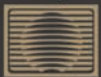


SECULAR SNOBS

Documenting the National Media's Long-Standing Hostility to Religion



A Special Report from the



media research center

AMERICA'S MEDIA WATCHDOG™



Secular Snobs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1993, then-*Washington Post* reporter Michael Weisskopf dismissed followers of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as “largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command.” A correction came the next day: “There is no factual basis for that statement.” *Post* ombudsman Joann Byrd later confessed that “several able editors” passed right over that inaccurate dollop of snobbery without recognizing its bias.

Almost 20 years later, that same contempt for religion continues. In fact, in some quarters of the media, religious bigotry has become acceptable.

In the words of *Time* writer Amy Sullivan, Democrats and their media friends are either “spooked or bored” by religion. They don’t really pay attention to the beliefs of the vast majority of Americans who say they believe in God — unless and until religious people stall the secularist agenda. Then religion becomes a strange, undemocratic force that must be scorned and stopped.

As part of its 25th anniversary, the Media Research Center has assembled a report revisiting the “objective” media’s hostility to organized religion, especially whenever it leans toward tradition or conservatism. For “Secular Snobs,” the MRC has compiled 45 quotes in six broad categories:

I. Simple-Minded Christianity: The “complex, intellectual ideology” of liberalism is seen as a much more impressive worldview than the old-time “fundamentalist faith” that provides a false sense of security to the less-educated American.

II. Republican Theocracy: From Falwell’s Moral Majority in the 1980s to Rick Santorum’s campaign in 2012, journalists continually proclaim that conservatives in the Grand Old Party want to impose something “punitive” and “puritanical” on

America that is not unlike the ayatollahs in Iran.

III. Liberal Saviors: The media elite's fear of GOP theocracy is matched by a willingness to entertain — without embarrassment — that leftist icons and Democratic Presidents from Clinton to Obama bear a striking resemblance to Jesus Christ.

IV: Bible-Thumping Death-Dealers: On hot-button issues like abortion and homosexuality, the religious right has been blamed for encouraging a "climate" of violence, no matter how kind and generous their rhetoric.

V. Rome's Rottweilers: Journalists report and approve of Vatican City when the Pope is opposing capital punishment or U.S. wars, but when it comes to social issues and church governance, recent pontiffs have been slammed as vicious enforcers of "rigid" orthodoxy.

VI. Religion Slammed by Non-News Media Celebrities: For years, leading entertainers from Bill Maher to Rosie O'Donnell have ridiculed the American majority for how their religious beliefs have led to violence, extremism, and cults of "organized pedophilia."

The report recommends the news media take religion seriously. If the *Post* apologized for Weisskopf's snide "easy to command" verbiage, why does this long-standing journalistic disrespect for religion continue?

April 2012

Secular Snobs

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BY TIM GRAHAM
DIRECTOR OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

Modern liberals resent the role that religion plays in American political culture. They want the separation of church and state to be so all-encompassing that no one would ever breathe a word of their religion in a political conversation.

In 2003, Howard Dean announced: "I am tired of coming to the South and fighting elections on guns, God, and gays." Obama said about small-town Pennsylvanians in 2008 that "it's not surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy toward people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."

In their 1979 and 1980 survey research of the national media, Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman found 86 percent of journalists seldom or never attend religious services, and 50 percent openly described their religion as "none." A survey of Columbia University journalism students at the time also found 46 percent described their religion as "none."

For many years, the symbol of the major media's contempt for religion was CNN founder Ted Turner, who in 1989 insisted Christianity was a "religion for losers." He thought the Ten Commandments were insufficient and composed his own "Ted Commandments." In 2001, he greeted Christian colleagues at CNN on Ash Wednesday with this: "What are you, a bunch of Jesus freaks? You ought to be working for Fox."

In 2005, Steven Roberts recalled "I worked for the *New York Times* for 25 years. I could probably count on one hand, in the Washington bureau of the *New York Times*, people who would describe themselves as people of faith....I think one of the real built-in biases in the media is towards secularism."

Research assistance for this report provided by MRC's Geoffrey Dickens and Matthew Balan.

Today, those secularizing attitudes have trickled down to where the American public will profess faith, but is wary of encouraging national leaders to consult their own faith in their daily duties. In March, Bloomberg News asked, “In your mind, do you think a president’s religious beliefs should influence his federal policy decisions all of the time, most of the time, just some of the time, or never?” It landed largely on “never” – 58 percent, and another 25 percent said just some of the time.

