

U.S. NEWS DEFENDS BIGOTRY

We were only one week into the new year when we were treated to one of the most anti-Catholic articles we've seen in many years. Columnist Jamie Stiehm published her onslaught against Catholics, as well as the Catholic Church, in *U.S. News and World Report*. We choose our words carefully: this was not just an assault on the teachings of the Catholic Church, it was an assault on Catholics.

"The Catholic Supreme Court's War on Women" is the title of this screed. What set Stiehm off was Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor's decision to stay the Health and Human Services mandate from taking effect January 1.

Sotomayor is referred to as "just a good Catholic girl" who "put her religion ahead of her jurisprudence. What a surprise, but that is no small thing." The Justice's decision "brings us to confront an uncomfortable reality," Stiehm writes. "More than WASPS, Methodists, Jews, Quakers or Baptists, Catholics often try to impose their beliefs on you, me, public discourse and institutions." She then lists, as a happy exception, Nancy Pelosi. Sotomayor, by contrast, "is selling out the sisterhood."

"Catholics in high places of power have the most trouble, I've noticed, practicing the separation of church and state," Stiehm says. "The pugnacious Catholic Justice, Antonin Scalia, is the most aggressive offender on the Court, but not the only one." Now it seems that Justice Sotomayor "has joined the ranks of five Republican Catholic men on the John Roberts court in showing a clear religious bias when it comes to women's rights and liberties. *We can no longer be silent about this.*" (Our italics.)

Stiehm also indicts "the meddlesome American Roman Catholic Archbishops" who "seek and wield tremendous power and

influence in the political sphere.” Moreover, “The rock of Rome refuses to budge on women’s reproductive rights and the Supreme Court is getting good and ready to strike down *Roe v. Wade*....”

This is a throwback to the most anti-Catholic vitriol of the 19th century. Stiehm hurls every negative stereotype there ever was at us: Catholic public officials are not to be trusted; Catholics do not think for themselves; Catholics want to impose their religion on others; Catholics do not believe in separation of church and state; Catholics want to control women; Catholic bishops interfere in the lives of others; and the Vatican is a beacon of intolerance.

When we first read this attack, we investigated who Jamie Stiehm was (we had never heard of her). She is a writer for Creators Syndicate; the company distributes her articles to its subscribers, and they decide whether to publish them. We believed that the *U.S. News* piece was distributed by Creators Syndicate, and so we criticized both media outlets.

At first, an official at Creators Syndicate said that although this particular article by Jamie Stiehm was not distributed by the company, he would take no responsibility for her work, even though she publishes a weekly column for Creators; he also thanked those who liked it. When word of the controversy got out, Brent Bozell, who is on the Catholic League’s advisory board, offered to act as a go-between between Bill Donohue and Rick Newcombe, the head of Creators Syndicate; Bozell writes for the company.

Donohue and Newcombe spoke at some length and came to an amicable understanding. Newcombe said he never would have published such a bigoted article, and Donohue was convinced of his sincerity.

Bill Donohue then asked Brian Kelly, the Editor and Chief Content Officer of *U.S. News*, whether he defends the article.

To his surprise, Kelly did. Brian Kelly said Jamie Stiehm's attack on Catholics and the Catholic Church was "within the bounds of fair commentary." He compared her vicious statement to "pieces from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Archdiocese of New York and Concerned Women for America."

Here is how Bill Donohue replied: "I have no way of knowing if Kelly is a bigot. I do know he is incompetent. Any man who equates a reasonable defense of Catholicism, written by those in the employ of the Catholic Church, with Jamie Stiehm's anti-Catholic screed, lacks the faculty of discernment, and thus has no legitimate role to play in journalism. He couldn't defend this in public; I challenge him to do so."

We made sure that Stiehm's attack was widely read. In addition to our media blitz, we sent it to the top schools of journalism, as well as to journalist societies and associations. Multicultural and Diversity institutes were also blanketed. All major Hispanic media outlets and civil rights organizations learned of Stiehm's condemnation of Justice Sonya Sotomayor. We also contacted all of the chapters of the Federalist Society, the conservative civil liberties organization. We were delighted when Holly McKay of Fox News, and others, picked up this story.

There was a time when *U.S. News & World Report* was a respected magazine. Like so many other magazines, the print edition no longer exists; it is available only online. No matter, Brian Kelly is a disgrace: the Georgetown graduate is comfortable disseminating anti-Catholic propaganda, though as Bill Donohue said, he cannot do so in public.