

CATHOLICISM UNDER FIRE; BATTLES RAGE ON MANY FRONTS

This spring has been among the busiest of seasons for the Catholic League in some time. The media kept coming to us over and over about a range of issues.

The controversy over “Angels & Demons” swirled for weeks before it opened May 15. The decision to award an honorary degree to President Barack Obama at the University of Notre Dame triggered many sharp reactions. A hate crimes bill that has many troubling aspects to it was taken up by the Congress. The pope’s trip to the Middle East proved to be another ruckus, as some Jews and Muslims acted irresponsibly. And the appointment of a Catholic basher to a faith-based program drew fire.

In every one of these issues, the Catholic League stepped up to the plate. We led the fight against the movie; we sharply opposed the honor bestowed on the president; we fought the hate crimes bill; we denounced the vitriol of the pope’s critics; and we sought the ouster of an anti-Catholic. We did so with news releases and by appearing on TV. We granted interviews to radio shows, newspapers and magazines. We participated in a teleconference with the media.

While these were the big issues, we continued to fight the good fight on other fronts as well. Our media coverage was so great that we could fill many more pages of *Catalyst* with “In the News.”

We are the only religion that Hollywood continues to dump on. Fortunately, “Angels & Demons” was so absurd that Ron Howard did us a favor by effectively blunting the worst elements of Dan Brown’s work. Moreover, when Larry King asked Howard to respond to one of Bill Donohue’s charges, he totally dodged

the question. Even more disturbing was giving a champion of abortion rights an honor at a distinguished Catholic school; it was a slap in the face to the bishops.

Legislation that would force the clergy to tippy toe around passages of the Bible—so as not to offend gay activists—should never have been considered. Rabbis and imams who have an agenda are bad enough, but when they start insulting the Holy Father, it is enough to provoke a backlash. And naming bigots to a federal post is simply mind-boggling.

There is some good news. It's been a long time since the bishops have become collectively mobilized. Just as passivity is contagious, so is activism. It is no exaggeration to say that our bishops have been galvanized by recent events, the result of which is a more vocal Catholic Church. That's great news for our side.

HARRY KNOX MUST GO

On May 13, Bill Donohue participated in a teleconference with other Catholic leaders demanding the ouster of Harry Knox from President Obama's Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; many from the media heard what was said. A letter signed by some two dozen Catholic leaders called on Obama to oust Knox.

Knox has had plenty of opportunities to take back his hate speech against the pope and orthodox Catholics, but refuses to do so. Among other things, he has implied that the pope is a liar and has called Catholics who oppose gay marriage "foot soldiers of a discredited army of oppression."

Also, people like Rep. Mike Pence have asked for Knox's dismissal. When questioned about Knox's appointment,

Democratic leaders like Nancy Pelosi and White House spokesman Robert Gibbs profess ignorance of his anti-Catholic record. This kind of stonewalling explains why the teleconference was called.

If all Knox had done was to criticize the Catholic Church on public policy issues, there would have been no problem. But he is not content to disagree: he must demonize the opposition. Moreover, football coach Tony Dungy was pressured to decline an invitation to serve on the same board, simply because he believes marriage should be between a man and a woman. But there's room for a bigot?

Justice demands that Knox be removed. To top things off, Knox, who is not Catholic, has a record of slamming the Catholic Church on internal matters that are none of his business.

CAMPAIGN TO DISCREDIT POPE; ATTACKS ON HOLY FATHER MOUNT

Over the past few months, it has become increasingly evident that a large-scale campaign against Pope Benedict XVI is being waged by his critics. The issues that his adversaries have seized upon include his relations with Muslims and Jews, and his opposition to embryonic stem cell research, abortion and gay marriage. The latest firestorm occurred when the pope questioned the utility of condoms to check AIDS.

On his flight to Cameroon in March, Benedict XVI was asked about the Catholic Church's position on fighting AIDS. He said, in part, "One cannot overcome the problem with the distribution of condoms. On the contrary, they increase the problem." Despite the uproar this caused, the facts support

the pope's position.

Last year, Edward C. Green, director of the AIDS Prevention Research Project at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, wrote that "In every African country in which HIV infections declined, this decline has been associated with a decrease in the proportion of men and women reporting more than one sex partner over the course of a year—which is exactly what fidelity programs promote."