ABC News also asked in March: “Do you think a political leader should or should not rely on his or her religious beliefs in making policy decisions?” The “no” side won 63 to 31 percent.

The public was more mixed in that survey when asked if the country has gone too far to avoid mixing government and religion (36% said yes), or too much involvement of religion in government (25%), while 34 percent thought the mix “struck a good balance.”

The media rarely show interest in organized religion inside its own buildings. They typically notice religion only when journalists feel they’re intruding unfairly into politics. As part of its 25th anniversary, the Media Research Center has assembled a report revisiting the “objective” media’s hostility to organized religion, especially whenever it leans toward tradition or conservatism.

I. Simple-Minded Christianity

The “complex, intellectual ideology” of secular liberalism is seen as a much more impressive worldview than the old-time “fundamentalist faith” that provides a false sense of security to the less educated American. For the media elite, religion is truly the “crutch of the ignorant” and the separation of church and state isn’t intended to protect religion from being spoiled by the affairs of state. It’s to separate the rational and the bizarrely irrational, and keep religion from having any influence on government.

■ “Corporations pay public relations firms millions of dollars to contrive the kind of grass-roots response that Falwell or Pat Robertson can galvanize in a televised sermon. Their followers are largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command.”

– *Washington Post* reporter Michael Weisskopf, February 1, 1993 front-page news story.

■ “She was a ninth-grade dropout thrust at random into the headlights of a divisive social movement – but she was a powerful symbol. It’s no wonder, analysts say, she flipped over last week from the complex, intellectual ideology of the abortion rights movement to the security of a fundamentalist faith dedicated to ‘saving babies.’”

– *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Lynn Smith on Norma McCorvey (Jane Roe), August 15, 1995.

■ “The Rapture, and I quote, ‘is the immediate departure from this Earth of over four million people in less than a fifth of a second,’ unquote. This happily-volatilized mass of the saved were born again in Jesus Christ. Everybody left behind will basically go to Hell, but not before experiencing Armageddon, which is a really bad end of the world. If you find yourself in this situation, there isn’t much you can do except, one, starve yourself to death or, two, get your head cut off. This loving Christmas message coming as it did amid the jungle of the mall Santa and the twinkling manger at the corner of Canal and the Ramparts made it clear that the Rapture is indeed necessary. The evaporation of four million who believe this crap would leave the world an instantly better place.”

– NPR commentator Andrei Codrescu, December 19, 1995 *All Things Considered*.

■ “Do I need to be concerned that I’m going to go live with a church family, are they going to proselytize me, are they going to say, ‘You better come to church with me or else, I’m, you know, you’re not going to get your breakfast this morning?’”

– Co-host Harry Smith asking author/pastor Rick Warren about church families taking in those displaced by Hurricane Katrina, on CBS’s *Early Show*, September 6, 2005.

■ **Co-host Rosie O’Donnell:** “As a result of the [9/11] attack and the killing of nearly 3,000 innocent people, we invaded two countries and killed innocent people in their countries.”

Co-host Elisabeth Hasselbeck: “But do you understand that, that the belief funding those attacks, okay, that is widespread. And if you take radical Islam and if you want to talk about what’s going on there, you have to—”

O’Donnell, interrupting: “Wait just one second. Radical Christianity is just as threatening as radical Islam [loud applause] in a country like America where we have a separation of church and state. We’re a democracy.”

– Exchange on ABC’s *The View*, September 12, 2006.

■ “When doctors pronounced the Rev. Jerry Laymon Falwell, Sr. dead at 12:40 p.m. EST Tuesday....my first thoughts were not of what to say or write. In fact, my very first thought upon hearing of the Rev. Falwell’s passing was: Good. And I didn’t mean ‘good’ in a oh-good-he’s-gone-home-to-be-with-the-Lord kind of way. I meant ‘good’ as in ‘Ding-dong, the witch is dead.’”

– *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Cathleen Falsani in her May 18, 2007 piece, “Sigh of relief over Falwell death.”

■ **Author Ayaan Hirsi Ali, talking about radical Muslims:** “Somehow, the idea got into their minds that to kill other people is a great thing to do and that they would be rewarded in the hereafter.”

Host Tavis Smiley: “But Christians do that every single day in this country.”

