

YEAR IN REVIEW 2024

Michael P. McDonald

2024 will go down in American history as a pivotal year. The people standing for tradition, reason, and faith fought to reclaim their country, and the Catholic League was right there in the thick of it.

By far, the biggest story of 2024 was the presidential election, and as history unfolded, we tirelessly worked to educate Catholics on the critical issues at stake.

To this end, we published a report on the religious liberty policies of Donald Trump and the Biden-Harris administration. We noted how Trump was pro-religious liberty and never supported groups hostile to Catholics. We could not say the same for Biden-Harris and found their record sorely lacking. Our comprehensive report did more to educate Catholics on this subject than any other document put out by other organizations.

We additionally pointed out Harris' outright hostility to Catholics on several occasions. She stiffed Catholics this year by refusing to go to the Al Smith Dinner. While serving in the Senate, she was openly hostile to judicial nominees who were faithful Catholics. As California Attorney General, she crippled pregnancy resource centers and targeted pro-life activists.

While Harris had problems with Catholics that upheld the teachings of the Church, in her corner was a whole slew of Catholic dissidents. We called out these rogues.

Ultimately, Trump decisively won the election, in large part thanks to him carrying approximately 58 percent of Catholics. Moving forward, the work will turn toward ensuring that the safeguards for religious liberty are as robust as they can be.

To that end, Bill Donohue urged Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito to resign early in the new Trump administration so they can be replaced by younger justices who will protect the court's religion friendly majority for years to come. Bill also raised concerns over Robert F. Kennedy's departures from Catholic teachings and the prudence of appointing him as Secretary for Health and Human Services.

While Trump's victory represents a return to tradition and commonsense, the opposition went down swinging. In 2024, we saw a concentrated effort from the federal and state governments targeting Catholics and other people of faith.

We called out the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network after the Federal agency flagged "the purchasing of books (including religious texts)" as a sign of extremism. We also went after the Department of Justice (DOJ) for using the FACE Act to punish peaceful pro-life activists while giving a pass to violent pro-abortion radicals.

The FBI continued to stall in revealing the truth behind its probe of Catholics from 2023. Even after DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz released a report on the matter, several critical questions remained. For now, it appears that our doggedness to uncover the whole truth has at least curtailed the worst of it. Hopefully, the new administration can definitively put this issue to rest.

Another area we battled with the FBI was the release of Audrey Hale's manifesto. In 2023, Hale, a woman who falsely believed she was a man, attacked the Christian Covenant School in Nashville, killing six people including three children. For over a year, the FBI withheld the manifesto from the public. Normally, such documents are released right away. We hounded them to disseminate the manifesto.

When it was finally released, it was clear why the FBI kept it

hidden for so long. The manifesto showed that Hale was a very sick person, and her woes were further compounded by identifying as transgender.

We also pushed back on the Department of Homeland Security after it came to light that an internal advisory board recommended flagging those who served in the military, are religious, and support Trump as potential extremists and domestic terrorists.

We proved Biden's White House and the media were wrong to insist the ban on religious symbols at the annual "egg roll" party was in line with previous administrations. We found evidence to the contrary highlighting their deception.

Another disturbing trend was how the Biden administration used Orwellian language to influence public thought and sideline traditional Catholic values. We issued a report examining this.

On the state level, perhaps the greatest display of anti-Catholicism came from Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. While wearing a "Harris Walz" hat, Whitmer mocked the Eucharist by placing a Dorito on the tongue of a kneeling Liz Plank, a podcaster. We led the charge against Whitmer, alerting all Catholic parishes in Michigan of her horrendous act. We created such a media firestorm that she was compelled to put out a statement.

In the statement, Whitmer tried to say she was not mocking the Eucharist. Instead, she was championing the CHIP Act also insisting that no one was kneeling. Of course, this was a flimsy excuse and photographic evidence quickly proved she was lying. We did not fall for it and jumped back into the fray to confront her dishonesty.

We also called out a dangerous ballot initiative in New York that would trample parental rights and religious liberty. We mobilized Catholics across the state to vote no on Proposition

1. Bill wrote an excellent booklet highlighting the adverse impact the initiative would have, and we sent the booklet to important stakeholders in the Empire State. Unfortunately, New York is too far gone, and Proposition 1 passed.

Joining the government in targeting Catholics came a large swath of characters from all walks of life.

