

AP Responds to League Complaint

On March 10, the Associated Press (AP), in a story on a court ruling upholding a law barring doctors from engaging in assisted suicide, disclosed that federal appeals court judge John T. Noonan was a Catholic. Dr. Donohue sent a letter to AP executives asking, "Why does AP think it important for the public to learn of a judge's religion if he is a Catholic? Does AP find it necessary to disclose the religion of all judges, or just Catholic ones? I do not remember seeing Jewish judges identified as such. I wonder why."

Dr. Donohue requested a copy of the AP policy on the matter. "In the event AP policy allows reporters to designate the religion of public persons in stories that have little, if anything, to do with religion, then we would like to see recent examples," said a press release issued by the League. "If there is no anti-Catholic bigotry to worry about, we expect full and immediate disclosure."

In response to Dr. Donohue's letter and the League's press release, Darrell Christian, AP's Managing Editor, wrote, "Our policy on religion, as it is on race, is to mention it when it's relevant and omit it when it's not. In the specific story, we did not establish, as we should have done, why his past writings and scholarship were relevant to the case at hand. I can see why that would lead you to think we (were) making an unfair point of his religion."

The League is satisfied with AP's quick response, and expects that it will not have to call attention to such errors in the future.