Ali: “Do they blow people up every day?”

Smiley: “Yes. Oh, Christians, every day, people walk into post offices, they walk into schools, that’s what Columbine is — I could do this all day long.”

– PBS’s *Tavis Smiley*, May 25, 2010.

■ “We have, in many ways, been a victim of the Scriptures and theology that have been used to keep us as slaves. It’s been ingrained us (sic), and now we use it against gay people without thinking about things objectively.”

– Openly gay CNN anchor Don Lemon in a November 2011 online interview with the *Windy City Times*, a gay newspaper.

■ “‘First of all, I just have to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ – and you know what I want to say: S.T.F.U. [shut the f*** up]. I’m tired of hearing Tim Tebow and all this Jesus talk....Tim Tebow, everybody wants to make him a hero. I think he’s a disgrace! I think he’s a disgrace! I think he’s an embarrassment!”

– Former CNN host Bill Press on the December 15, 2011 edition of his radio program.

II. Republican Theocracy

When Martin Luther King spoke from a metaphorical mountaintop about legislating a political vision of his faith, liberals were thrilled. But whenever conservatives bring faith into their politics, journalists continually proclaim that conservatives in the Grand Old Party want to impose something “punitive” and “puritanical” on America that is not unlike the ayatollahs in Iran.

■ “The only excited, demonstrative delegates any of us could find were the ones from the religious right, Pat Robertson’s God and Country rally. They remind me of those Goldwater delegates of 28 years ago, far more interested in imposing ideological purity on this party than they are on winning the election. They were happy today. They got the platform they want. No room for a pregnant woman to make any decision at all, even if she was raped. It’s a platform tough on welfare, tough on taxes and guns and gays and pornography, tough even on public radio and public television. They cheered Dan Quayle this afternoon and they will cheer Pat Buchanan and Ronald Reagan tonight, but will they help elect George Bush? It’s almost as if they haven’t thought of that, Dan.”

– Charles Kuralt during August 17, 1992 CBS Republican convention coverage.

■ “Bush, the exponent of a ‘kinder, gentler’ approach to government at the 1988 convention, was presented with a 1992 platform loaded with puritanical, punitive language that not only forbade abortions but attacked public television, gun control, homosexual rights, birth control clinics and the distribution of clean needles for drug users.”

– *Boston Globe* reporter Curtis Wilkie, August 18, 1992 news story.

- “Howard, who are the Republicans who are not happy with the way this event looked tonight and similar groupings of these six, meaning, and it’s red meat for conservatives, the positions rather strident tonight: anti-gay, pro-Jesus, and anti-abortion and no gray matter in between?”
 – Brian Williams, after a debate amongst Republican presidential candidates, to *Newsweek’s* Howard Fineman, January 6, 2000 MSNBC’s *The News with Brian Williams*.
- “In John Ashcroft’s America, he said in 1999, ‘We have no king but Jesus.’ But President-elect George W. Bush has nominated Ashcroft to the position of Attorney General of the United States. In the venerable halls of the Justice Department, where he will work, it is the Constitution that is king....Ashcroft will need to assure the nation that he can enforce the Constitution and the laws of Congress when they run contrary to the laws of Jesus, as they surely will. A larger question, spoken or unspoken, will be: Can a deeply religious person be Attorney General?”
 – Opening of Jan. 16, 2001 *USA Today* op-ed piece by former *USA Today* Supreme Court reporter Tony Mauro.
- “The [President’s Council on Bioethics] will be navigating a scientific and ethical landscape significantly more complex than the one that existed...last summer. In November, researchers announced that they had made the first human embryo clones, giving immediacy to warnings by religious conservatives and others that science is no longer serving the nation’s moral will. At the same time, the United States was fighting a war to free a faraway nation from the grip of religious conservatives who were denounced for imposing their moral code on others.”
 – *Washington Post* reporter Rick Weiss in a January 17, 2002 “Federal Page” article.
- “If you like the Supreme Court that put George W. Bush in the White House, you will swoon over what’s coming. And if you like God in government, get ready for the Rapture.”
 – Bill Moyers’ commentary on PBS’s *Now* November 8, 2002, a few days after Republicans won the midterm congressional elections.
- “Attorney General John Ashcroft has earned himself a remarkable distinction as the Torquemada of American law. Tomas de Torquemada...was largely responsible for... [the] torture and the burning of heretics – Muslims in particular. Now, of course, I am not accusing the Attorney General of pulling out anyone’s fingernails or burning people at the stake (at least I don’t know of any such cases). But one does get the sense these days that the old Spaniard’s spirit is comfortably at home in Ashcroft’s Department of Justice.”
 – Former *CBS Evening News* anchor Walter Cronkite in his syndicated column published in the September 22, 2003 *Philadelphia Inquirer*.
- “Look at the little empires that people like James Dobson or Pat Robertson run. They are despotic, Third World fiefdoms where these guys fly around with bodyguards and Lear jets and amass hundreds of millions of dollars taken from people who live on the margins of American society...The image that they present of Jesus and of the Christian is essentially a warrior cult. I mean, it is that obsession with violence, it’s that notion that America can use its imperial power

