

# The Message From Florida Is: Bigots Beware

I have never met, nor am I likely to meet, Frank Hauck, Catherine D. Grantz, Richard A. Schaefer, John S. Herron, Phil Brennan or Arthur J. Nicholson. Nor am I likely to meet Edward H. Maloney, Father Michael T. Driscoll, Sister Carol Stovall or Father Charles E. Hawkins. But I wish I could.

All of them played a key role in bringing about the victory we had against the *Sun-Sentinel*. It was those in the first cluster of names (our own Catholic League members!) who initially contacted us about the incident, and it was those in the second cluster who played a role in following through on the matter. Many thanks to all of them.

The way I first found out about the *Sun-Sentinel* incident is worth sharing with you. I was being grilled by William Macklin, a tough and very bright reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, when the mail was dropped off on my desk. I took a quick look at the anti-Catholic ad in the newspaper and immediately recognized the type-face and scurrilous content, pointing out to Mr. Macklin that this was an example of something we would ignore. We would ignore it, I said, because this kind of crazy anti-Catholic stuff is published with regularity by a fringe group, and to our knowledge it has not appeared in any mainstream publication.

But then Macklin took a closer look at it and saw that it was published in the *Sun-Sentinel*. Having brought this to my attention, I said that that changed everything. We had to do something about it right away.

Why the fast change of heart? Because I think it is a gross mistake to give elevation to fringe groups. Our basic rule of thumb is this: the more mainstream the source of anti-

Catholicism, the more likely it is that the Catholic League will respond. We do not want to play into the hands of crackpot bigots who appear on public access television or who publish wacko newspapers and the like. We keep a file on them, to be sure, but we are not interested in giving them media attention.

But when an establishment newspaper such as the *Sun-Sentinel* offends, it cannot be ignored. The mainstream media, after all, have the credibility and influence that the fringe lacks, and they are therefore much more likely to do real damage. When bigotry ascends to that level, it demands a response from the civil rights organizations established to combat it.

In our news release on the subject, we pledged to conduct a public ad campaign of our own if the *Sun-Sentinel* did not extend an apology and promise not to publish such ads again. What exactly did we have in mind? We were prepared to take out ads in the opposition newspaper, registering our charge of anti-Catholic bigotry. We were prepared to pay for radio spots making our charge.

We were prepared to buy billboard space along the major arteries surrounding the Fort Lauderdale community. Why not? After all, it is directly due to the generosity of our members-the ranks of which continue to boom-that we are in a position to make such threats. And if I know our members, I know that they want a sharp response, one that will get results. So we deliver.

The press and the radio talk shows asked me if the Catholic League was engaging in censorship by responding the way we did. As always, I informed them that only the government has the power to censor anything. All I can do is register my outrage by exercising my First Amendment right to freedom of speech.

This is the way it works: if the source of bigotry wants to

deal with lousy publicity, it can elect to do so. Or it can come to its senses and knock it off. In the event the anti-Catholic bigots want to bite the bullet and stay the course, we'll do everything we can within the law to make sure that they pay a very high price for doing so. That's our right, and we have every intention of using it. Again and again.