As for condom use, Green said, "Many countries that have not seen declines in HIV have seen increases in condom use, but in every country worldwide in which HIV has declined there have been increases in levels of faithfulness and usually abstinence as well." No wonder that when Green was asked about the Holy Father's remarks, he said, "The pope is correct, or put it a better way, the best evidence we have supports the pope's comments."

The Catholic Church, we pointed out to the media, has been the most active of any institution promoting the very programs in Africa that Green touts. It also operates more hospitals and related medical centers for AIDS patients than any other private institution in the world.

The Holy Father will be visiting Israel from May 8-May 15. Look for commentators to try to discredit him by mentioning the flap over Bishop Richard Williamson's inane comments on the Holocaust; the St. Pius X Society bishop has since apologized.

What the pope's critics are trying to do is frame him as being out-of-touch. That way they can try to force feed Catholics with a steady diet of their so-called progressive ideas. Funny thing is this pope could run intellectual circles around every one of them.

“DEMONS” DOUBLESPEAK

“Angels & Demons” opens May 15 and promises to be yet another hit job on the Catholic Church. Just as bad, those responsible for the film are engaging in doublespeak.

In a TV promo for the film, Tom Hanks, who plays Harvard professor Robert Langdon, discusses “the 400 year myth of the Illuminati”; he says they “have come for their revenge” against the Vatican.

What makes this so infuriating is that Hanks is on record saying he doesn’t believe in conspiracy theories. Yet that hasn’t stopped him from playing the lead role in two back-to-back conspiracy tales, both of which target the Catholic Church. “Conspiracy theories, I think...conjured up by people who can then sell their books about conspiracy theories,” says Hanks. People like Dan Brown, author of *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels & Demons*?

Here’s more doublespeak. On Brown’s website he addresses the conspiratorial Illuminati: “It is historical fact that the Illuminati vowed vengeance against the Vatican in the 1600s.” But as we have pointed out, it is an historical fact that there was no Illuminati until 1776; it folded in 1787.

Were it not for savaging Catholicism, few would care about the duplicity of Brown and Hanks. But they are obviously not content to spin mysterious tales absent an anti-Catholic animus. That is why the Vatican denied them the opportunity to film on its grounds. It also explains the Catholic League’s on-going campaign to educate the public about their agenda.

“ANGELS & DEMONS”: MYTHS, LIES AND SMEARS

The Catholic League has launched a major attack on the upcoming film, “Angels & Demons.” It is based on the book by that name by Dan Brown, the author who penned *The Da Vinci Code*. The movie opens May 15.

Joining Brown in his latest anti-Catholic assault is director Ron Howard. Both producers are back, as well: John Calley, who admitted that “The Da Vinci Code” was anti-Catholic, and Brian Grazer, who has said that he hopes “Angels & Demons” is less reverential than their previous venture.

“Angels & Demons,” like “The Da Vinci Code,” is strewn with myths, lies and smears about the Catholic Church. Both are a curious blend of fact and fiction, and in both instances the tag team of Brown-Howard paints the Catholic Church in the worst possible light. To combat the movie, Bill Donohue has written a booklet, “Angels & Demons: *More Demonic Than Angelic*.”

“Angels & Demons” alleges there is a secret society, the Illuminati, which is angry at the Catholic Church because of its purportedly anti-science bent. Originally claiming Galileo as one of its members, the group seeks to blow up the Vatican. The protagonist, Harvard professor Robert Langdon, is out to get them before the time bomb explodes.

The book, and perhaps the movie, is entertaining. But it is also malicious. To intentionally distort the historical record as a means to discredit Catholicism is morally indefensible. For example, Galileo died almost 150 years before the Illuminati were founded in 1776. Yet Brown and Howard say “it

is a historical fact” that the Illuminati were formed in the 1600s. They say this because they need to justify trotting out their favorite martyr, Galileo, to beat up on the Catholic Church.

The portrayal of Catholicism as anti-science is bunk. Had it not been for the Catholic Church, the universities would have died during the Middle Ages. Had it not been for the Catholic Church, the Scientific Revolution would never have happened. After all, science did not take root in South America, Africa, the Middle East or Asia. It took place in Christian Europe.