and use its violence to create a Christian society. They condemn...other religion as satanic, I mean, they're constantly blasting Islam, nominal Christians, liberals. It is a message that's deeply anti-Christian and I think filled with a lot of bigotry and a lot of intolerance."

— Ex-*New York Times* reporter Chris Hedges, author of the book *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*, on the February 8, 2007 *Colbert Report* on Comedy Central.

■ "Do you think God belongs in American politics?...[Sarah Palin] knocks the McCain campaign because she didn't have anybody in the campaign to pray with. That is an amazing public statement to me....I mean, this is a little bit theocratic, isn't it? A little scary?...Is he [John McCain] the Anti-Christ? I mean what, she's portraying him as some ungodly figure in which a campaign, a national campaign, where all the people surrounding her, and she couldn't find anybody that shared her Christianity. Is that what she's saying?...Why does everything sound like *The 700 Club* with this party now? I mean, everything seems to be a religious discussion."

— MSNBC's Chris Matthews on *Hardball*, March 26, 2009.

■ "You then have Rick Santorum representing the theocrats and the Republican Party, which is also part of the base — theocracy, of course, like perhaps the one in Iran, they would like to see that created here."

— Former CNN reporter Bob Franken on MSNBC's *Politics Nation*, January 6, 2012.

■ "Remember earlier in the campaign when Newt Gingrich was worrying everyone about Sharia law: the Muslims were going to impose Sharia law in America? Sometimes Santorum sounds like he's creeping up on a Christian version of Sharia law."

— Ex-*New York Times* Executive Editor Bill Keller, now a columnist for the paper, on MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, February 28, 2012.

III. Liberal Saviors

Ironically, the media elite's fear of GOP theocracy is matched by a willingness for some to entertain — without embarrassment — that leftist icons and Democratic presidents from Clinton to Obama bear a striking resemblance to Jesus Christ. The public might wonder if the media elite are suggesting these left-wing saviors should be seen as superior secular examples to take the place of Jesus in all offerings of homage and glory.

■ "Roger [Clinton]'s life is in some ways the story of any younger sibling clobbered by the spectacular success of the one who came before. The presidential brother syndrome. If your brother is Christ, you have a choice: become a disciple, or become an anti-christ, or find yourself caught somewhere between the two."

— *Washington Post* reporter Laura Blumenfeld, January 24, 1993 "Style" section story.

■ “He’s simultaneously endowed with the humility of an everyman and the larger-than-life presence of a hero....In the proliferation of his image since his death (he’d be 69 today), he’s remained an ever-youthful demi-god. Chesucristo, superstar.”
– *Los Angeles Times* art critic Christopher Knight honoring communist guerrilla fighter Che Guevara, October 18, 1997.

■ “When I watched him [former President Bill Clinton] at Mrs. King’s funeral, I just have never seen anything like it....There are times when he sounds like Jesus in the temple.”
– MSNBC’s Chris Matthews on *Hardball*, February 28, 2007.

■ “People have called you ‘The Savior,’ ‘The Messiah,’ ‘The Messenger of Change.’ The expectations have been raised to such a level....If you are, as you just say, lucky enough to be elected the next President, are you going to have to consciously manage expectations during the first several months of your administration?”
– NBC’s Matt Lauer to Barack Obama on *Today*, October 20, 2008.



