

BIGOTS LYING IN WAIT

William A. Donohue

"I can't think of a time when the Catholic Church had a lower esteem than it has now." This was not said in regret by one of our friends. It was said in triumph by one of our enemies. His name is Peter Mullan and he is the director of a notoriously anti-Catholic movie that was recently purchased by Miramax called "The Magdalene Sisters."

Like so many other bigots, Mullan delights in knowing that the sex scandal has hurt the Catholic Church. He knows that bishops and priests who once would speak out about immorality have gone mute. And he's right. Whether it's a couple having sex in a New York cathedral or an emergency abortion pill being shoved down the throat of Catholic hospitals in California, many of our nation's bishops are greeting moral outrage with a thunderous silence.

The enemy knows this. Like the proverbial schoolyard bully, he is emboldened by weakness. He seizes on such moments and exploits them at his will. Unless he is confronted, he proceeds to wreak havoc. Which is why he must be stopped.

The Catholic League will not be bested. We beat "Opie and Anthony" and we will beat their ilk again. To shy away now is a monumental mistake. But it is important that all Catholics get this message.

We knew that as soon as we criticized New York's Museum of Sex (which we've dubbed Museum of Smut), we'd get blasted by the bigots. We knew this would happen because we were absolutely deluged with the most incredibly vile comments sent to us by the sick fans of "Opie and Anthony." We were told, ad nauseam, and in the most obscene language, to mind our own business and just tend to our pedophile priests.

But we refuse to cooperate. Instead, we are deliberately defiant. Bold as brass, we proudly walk directly into the heart of the culture and challenge moral corruption when we see it, never backing down to anyone. And for one very good reason: it is not the teachings of the Catholic Church that need to change—it is the behavior of those (priests included) who reject the wisdom of the Church's teachings. Nowhere is this more true than when it comes to sexuality.

George Weigel, a member of the Catholic League's advisory board and author of, most recently, *The Courage To Be Catholic*, has said "A man who truly believes himself to be what the Catholic Church teaches that a priest is—a living icon of the external priesthood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God—does not behave as a sexual predator." Indeed, as Weigel emphasizes, "He *cannot* behave that way."

To put it somewhat differently, a priest who helps young people is conforming to his beliefs. A priest who violates young people has violated his beliefs. This is in sharp contradistinction to libertines who molest young people—they are conforming to their beliefs. That's not a small difference. The principles that constitute the core teachings of the Church are sound. After all, it is not those who practice restraint who die of sexually transmitted diseases. And lest we forget, it is the Church that teaches restraint while our culture teaches the abandonment of it.

Those who are not Catholic know this as well. This was driven home to me during and after the "Opie and Anthony" controversy. There are an awful lot of men and women out there who belong to another religion and are heartbroken by the sexual abuse scandal. They desperately want the Church to succeed because they are very disappointed with the extent to which their own religion has succumbed to the dominant culture. They know the Catholic Church has stood fast for traditional morality in the past and they don't want to see it retreat now. They have kids and grandkids, and they don't want

them to suffocate because of moral pollution.

Peter Jennings picked up on this point when he drafted questions for me to answer on ABC's "World News Tonight." He wanted to know the cultural significance of our victory over "Opie and Anthony." "You know, there are some people in our society," I said, "who get their jollies by saying 'let's keep pushing the envelope.'" I finished my remarks by commenting, "You know what? Our society needs borders, it needs parameters."

Historically, more than any other force in society, it was the Catholic Church that drew our moral borders and established our parameters. That's why so many who are not Catholic are worried we might pull back. There's a lot at stake for everyone regardless of religion.

So even if some bishops feel hamstrung, lay Catholics should not. To impose a collective gag rule on ourselves is exactly what the Catholic-bashers want. The bigots are lying in wait, and what we need to do is greet them and defeat them. That, at least, is the Catholic League way.