans Are Catholic or Connected to Catholicism" bore no relationship to the title. Moreover, it was not clear why this figure even mattered. "Connected to Catholics"?

Most surveys contrast practicing and non-practicing Catholics, as judged by Mass attendance. This survey did this as well, but it also included "Cultural Catholics," namely, those who are no longer Catholic but continue to think of themselves as such (converts and non-believers). Probing self-identity is an

interesting subject, but to what end? If a vegetarian turns carnivorous, yet persists in considering himself a vegetarian, would we include him in a survey of vegetarians? Pew's typology also included self-identified "Ex-Catholics." Would ex-Muslims be included in a survey of Muslims? And as noted, the survey included "Connected to Catholics." We never learned why they are worth studying.

Not surprisingly, "Cultural Catholics" and "Ex-Catholics" are less likely to accept the Church's teachings. But it is nice to know they like the pope.

One finding which never varies is the correlation between Mass attendance and fidelity to Church teachings: practicing Catholics are the most likely to accept the teachings of the Church; women, seniors, and those who are married are the most practicing. In this regard, "Most Catholics are very loyal to the church," is one of its most salient findings.

There was much to mine in this report. Unfortunately, there was much that was of dubious significance.