

CRECHE CASE IN THE COURTS

On November 13, oral arguments were heard in U.S. District Court regarding a lawsuit that maintains that the New York City school system discriminates against Christians. Suing the New York City schools is The Thomas More Law Center of Ann Arbor, Michigan; the Catholic League began the process and secured a complainant for the law firm.

The dispute originated in 2001, when a Catholic woman who teaches in the New York City public schools contacted the Catholic League complaining that her principal was inviting Jewish and Muslim teachers to bring religious symbols into the classroom in December to celebrate Hanukkah and Ramadan; Christian teachers were told they could bring secular symbols like the Christmas tree.

At first we thought this was an anomaly. But then we discovered it was the official policy of the Board of Education. A flurry of exchanges between William Donohue and the attorney for New York City schools ensued. Because the City would not budge, Donohue threatened to sue. He then spoke to Richard Thompson, president of The Thomas More Law Center, who said that if the league could secure a plaintiff, his firm would do the litigating.

After this was reported in *Catalyst*, we were contacted by league member Andrea Skoros. She lives in Queens, sends her children to public schools, was outraged over the City's policy, and agreed to be party to the suit.

A decision by the judge could come at any time.

ATTACKS ON MEL GIBSON GROW; SO DOES HIS SUPPORT

Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of Christ" (recently retitled from "The Passion"), won't be released until Lent, but the reaction to it hasn't abated since the first salvo was launched against the Hollywood star last spring.

Lining up against Gibson is the ad hoc committee of New Testament scholars, both Catholic and Jewish, who are furious that they have had to confine their comments to a stolen script of the film. