

DEMOCRATS END FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS

The following article written by Bill Donohue was recently published on CNSNews.com.

Here is a story no one is talking about: the Democrats have given up on faith-based programs.

The Democratic Party Platform does not say a word about government sponsored faith-based programs, thus closing a chapter in their playbook.

After George W. Bush won reelection in 2004, Democratic strategists correctly decided that the “value voters” were killing them. The post-election surveys showed that more than any other segment of the population, it was “values voters” who decided the election, literally creaming John Kerry. That’s when people like Mike McCurry, James Carville, and Paul Begala realized it was time the Democrats changed their tune and started talking to people of faith.

One of the religious-outreach projects launched by Bush that caught the eyes of these Democrats was his faith-based initiative. The Republicans knew that religious organizations were well situated to care for the needy and provide for an array of social services; all they needed was more money to extend their mission.

Between 2004 and 2008, the Democrats outlined a plan to mimic the Republican initiative. But they had to overcome some obstacles, one of them being their built-in aversion to Christian programs. Infinitely more concerned about separation of church and state than religious liberty, they had to walk a minefield establishing faith-based programs of their own.

Barack Obama had all the markings of someone Democrats could

feel comfortable with in developing these programs. A talented orator, he electrified the crowd at the 2004 Democratic Convention by directly appealing to people of faith. So when it appeared that he may be elected president in 2008, the Democrats had a well-planned initiative ready to roll.

On July 2, 2008, I commented on Obama's faith-based initiative; he was a presidential candidate at the time. "If a customer walked into a New York deli and said, 'Let me have a hot dog on a roll—hold the frankfurter'—he'd likely be thrown out. That's what the public should do to Obama's faith-based initiative: since he wants to gut the faith from his faith-based programs, he should be told to junk it."

My criticism stemmed from the fact that under Obama's plan, Orthodox Jews who run a day care center were not allowed to exclusively hire Orthodox Jews. Ditto for Catholics running foster care programs—they had to hire non-Catholics. And so on. For these reasons, I said, "his initiative is a fraud."

P.Z. Meyers agreed with me. He is a militant atheist professor whose claim to fame was driving a rusty nail into an allegedly consecrated Communion host. He listened to Obama talk about his half-baked plan and rendered his conclusion. "He's essentially tearing down the faith-based initiatives and instead building secular-based initiatives, with the religious folks doing the work. Works for me." And why wouldn't it?

On February 5, 2009, I assessed President Obama's newly designed Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. The uneasiness of working with religious entities was readily apparent, allowing me to remark, "Those who walk in the middle of the street risk getting run over by cars on both sides."

Nearly a year later, on January 15, 2010, the secularization of faith-based programs had reached such a level that I wrote a news release titled, "Time to Close Faith-Based Programs." On June 24, 2011, after a new round of dumbing-down the

religious element in these programs, I released another statement, "Shut Down Faith-Based Programs."

The 2012 Democratic Party Platform boasted how "Faith-based organizations will always be critical allies in meeting the challenges that face our nation and our world" But it wasn't just conservative critics who saw through this nonsense: Those who worked in these programs were beginning to express their frustration with the White House—nothing was getting done. The dissension has only gotten worse.

Now it's over. Faith-based programs are no longer "critical allies"—they have been expunged from the 2016 Democratic Party Platform. By contrast, the 2016 Republican Party Platform makes seven references to faith-based programs, underscoring their importance.

Are we better off without public funding of faith-based programs? If the price to be paid is their neutering, then the answer is yes. If Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Mormons, and Muslims are being ordered to subordinate their religious beliefs and practices to the high altar of secularism—just to get a dime from Uncle Sam—they are essentially being asked to engage in self-sabotage.

It has been a long time since Hillary Clinton has addressed faith-based programs, and from the looks of things, she's in the clear—there is no one of any weight left in her party imploring her to do so.

This means that Hillary can continue her practice of discussing freedom of worship while avoiding any mention of freedom of religion. Freedom of worship means that people have the right to pray and attend religious services; freedom of religion means a full-throated public exercise of freedom. For those who think religion needs to be contained, not expanded, the former is very attractive.

WASHINGTON POST LIES ABOUT POPE

Here is how a recent editorial in the *Washington Post* interpreted what Pope Francis allegedly said aboard the papal plane a few weeks ago:

“In this case, the pontiff has acknowledged that, at times, the church has been and can still be the oppressor—whether by discriminating against gay people, treating women in its ranks as second-class citizens or preaching clerical celibacy while protecting child abusers in the priesthood.”

This is a lie—that is not what the pope said.

After initially saying that the Church “must not only ask forgiveness to the gay person who is offended...she must ask forgiveness to the poor too, to women who are exploited, to children who are exploited for labor,” he quickly explained what he meant by “the Church.”

“When I say the Church,” the pope said, “I mean Christians! The Church is holy, we are sinners!” In other words, it is not the institutional Church and its teachings that are the problem, it is Christians who sin. That is not a small difference—it’s a huge difference.

By the way, the pope had nothing to say about priestly sexual abuse—which was caused by homosexuals, not pedophiles—that was simply thrown in by the *Washington Post* for good measure.

The reporting on what the pope said in this interview has been widely distorted. But none can match the irresponsibility of this editorial. Indeed, it calls into question the integrity

of the *Washington Post*.

POPE SPEAKS THE TRUTH ABOUT GENDER

A couple of weeks ago, Pope Francis made some remarks that condemned “gender ideology”.

Speaking with Polish bishops, Pope Francis pulled no punches in rejecting the notion that “everyone can choose their gender.”

“This is terrible,” he said bluntly. “Today in schools they are teaching this to children—to children!” He said this is part of the “ideological colonization” that “influential countries” are trying to impose on the world.

“We are living in a moment of annihilation of man as image of God,” the pope said. “God created man and woman, God created the world this way, this way, this way, and we are doing the opposite.” He told the Polish bishops, “We must think about what Pope Benedict said—‘It’s the epoch of sin against God the Creator.’”

Thus did Pope Francis, not for the first time, reject political correctness in order to speak boldly and truthfully about the destructiveness—to children, to families and to society—of “gender ideology.”

We await—surely in vain—affirmation of the Pope’s remarks from mainstream media and Catholic dissidents who are selectively enamored by papal comments they find useful to their agenda. We won’t be holding our breath.

But his words are sure to be welcomed, across the world, by all who affirm the laws of nature and nature's God.

RICHARD DAWKINS SPEAKS ABOUT EVIL

Recently, BBC conducted an interview with British atheist Richard Dawkins.

The headline in a story run by World Religion News read, "Richard Dawkins Still Says Religion is a 'Force of Evil.'" The story was occasioned by an admission Dawkins made that even after he had a stroke earlier this year, he still hasn't changed his beliefs.

He really didn't leave himself any wiggle room. After all, since the age of nine he has been a convinced atheist. Moreover, he has spent his entire adult life telling us that life is a crapshoot, having no meaning whatsoever. So it's a little late in the game—he is 75—to pivot. But his recent BBC interview did yield interesting fruit.

Here is how a friendly journalist explained his remarks. "He believes we all are aware of our mortality and someday we all have to die, sooner or later, and that is the end of the journey." Yes, the sentient readily admit to their own mortality, and he is certainly entitled to his belief that life on earth is the end of the road. It is ironic to note, however, that while he ridicules the faithful for not providing scientific evidence of an afterlife, he is curiously content not to offer any such data to support his beliefs.

In the interview, Dawkins said that while religion promotes

evil, “the vast majority” of believers do not commit evil acts; only a minority do so. Which begs the question: Why, if religion is evil, are so few of its adherents evil? How does Dawkins know—does he have any evidence?—that evil acts committed by Christians, for instance, are an expression of their fidelity to Christianity? Would it not make more sense to say that it is precisely because so few Christians are evil that it is a tribute to their religious upbringing?

Hitler and Stalin were genocidal maniacs, and in both cases they were raised Christian. But they committed their evil acts *after* they became militant atheists. Too bad they converted.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IMPERILED WORLDWIDE

Recently, the findings of the 2015 International Religious Freedom Report were issued by the U.S. State Department.

It is a mistake to ascribe all religious persecution to Muslim madmen who belong to terrorist groups such as ISIS, al Qaeda, al Shabab, and Boko Haram. The sad fact is that Muslim-run governments are centrally involved in oppression, as are Communist-run governments.

The Report cited Penn State researchers who found that “the number of countries that require some sort of [religious] registration has increased significantly over the last two decades, to nearly 90 percent of all countries.” Worse is the practice of punishing people for merely criticizing Islam or converting to another religion. Such persons were routinely tortured and killed, with the approval of street mobs.

In Mauritania, a blogger critical of the government was initially sentenced to death, but it was revoked after he apologized; he is still in prison. Mobs in Pakistan have killed 62 persons for blasphemy since 1990. Sudan punishes anyone who claims that the Quran—not the government—is the sole source of authority.

In Saudi Arabia, a Palestinian poet was sentenced to 8 years in prison and 800 lashes (he was initially sentenced to death); three others had their death sentences upheld. The Syrian government has been on a tear killing Sunnis and other religious minorities. Iran executed at least 20 persons for blasphemy. Religious minorities were tortured in Eritrea, and three persons were legally stoned to death in Brunei for apostasy. China demolished several Catholic and Protestant churches, and “the exercise of religious freedom continued to be nearly non-existent in North Korea.”

Still worse is the fact that the Obama administration continues to cut deals with Iran, and has been muted in its condemnation of Christian persecution. Beyond belief is the fact that the Clinton Foundation has received upwards of \$25 million from the thugs in Saudi Arabia. For obvious reasons, the Democratic-controlled State Department failed to cite any of these facts.

MEDIA COVER FOR MUSLIM MADMAN

Here is a sample of some of the most common statements and headlines issued by the media on Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, the truck driver who killed at least 84 people in Nice, France:

- “A Frenchman of Tunisian descent drove a truck through

crowds....”

- “French Tunisian Truck Terrorist Identified”
- “Truck Attack in France Kills at Least 80”
- “Attack in Nice: Driver of Truck Identified as 31-Year-Old French-Tunisian”

Rare is the story that identified him as a Muslim. A Lexis-Nexis search found 162 articles on the massacre, and in 108 of them they cited his Tunisian descent. Even though many witnesses said they heard him shout “Allahu Akbar,” only 19 stories mentioned it.

If an Irish-Catholic madman were to mow down scores of people, yelling “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” every media outlet would identify him as a Catholic terrorist.

It’s not just the Obama administration that refuses to discuss the religious identity of Muslim madmen, the media are just as bad.

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS NEED MORE PROTECTIONS

Two bills critical to the defense of religious freedom came before the U.S. House of Representatives over the summer.

On July 12, the House held hearings on the First Amendment Defense Act (FADA). This bill is needed to protect the religious rights encoded in the First Amendment, which are under attack on many fronts, most conspicuously in the collision between those rights and the rights of homosexuals.

This issue was brought to a head when the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the Obergefell decision that

eventually led to the legalization of same-sex marriage. The U.S. Solicitor General, asked if churches might lose their tax-exempt status if they opposed gay marriage, said it “certainly [is] going to be an issue.”

Nothing more is needed to prove the necessity for FADA. If the public good that houses of worship provide is going to be denied—that is what the forfeiture of their tax-exempt status would mean—simply because the clergy hold to biblical prescriptions regarding sexuality, then the principal victim is the First Amendment.

On July 13, the House passed the Conscience Protection Act of 2016. This bill would prohibit federal, state or local governments from penalizing health care providers that do not provide abortions or abortion coverage.

Such a prohibition already exists. The Weldon Amendment, a federal provision, makes it illegal for states that receive federal funds to discriminate against health-care providers that refuse to participate in abortions. But the Department of Health and Human Services simply disregarded the Weldon Amendment when it upheld a California law requiring all health care providers, including Catholic entities, to provide coverage for abortions.

Conscience protection is the most elementary exercise of our First Amendment right to religious liberty. If it can be violated, especially in cases involving life and death, all rights can be violated. The Senate should follow the House in passing the Conscience Protection Act.

WHAT VATICAN HOLOCAUST SECRETS?

Gerald Posner's op-ed in a recent edition of the *New York Times* broke no new ground, and offered a dishonest assessment on the Vatican Holocaust archives. Moreover, he has been accused of serial plagiarism, and his work on this subject has already been discredited. Now he is back accusing the Vatican of refusing to release its "secret wartime files."

