

AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS CENSORS LEAGUE

On May 21, two New York Jewish organizations censored literature supplied by the Catholic League for a conference on prejudice. The Bi-County Conference for Educators, a group from Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island, held a conference entitled, "Reducing Prejudice: A Matter of Education." It was principally sponsored by the American Jewish Congress Center for Prejudice Reduction and the Suffolk Association for Jewish Educational Services.

When the Catholic League learned of the event, it sought inclusion in the conference. Along with several other civil rights and educational organizations, it was welcomed as a co-sponsor and was told that it could distribute its literature to interested teachers and school administrators. But just two days before the event, Chuck Mansfield, who heads the Long Island chapter of the league, was informed by officials from the two Jewish organizations that *Catalyst* and our *Annual Report on Anti-Catholicism* were not allowed to be displayed; only our brochure was deemed acceptable for distribution.

Upon learning of this decision, William Donohue contacted the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress) and asked to speak to the director of the Center for Prejudice Reduction, Amy Levine. Levine was unavailable, but Donohue learned that it was decided that the league's journal and annual report were "too strident." In addition, the cartoons in the annual report were judged to be "offensive." Donohue told the woman to whom he was speaking that what was really offensive was the decision to censor the Catholic League; he promised to contact the media and blow the conference out of the water.

Donohue tried to reach Amy Levine again but she never returned his phone call. But when later contacted by the *Jewish Week*,

Levine said that she had spoken to Donohue. Donohue wrote to the newspaper saying that the *Jewish Week* had been lied to: never had he spoken to her (his letter, along with another one he wrote, was printed). In a press release on the subject, the Catholic League said the following:

“The decision to remove Catholic League material—literature that proves the prevalence of anti-Catholicism—from a conference on prejudice, is surely one of the most incredibly ironic and demonstrably anti-Catholic statements that has been made in recent times. After accepting the league’s money to join as a co-sponsor, we are now told that our journal and annual report are too much for the teachers to take. This act of censorship shows the depth of anti-Catholicism that affects even those educators who purport to be concerned with prejudice and discrimination.” On the day of the conference, Bill Lindner, a member of the league’s board of directors, distributed copies of the press release to the attendees; he also met with Amy Levine.

The directors of the two Jewish organizations wrote a letter to Donohue explaining their reasons for censoring the league’s material and AJCongress answered the league’s press release with one of their own. Donohue’s reply to Amy Levine is reprinted here. Dear Ms. Levine:

You say that the Catholic League’s *Annual Report on Anti-Catholicism*, as well as its monthly journal, *Catalyst*, were not allowed to be distributed at the conference on prejudice reduction because they “serve to review your organization’s implementation of your specific organizational agenda.” As a result, you only allowed distribution of our brochure.

Your argument is disingenuous at best. According to your logic, the one league item that should have been disallowed was the brochure: it promotes the agenda of the organization. *Catalyst*, and in particular the *Annual Report*, merely provide evidence of anti-Catholicism. Just how we are to educate the

public about the prevalence of anti-Catholicism without offering concrete examples is not explained.

Your argument is also undercut by the literature that you allowed. Examples abound of bigotry against blacks, Jews and gays and yet you had no problem with any of this. Obviously, you have a double standard when it comes to Catholics and this is why I continue to maintain the charge that I first lodged against you: at a conference on prejudice reduction you are offering a textbook case of prejudice—and discrimination—against Catholics. Your letter also says that it is your desire to “keep this program free of political agendas” and that all participants in the conference agreed to “park [their] politics at the door.” That’s great. Now would you please be specific and identify the “political agenda” of the Catholic League as represented in its censored literature?

It is you, Ms. Levine, who has a political agenda and here is my evidence. From conversations that my staff has had with you, your office and the press, the following reasons were offered for censoring the league’s literature: a) the cartoons were offensive b) the league is pro-voucher c) the league is pro-life d) there was an entry in our *Annual Report* regarding a Jewish person who complained about a crucifix in his Catholic hospital room e) teachers wouldn’t use our material because it is “too strident” f) our literature promotes religion.

The cartoons were included in our report precisely because they were offensive. Are you suggesting that we delete examples of anti-Catholicism from a report on anti-Catholicism simply because some might be offended by what they see or read? You honestly don’t expect me to believe you. Do you?

The league believes that choice means allowing the poor to send their children to the school of their choice—just like the rich do. You obviously think otherwise and that is your right. But to suggest that we are political for supporting

Catholic parental rights on this issue and you are not political for opposing such rights is patently absurd. The hypocrisy that you exhibit is driven home even further when one considers that you allowed the distribution of a pamphlet that attacks the concept of choice in education (see the catalog, *Rethinking Schools*, p.4).

As an anti-defamation organization, we defend the right of the Church to say whatever it wants, including statements on abortion. Simply because AJC is aligned with the politics of the pro-abortion movement gives you no right to censor the literature of those who disagree with your position. Whether you think that the inclusion of the entry regarding the Jewish person who protested a crucifix in a Catholic hospital merits our attention is irrelevant. What is relevant is that we think it merits inclusion. So let me ask you this: do your censors have the right to veto any entries they don't like? If that is the case, then it is clear that you have submitted our work to a political litmus test, indicating once more that it is you who has the political agenda.

If teachers don't want to use our material, that is their right. But it is not your right to censor our literature simply because you think they won't use it.

The Catholic League is a civil rights organization that defends individual Catholics and the institutional Church from defamation and discrimination. If that makes us "religious" then what would you call ADL, AJC, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Islamic organizations that were allowed to distribute their material? I also find it striking that the award you gave to Mr. Gaffney was for his veto of legislation that would have mandated English-only in Suffolk County. Was that not a bald act of politics? No doubt that had he taken the opposite position he would not have received the award, because to do so would have been contrary to *your* politics.

The Catholic League has often presented its material at conferences on prejudice. We did so recently at a major national conference on education in Florida. And guess what? No one has ever even attempted to censor our work. That prize goes to you.

I have no problem with people on the left and right promoting their politics in public, but I do have a problem with those who try to mask their agenda and then have the gall to brand others for being political. It gives me great comfort to know that you "certainly recognize [our] right to print and distribute [our] materials." It gives me even greater comfort knowing that your contribution to anti-Catholicism will be noted in our monthly journal and in next year's annual report.

Please refund our money for the conference. Sincerely, William A. Donohue, Ph.D. President

Since this exchange took place, the Catholic League filed a complaint with the Commission on Human Rights and AJCongress refunded the league's contribution.

The league considers this incident to be one of the most telling examples of bigotry, politics and hypocrisy that it has witnessed in some time. The league is grateful for the intervention of Rabbi Yehuda Levin who, at Donohue's request, tried to dissuade the AJCongress from its decision to censor.