IV. Bible-Thumping Death-Dealers?

In the early days of AIDS in the 1980s, the hard left insisted “silence = death.” But then they added the idea that spoken opposition to homosexuality as a sin against God also equals death – to either the beating of gays or their suicides. Catholics were “dealing death” when they refused to provide condoms for illicit sexual activity that led to AIDS. Reporters also asserted that the pro-life movement spawned the murder of abortionists and a kind of “terrorism” outside abortion clinics. The religious right has been blamed for encouraging a “climate” of violence by preaching from the Bible, no matter how kind and generous their rhetoric.

■ “Gays and lesbians are beaten to death in the streets with increasing frequency – in part due to irrational fear of AIDS but also because hatemongers, from comedians to the worst of the Christian right, send the message that homosexuals have no value in our society....In the post-cold-war era, gays have been drafted to replace communists as the new menace to the American Way: We’re told gays corrupt youth and commandeer art and entertainment to win converts.”
– Dan Rather in *The Nation*, April 19, 1994.

■ “Then the fallout from the death of Matthew Shepard. The tragic beating of the college student in Wyoming has some activists in this country saying there is a climate of anti-gay hate that’s been fostered by a provocative advertising campaign by the political right in this country. We’re going to get into that debate after news and weather.”
– *Today* co-host Katie Couric opening the October 13, 1998 show.

■ “Even as friends of Matthew Shepard held a candlelight vigil in his honor, gay rights groups rushed to condemn the killing, portraying Shepard as a casualty of a new cultural war against gays and lesbians, a war declared this summer by a coalition of religious-right groups, including the Christian Coalition, which funded advertisements in major newspapers and commercials on TV promoting a campaign to convert homosexuals to heterosexuality.... The ads were controversial for portraying gays and lesbians as sinners who had made poor choices, despite the growing belief that homosexuality may be genetic.... Have the ads fostered a climate of anti-gay hate that leads to incidents like the killing of Matthew Shepard? Gay rights activists say the ads convey a message that gay people are defective.”

— NBC reporter David Gregory, later in the October 13, 1998 *Today*.

■ “The Christian Right per se and some particular members on Capitol Hill have helped inflame the air so that the air that these bad people breathed that night was filled, filled with the idea that somehow gays are different, and not only are they different in that difference, they’re bad and not only are they bad, they are evil and therefore evil can be destroyed. The next step to that to me, it’s a three-step process, and that ends in destruction. I don’t say that they were told to do that, they certainly weren’t part of any plan to do that, but again, what air are they breathing now? It’s the air filled with that hate....I mentioned Trent Lott, Jesse Helms and Dick Armev particularly. The Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council and the Concerned Women for America.”

— Deborah Mathis of Gannett News Service on who inspired the murder of Matthew Shepard, October 17, 1998 *Inside Washington*.

■ “Let’s talk a little bit more about the right wing because I know that’s something you feel very strongly about. But this is actually not necessarily about the right wing, but perhaps a climate that some say has been established by religious zealots or Christian conservatives. There have been two recent incidents in the news I think that upset most people in this country, that is the dragging death of James Byrd, Jr. and the beating death of Matthew Shepard. I just would like you to reflect on whether you feel people in this country are increasingly intolerant, mean-spirited, etc., and what, if anything, can be done about that because a lot of people get very discouraged when they hear and see this kind of brutality taking place.”

— *Today’s* Katie Couric to former Texas Governor Ann Richards as she hosted a 92nd Street Y appearance in New York City on March 3, 1999 shown by C-SPAN April 3.

■ “Since September 11, the word ‘terrorist’ has come to mean someone who is radical, Islamic and foreign. But many believe we have as much to fear from a home-grown group of anti-abortion crusaders.”

— Reporter Jami Floyd on ABC’s *20/20*, November 28, 2001.

V. Rome's Rottweilers

Journalists have a love-hate relationship with Vatican City. They love when the Pope is opposing capital punishment or U.S. wars, but when it comes to social issues and Catholic church governance, they portray the church hierarchy as a group of white male celibate authoritarians viciously enforcing a "rigid" and ancient orthodoxy. Like Phil Donahue, they pose as hip modernists against the prehistoric "fairy tales" of Christ establishing a church on Earth that would last until the end of time.

■ "The [Catholic] Church has always thrived on ignorance and oppression."

– Phil Donahue, interviewed by Pat Buchanan on CNN's *Larry King Live*, May 31, 1988.

■ "But most of his fellow countrymen do not share John Paul's concept of morality.... Many here expect John Paul to use his authority to support Church efforts to ban abortion, perhaps the country's principal means of birth control. And this, they say, could deprive them of a freedom of choice the communists never tried to take away from them."