There is nothing "secret" about the Holocaust archives: much has been disclosed, with more to come. More important, from what has been learned, the evidence overwhelmingly puts critics such as Posner on the defensive. If anything, the evidence supports the position that Pope Pius XII did more to save Jews than any other world leader, secular or religious, meriting the honor, "Righteous Gentile."

Professor Ronald J. Rychlak is one of the world's most noted scholars in this area, and it is his judgment that the archival evidence we have so far, "supplemented with eyewitness accounts and documents from other sources, provide a consistent portrait of the wartime pope as a champion of the victims, opponent of the villains, and inspiration to the rescuers."

Posner needs to stop skirting the evidence. For example, in 2009 some important archival documents proved that Hitler had planned to kidnap or kill Pope Pius XII. The recent book by Mark Riebling details four plots to kill Hitler, and that the pope was involved in three of them. Why doesn't Posner mention any of this?

Why didn't Posner direct readers to the website of the Pave the Way Foundation? It has a wealth of documents from the wartime years. The founder of this initiative, Gary Krupp, was

once a Jewish critic of Pope Pius XII, but the more evidence he uncovered, the more convinced he was that the critics were wrong. He now concludes that the pope “was a true hero of WWII.”

We can’t wait until there is a more complete disclosure of the Vatican Holocaust archives. If we were Posner, we’d want to keep them “secret.”

HOLLYWOOD’S RELIGIOUS BIAS

The Barna Group recently conducted a survey of Republicans and Democrats asking them whether Hollywood is biased against Christianity. It found that 32 percent of Republicans, and 5 percent of Democrats, believe that Hollywood generally portrays Christianity in a negative way.

We know from other surveys that Republicans are much more likely to attend religious services on a regular basis than Democrats, and that the latter are home to most agnostics, atheists, and the unaffiliated. It therefore does not surprise to learn that Democrats are more inclined not to see Hollywood’s portrayal of Christianity in a negative light; such depictions are more likely to be seen as accurate representations.

The anti-Christian bias is not new to Hollywood. Over a decade ago, actress Jennifer O’Neill remarked that “If you mention the name Jesus Christ in Hollywood, all hell breaks loose.” Right about that time, Mel Gibson validated her observation when he tried to find a studio for “The Passion of the Christ.”

In 1997, John Dart wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* that

“Hollywood and organized religion have regarded each other with deep suspicion, and sometimes open hostility, since the days of the flickering silents.” But it never got really bad until the 1980s, and while things have turned around somewhat, it is no credit to the big Hollywood studios that they have.

“Frustrated with Hollywood, which shied away from making films with spiritual themes or religious characters,” wrote Andre Chautard for the *Los Angeles Times* in 2002, “a handful of independent producers are striking out on their own to make Christian-themed films to entertain more than preach.”

Hollywood should start treating Christians the way it treats gays. But then the moguls would have to suffer blowback from some in their own party.

CATHOLICISM AND NATIVE AMERICANS

In a *Washington Post* blog, Naomi Schaefer Riley wrote that Catholic schools, after a history of “physical, sexual and emotional abuse” of Native American children, are now finally trying to do them some good. The piece lacked both supporting data and context.

Riley cited apologies by Popes Francis and Benedict XVI for mistreatment of Native Americans. But she ignored the rest of what Pope Francis said in that 2015 statement: that many bishops, priests and laity were found “standing alongside the native peoples or accompanying their popular movements even to the point of martyrdom.”

One such person—St. Junípero Serra—was canonized by Pope

Francis in recognition of his lifetime of heroic missionary work with Native Americans in California, and his efforts to protect them from the abuses of Spanish colonial authorities. Riley substituted carefully selected anecdotes for documentation of systemic abuse, and offered no context comparing treatment of Native Americans in Catholic schools with their treatment in society. She blamed Catholic schools "at least in part" for suicides among Native Americans, without examining how mistreatment in the wider culture may have contributed to suicides among Native Americans. And she distorted as "forced assimilation" the efforts of Catholic schools to help Native Americans adapt to that wider culture, rather than be destroyed by it.

Riley praises these same Catholic schools for their spectacular successes today in educating Native American children. Which begs the question: Would Native American parents risk sending their children to a school system that they believed had a long history of systemic abuse?