

# Calvin Klein Ad Pulled After League Protest

On August 28, Calvin Klein, Inc. announced that it was withdrawing a series of jean ads that featured young people in sexually suggestive poses. The Catholic League, which just ten days earlier had begun a campaign against Calvin Klein, was credited by the media as playing a major role in getting the company to pull its ads.

The uproar began when the *New York Daily News* ran a front page story on the jean ads on August 18. Catholic League president William Donohue was quoted as saying that the ads were the most “morally destitute” that Calvin Klein had ever produced. The ads, which Donohue branded as “soft core porn,” showed adolescent boys and girls in varying states of undress. The pictures were featured alongside New York City buses and on huge billboards in places like Times Square.

Nationally, the “back-to-school” ads were on display in such magazines as *Rolling Stone*, *Spin* and *Mademoiselle*. Those publications showed pictures of a boy in jockey-type underwear (his black fingernail polish yielded the intended androgynous look) and a girl on a ladder with her underwear exposed. “Kiddie-sexploitation” is how the *Daily News* dubbed it.

Once the story broke, the Catholic League was called upon by many television and radio shows, both nationally and locally, to comment on the ads. The NBC news-entertainment show, *Extra*, did a piece on the League’s response, as did the New York station of National Public Radio.

On August 22, at a press conference held at the behest of New York City Councilman Noach Dear, Catholic League vice president Bernadette Brady joined Councilman Dear in calling for a boycott of Calvin Klein; other organizations soon

followed suit. Miss Brady was particularly incensed by those pictures that featured boys and girls wearing a cross. The use of such imagery, she said, was to provide an air of legitimacy to what was an otherwise lewd ad. Councilman Dear, who is Jewish, also complained about the use of the cross.

When Calvin Klein, Inc. withdrew the ads, the company issued a full-page statement in the *New York Times*. It did not extend an apology, rather it said that it was "taken aback" by the strong public reaction, adding that the ads were "misunderstood by some." In reply, the Catholic League stated, "It is precisely because the public understood the intended message of the ad that Calvin Klein, Inc. had to pull it." Once the ad was pulled, Bernadette Brady joined Councilman Noach Dear again in a press conference, only this time it was to claim victory.

This was the second time that the Catholic League has succeeded in getting offensive ads removed from New York City buses (we were successful in getting the "Madonna" ad removed in September 1993). The League has been invited by the New York City Council to testify at an upcoming hearing on the need for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to write a more restrictive ad policy. It looks forward to doing so.