Brown-Howard, as well as others associated with the film, can say all they want that they are not anti-Catholic. The booklet has devastating evidence to the contrary.

Our goal is not to call for a boycott of the movie, but to educate the public about the Brown-Howard agenda. That’s why we unloaded so early—to alert the public to the game they’re playing.

POPE REBUKES PELOSI

When House Speaker Nancy Pelosi traveled to Rome in February, all Catholic eyes were on her meeting with the Holy Father. Practicing Catholics were not disappointed with the outcome.

At their meeting, Pope Benedict XVI took the occasion “to speak of the requirements of the natural moral law and the Church’s consistent teaching on the dignity of human life from conception to natural death which enjoin all Catholics, especially legislators, jurists and those responsible for the common good of society, to work in cooperation with all men and women of good will in creating a just system of laws

capable of protecting human life at all stages of development.”

What occasioned such a rebuke was not only Pelosi’s total support of abortion rights, including the now outlawed practice of partial-birth abortion, but her incredible statement last fall on “Meet the Press.” She said that the Catholic Church had not consistently opposed abortion over time. Hence, the pointed response by the pope.

What was perhaps even more significant, was the fact that Pelosi was denied her big prize: she desperately wanted a picture of her and the pope smiling together. But there was no photo-op—the Vatican, uncharacteristically, had no photographer present. Thus, there was no way for Pelosi to exploit her meeting.

Now if only Pelosi would pivot and accept the Catholic Church’s teachings on abortion. Then perhaps she could work on Joe Biden.

ATTACKS ON POPE GET UNRULY; HYPOCRISY ABOUNDS

The media, Catholic and Jewish critics, and a slew of sources from Germany, teamed up to attack Pope Benedict XVI in a most unruly way over the Holocaust-denying remarks of one bishop who belongs to the St. Pius X Society. The Catholic League responded quickly to the most outrageous remarks.

When it was announced that the pope was seeking reconciliation with the St. Pius X Society, it was immediately reported that the pope had welcomed back a Holocaust-denying bishop. This

was nonsense.

We moved without delay to put the facts on the table. The pope lifted the excommunication that had been imposed in 1988 on four bishops from the St. Pius X Society. One of them, Richard Williamson, entertains loopy and wholly discredited views on the Holocaust. It is important to note, we said, that none has been fully reinstated in the Catholic Church, and they may never be. What the pope did was the *first step* toward full communion. As the *New York Times* correctly reported, this was “a step toward the men’s full restoration to the church, *but their status has yet to be determined.*” (Our emphasis.)

The pope spoke clearly about the issue: “I hope my gesture is followed by the hoped-for commitment on their part to take the further steps necessary to realize full communion with the Church, thus witnessing true fidelity, and true recognition of the magisterium and the authority of the pope and of the Second Vatican Council.”

None of the media distortions of this issue excuses those in the Jewish community who lashed out at the pope. They should know better. As we said to the media, “Is their commitment to good relations with Catholics so thin that it can wither because of something like this? We certainly hope not.”

Nearly 50 Catholic Democratic congressmen implored the pope to “publicly state your unequivocal position on this matter so that it is clear where the Church stands.” How ironic that most of these very same Catholics fail to speak with clarity about what the Church teaches on abortion. Most are pro-abortion.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the D.A. from Regensburg, Germany, Catholic theologians and the German media took the occasion to lecture the pope about the Holocaust. Talk about hubris. The pope was forcibly conscripted at a young age to join a Nazi group and saw his family suffer economically

because he refused to attend Hitler Youth meetings.

All in all, the grandstanding that took place was over the top.

FR. NEUHAUS R.I.P.

Father Richard John Neuhaus died on January 8 of cancer. The founder of the immensely influential magazine, *First Things*, and the author of many books, he was a true public intellectual. When he died, Bill Donohue was quoted as saying, "He was a brilliant and devoted son of the Church who will be sorely missed. Indeed, he is irreplaceable." Both Donohue and vice president Bernadette Brady attended the funeral Mass.