Twice in 2024, anti-Catholic activists defiled St. Patrick's Cathedral. In the first instance, LGBT radicals hijacked the cathedral to stage a funeral mocking Catholic traditions for a man who falsely claimed to be a woman. Then again, during the Easter Vigil Mass, protesters invaded the cathedral screaming "Free Palestine" and holding a banner that read "SILENCE = DEATH." In both instances, we called out the crashers and the media, which either ignored the story or tried to frame the radicals as the victims.

After Harrison Butker, the kicker for the Kansas City Chiefs, spoke in defense of traditional Catholic values at Benedictine College, he was criticized by the NFL and slammed on social media. We happily came to Butker's defense with greater effect than any other Catholic organization.

The Olympics' opening ceremony featured a skit mocking the Last Supper starring transgenders. We wasted no time in contacting International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach and other officials around the world, targeting the Olympics' sponsors, and calling out those telling us it was not intended as an insult to Catholics.

Additionally, we called out the NBA for its selective interest in "human rights." While the league claims to promote social justice in America, it partners with China, one of the worst persecutors of Christians.

We also confronted the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) after they tried to intimidate us. The atheists complained to the IRS that we "engaged in unlawful political campaigning."

We were undeterred, because we did nothing wrong, and promised to continue to publicly hammer anti-Catholic bigots.

Meanwhile, a coordinated effort by Christian bashers attempted to discredit Trump nominees Pete Hegseth and Mike Huckabee. We exposed the bigots targeting these men for their faith.

All of these attacks were not just acts of random bigotry. The secular left needs to weaken the power of the Church and the resolve of individual Catholics to advance their agenda, particularly on the issues of abortion and transgenderism.

In 2024, the media covered for the pro-abortion extremists in the Democratic Party. Repeatedly, we were told there was no such thing as late-term abortions by the “fact checkers” and the talking heads.

Even during the presidential debate between Trump and Harris, and again during the vice presidential debate between JD Vance and Tim Walz, who as governor of Minnesota signed a law which repealed protections for infants born alive following a botched abortion, the pundits lied saying that late term abortions are “misinformation” and babies born alive receive lifesaving care following an abortion.

The worst was the *New York Times*, which omitted the relevant portion of the sentence that proved Walz repealed safeguards for newborn babies.

We routinely pointed out the truth to correct these false narratives.

There was also a lot of action on transgenderism. The secularists went on a tear trying to advance this cause. Across the country parents and religious people saw their rights eroded so that men and women can pretend to be the opposite sex. In several instances, parents lost custody of their children or children were permitted to “transition” without parental consent. Additionally, faithful Catholics and

Christians were denied the opportunity to provide loving homes to children in need.

Fortunately, we may have reached a tipping point on this issue. Across Europe, many nations have pulled back on their support for transgenderism. Closer to home polls throughout the year showed people rejecting this anti-scientific ideology.

We struck while the iron was hot with an ad blitz at both the Republican and Democratic conventions calling on both parties to commit to protecting children from this insanity. We also showed our support for those who realized they were hoodwinked by transgenderism and have decided to “detransition.” Look for more of these people in the year to come.

We also fought back on several other key issues and scored critical victories in the process.

We exposed the myth of “Christian nationalist” violence comprehensively showing that the “violence” often cited has almost nothing to do with Christianity. It is just a fraudulent attempt to silence Catholics.

We set the record straight after the *Washington Post* published a report on abuse at Catholic-run Indian boarding schools in the United States. We thoroughly tore apart the erroneous conclusions.

When the media was totally silent about a report by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops noting the almost complete eradication of clergy sexual abuse, we highlighted this good news.

Bill also released his new book *Cultural Meltdown: The Secular Roots of Our Moral Crisis*, and our documentary “Walt’s Disenchanted Kingdom” won its ninth award.

We continued displaying our life-sized nativity scene in Central Park. Additionally, we arranged for a billboard this

year in Madison, Wisconsin, home to FFRF. Our ad took aim at them for their mockery of Christmas with their Winter Solstice exhibit. We also defended a Catholic League member who wanted to display a Nativity alongside a menorah but was denied. The building decided to do the equal but intolerant thing and removed all displays. Meanwhile, around the country, atheist and satanic groups tried to dilute Christmas, but we pushed back.

We achieved great things this year, but it is only the beginning. It will take time to utterly route the secularists that maligned and marginalized Catholics in the last few years. The cultural forces that engendered these attacks remain potent and will attempt to corrode our values in the future. The culture war cannot be won in a single election cycle. It takes years of dedicated effort. The forecast for 2025 looks brighter. However, there is still work to be done, and the Catholic League will be there to see it through.

Michael McDonald is the Catholic League's Communications Director.