– CBS News reporter Bert Quint on the June 1, 1991 *Evening News*.

■ "One paradox of the Polish Pope is that while he is rightly revered for helping bring down the godless Communists, he has replicated something very like the old Communist Party in his church. Karol Wojtyla has shaped a hierarchy that is intolerant of dissent, unaccountable to its members, secretive in the extreme and willfully clueless about how people live."

– *New York Times* executive editor Bill Keller, May 4, 2002.

■ **NBC's Bob Faw:** "Embraced by multitudes....John Paul also alienated others. Lifelong Catholic Serra Sippel [of the pro-abortion group Catholics for a Free Choice] was so angered by his teachings she quit going to Mass....She's outraged even now the Vatican didn't do more to stop sexual abuse by priests. Outraged, too, because the late Pope refused to ordain or even consider ordaining women...."

Rea Howarth, Catholics Speak Out: "This Pope didn't care to learn from the likes of women."

Faw: "Her left-of-center Catholic group also complains that John Paul, rather than affirming life, actually affirmed death when he refused to permit the use of condoms to fight the spread of AIDS."

Howarth: "That teaching is death-dealing."

– *NBC Nightly News*, April 6, 2005, four days after Pope John Paul II died.

■ "It was Joseph Ratzinger's job as head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – the old office of the Inquisition – that led to him being labeled by some as 'God's Rottweiler'.... The new Pope Benedict has described homosexuality as a moral evil. He said the sex abuse scandal in the Church has been exaggerated by the media, and in the last U.S. election he said pro-choice candidates on the abortion question should be denied communion – in other

words, denied salvation. As a cardinal, Joseph Ratzinger took no prisoners. As the Pope, his policies now have the stamp of infallibility.”

– Mark Phillips on the April 19, 2005 *CBS Evening News*.

■ “There’s widespread doubt here that he will be able to overcome his reputation as the intimidating enforcer, punishing liberal thinkers and keeping the Church in the Middle Ages.”
– ABC News producer Christel Kucharz reporting on German reaction to Cardinal Ratzinger’s election during live coverage on April 19, 2005.

■ “He [Cardinal Ratzinger] said in his homily, on the death of Pope John Paul, that the world faces the menace of a dictatorship of relativism. And what he seems to represent is a dictatorship of certitude. I mean, one of his biographers said that he wanted to fight political totalitarianism in the world with ecclesiastical totalitarianism.”
– *Roll Call* Executive Editor and FNC contributor Mort Kondracke on *Special Report with Brit Hume*, April 19, 2005.

■ “Some of the values, depending on your perspective... may be deemed wholesome, but in other ways, I think, people will see this community as eschewing diversity and promoting intolerance....Do you think the tenets of the community might result in de facto segregation as a result of some of the beliefs that are being espoused by the majority of the residents there?...You can understand how people would hear some of these things and be like, wow, this is really infringing on civil liberties and freedom of speech and right to privacy and all sorts of basic tenets that this country was founded on. Right?”
– NBC’s Katie Couric on the March 3, 2006 *Today*, questioning Domino’s Pizza founder Tom Monaghan and real-estate developer Paul Marinelli, who are building a community based on Catholic values in Florida.

■ “After acquiring a reputation as an aggressive, doctrine-enforcing Cardinal, Pope Benedict XVI has surprised many with his gentle manner and his writings on Christian love. But with the Christmas season upon us, there is growing proof that the 82-year-old Pope is also quite willing to play the part of Scrooge to defend his often rigid view of Church doctrine.”
– *Time*’s Jeff Israely in a December 3, 2008 column, “The Pope’s Christmas Gift: A Tough Line on Church Doctrine.”

■ “Rome’s misogynous declaration, tossed into its new guidelines on reporting clerical sexual abuse, did more than just highlight the church’s hoary horror at the idea of female priests...It also pointed up an increasingly spiteful rhetoric of bigotry. When Argentina in mid-July legalized gay marriage, the country’s Catholic bishops weren’t content to simply denounce the legislation; they used the occasion to argue for the subhumanity of homosexual men and lesbians, the way many white Southern preachers weren’t ashamed to degrade African Americans during the civil rights

movement. Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio not only called the new law 'a scheme to destroy God's plan'; he termed it 'a real and dire anthropological throwback,' as if homosexuality were evolutionarily inferior to heterosexuality."