It was John Cardinal O'Connor who ordained Neuhaus in 1991, the year after the former Lutheran pastor became a Catholic. Neuhaus made his mark not only in New York, but in the U.S. and beyond. He was well regarded in Rome, and was a personal friend of the pope.

Neuhaus was part theologian, part philosopher and part social scientist. His range and erudition were prodigious, and his homilies were inspiring. It was his musings in the back end of *First Things* that stood out: His commentary was insightful and often provocative. He was certainly not afraid of taking on the big issues. Nor was he afraid of taking on the powerful, both within and outside the Catholic Church.

Neuhaus was also a good friend of the Catholic League. He wrote supportively of our mission and our strategies, and he never underestimated the menace of anti-Catholicism. In 2007, he spoke at the Communion Breakfast of the Long Island Chapter of the Catholic League.

The Catholic Church is poorer without him. But the good news is that his writings will continue to influence generations to come.

CHRISTMAS FOES ADVANCE; OUR SIDE PUSHES BACK

Every December the Catholic League is embroiled in the never-ending war on Christmas, and this past Christmas season was no exception. However, there were two important differences: foes of Christmas changed strategies and our side fought back with vigor.

The usual tactic employed by the enemies of Christmas has been to access the law: they prefer to go directly into federal district court seeking to ban nativity scenes on public property, or to censor Christmas songs from being sung in the schools by threatening legal action. While this gambit is still used, the most popular method this time around was to promote “contrived competition.”

Basically, what this comes down to is an attempt to neuter Christmas by celebrating every conceivable holiday or event that occurs in December. Indeed, it even goes beyond this by heralding every racial, ethnic, religious and cultural group worldwide. The goal, under the rubric of promoting diversity, is to deny the central role that Christmas plays in the life of most Americans every December. It is a scam, and nothing more.

The good news is that our side fought back all over the nation. From the state of Washington where the governor allowed militant atheists to foist their hate speech on the

public, to Long Island, New York where a village turned a Christmas tradition into an all-inclusive holiday event, Catholics and Protestants fought back by filing lawsuits, staging protests and withdrawing sponsorship.

None of these assaults on Christmas happened purely because of groups like the ACLU. It happened because millions of Americans, including Christians, have been indoctrinated into thinking that the celebration of Christmas should be a mostly private affair. They have been made to feel defensive about their own holiday.

The willingness to fight back occurred because millions of other Americans have had it with attempts to stymie Christmas. They picked up their cultural cudgels in a way not previously seen, giving hope that this perennial culture-war event may yet be won.

There are still those, mostly in the media, who try to pretend that there isn't a war on Christmas. But as this issue of *Catalyst* discloses, it is no myth. Moreover, the violence that takes place—in the form of vandalizing religious statues and trashing church grounds—is testimony to the ferocity of our adversaries.

As always, the media courted a response from the Catholic League, and as always, we didn't let them down.

PLAYBOY OFFENDS & LIES

The Mexican edition of the Christmas *Playboy* issue showed a nearly nude woman on the cover resembling the Virgin Mary. After a protest led by the Catholic League, the publisher of *Playboy* Mexico apologized.

When asked for a comment by the media entertainment outlet, TMZ, Bill Donohue said: "*Playboy's* juxtaposition of the sacred with the profane is a game that many have played, but to exploit Catholicism and insult Latinos in the same breath is novel. The December cover of its Mexican edition demonstrates once again that when it comes to good taste, *Playboy* remains quintessentially virginal."

To make matters worse, the apology was insincere. "The image is not and never was intended to portray the Virgin of Guadalupe or any other religious figure," said publisher Raul Sayrols. "The intent was to reflect a Renaissance-like mood on the cover."

When Rick Sanchez of CNN asked Donohue whether he accepted the apology, he replied, "They are liars. I mean everybody knows it has nothing to do with the Renaissance." Sanchez then asked whether it would have made a difference had they not lied. "No," Donohue said, "I wouldn't be okay with it. But at least I wouldn't call them dishonest."

This is not the first time *Playboy* has played fast and loose with Catholic iconography. Nor is it the first time it has attacked Catholicism in its pages; the American edition has a long record of abuse. The good news is that *Playboy's* sales are hurting.