

Cardinal blasts L.A. Times surveys of priests and nuns as “Catholic bashing”

Cardinal Roger Mahony has accused the *Los Angeles Times* of wanting to join “American media’s favorite pastime – Catholic bashing.” The charge was made in letters to the publisher and editor of the paper denouncing two surveys, one of Catholic priests, the other of religious women, currently being conducted by the paper.

According to a detailed story in *The Tidings* (Archdiocese of Los Angeles weekly), which included a lengthy selection of questions from the priests’ survey, the cardinal was “outraged” after reading the contents of both questionnaires.

The cardinal, wanting to base his criticism on expert opinion, submitted the questionnaires to “two eminent research scholars” who independently concluded that the survey was “heavily skewed toward reaching specific pre-determined conclusions.” One of the reviewers accused the paper of “attempting to prefabricate and market the story,” while the other – a non-Catholic – called it “a poorly designed, sloppy instrument and an inappropriate intrusion on a religious institution.”

Mahoney stated that the survey ignored real areas of concern for priests and women religious while trying to exploit “issues of church authority, sex, and whether priests are sexually active or not.”

“If the *Times* poll is serious about its ‘goal of better understanding the issues and challenges facing the church today,’ as the survey’s cover letter states, where are the questions on the many other serious areas of concern to the church,” the cardinal pointedly asked.

The cardinal noted that whoever had created the survey had little respect for priestly life or commitment, but were far more interested in “trying to determine how many are active (sexually) either heterosexually or homosexually.” Cardinal Mahony added, “I find this not only sad, but repulsive and demeaning – and an insult to the calling of the priesthood.” The *Tidings* story listed specific criticisms voiced by the professionals who reviewed the survey:

- * The survey instrument reflects very poor design, imbalance, and is very one-sided. Its main purpose seems to be to surface division within the ranks of the clergy, without understanding the meaning of division.

- *Research of this type is an insult to good sociologists (Catholic or non-Catholic) who painfully work at sound methodology aimed at digging deeper into the real truth of the matter.

- * It is structured to elicit responses in opposition to tenets of the church.

- * The survey is an intrusion on a religious institution by the fourth estate. No question, it is a “hit” on the church.

- * It shows a lack of understanding of a priest’s vows to his church.

- * Questions are poorly written, some are ambiguous or confusing, and many are too general, and because of their generality, are questionable with regard to the truth they are intended to surface.

- *The questionnaire’s faulty design reflects that it was never pre-tested – a prerequisite for research.

It remains to be seen how the paper will choose to handle the results of this tainted research and what “spin” they will place on its pre-determined results.