– *Time's* Tim Padgett in a July 19, 2010 online column titled "The Vatican and Women: Casting the First Stone."

VI. Religion, Slammed by Non-News Media Celebrities

For many years, the leading entertainers in New York and Hollywood have ridiculed the American majority, accusing them of holding religious beliefs that have led to violence, extremism, and cults of "organized pedophilia." From their very prosperous perch, celebrities often knock religious figures for self-righteous arrogance, and never consider if that's the impression they give the public.

■ "I wondered to myself during 'Shock and Awe,' I wondered which of the megaton bombs Jesus, our President's personal savior, would have personally dropped on the sleeping families of Baghdad?"

– Actress Meryl Streep at a John Kerry fundraiser, as quoted by the July 9, 2004 *Boston Globe*.

■ "I'd like to tip off law enforcement to an even larger child-abusing religious cult. Its leader also has a compound, and this guy not only operates outside the bounds of the law, but he used to be a Nazi and he wears funny hats. That's right, the Pope is coming to America....If you have a few hundred followers, and you let some of them molest children, they call you a cult leader. If have a billion, they call you 'Pope.' It's like, if you can't pay your mortgage, you're a deadbeat. But if you can't pay a million mortgages, you're Bear Stearns and we bail you out. And that is who the Catholic Church is: the Bear Stearns of organized pedophilia.... The Church's attitude: 'We're here, we're queer, get used to it,' which is fine. Far be it for me to criticize religion."

– Bill Maher on HBO's *Real Time*, April 11, 2008.

■ "I mean, if there was an organization, let's just say the — you know, I don't want to say that, but the Boys' Club, or one of the — you know, had the history of child abuse, you know, child torture and rape that the Catholic Church has, would you ever give money to the Boys' Club or the Girls' Club?...I'm saying that, to support an organization that, at the top of the infrastructure, are people willing to ignore the mass child abuse and torture and sexual molestation of its own constituents. I mean, it's almost like when you read about cults, Jonestown and all these cults, that they allow sexual perversity and sexual behavior."

– Rosie O'Donnell on the April 5, 2010 edition of her satellite radio show.



■ “I mean, when society as a whole has told — has basically told the kids that it’s okay, that we’re a group that you can pick on, that you that don’t have to treat as equal. In the laws and everything else that’s out here, in the churches that they preach that homophobia [sic] is wrong. You pretty much have given kids permission to disrespect and, you know, and to cause harm to the gay and lesbian community.”

— Wanda Sykes on CNN’s *Piers Morgan Tonight*, October 4, 2010. (This is the same performer who “joked” in front of the President she hoped Rush Limbaugh’s kidneys failed and he died.)

■ “Are you watching these debates? I mean, yes, the politicians are bad, but the people who egg them on. There, these crowds cheering for executions, cheering for letting people without health insurance die. In today’s Republican Party there’s a term for people who hate charity and love killing: Christian.”

— Bill Maher on his *Real Time* program on HBO, September 16, 2011.

Conclusion

When the *Washington Post* reporter Michael Weisskopf dismissed evangelical Christians as “largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command,” ombudsman Joann Byrd reported: “Hundreds of callers offered proof that they don’t fit the description. One man said there was a Jaguar parked in his driveway; people revealed their incomes in detail normally reserved for a Form 1040. A woman ran through the degrees of the six people living under her roof: two PhDs and another on the way, three master’s degrees. A Florida man said that in his ‘multimillion-dollar business, none of my employees commands me.’”

Byrd wrote “The simplistic Journalism 101 answer: Go back through a story and challenge every sentence for its factual basis.”

If the *Post* quickly apologized for Weisskopf’s snide “easy to command” verbiage, why does this long-standing journalistic disrespect for religion continue? Is it a “fact” that Republicans want to install theocracy and repeal the First Amendment? Is it a “fact” that abortion providers or gay people are killed by a “climate” inspired by the Bible? Reporters have a nasty tendency to uncork attacks on religion that are short on documentation and long on editorializing.

The Media Research Center

325 South Patrick Street • Alexandria, Virginia 22314

(703) 683-9733 • www.MRC.org

L. Brent Bozell III, President

Brent H. Baker, Vice President for Research and Publications

Richard Noyes, Research Director • **Tim Graham**, Director of Media Analysis

Geoffrey Dickens, Deputy Research Director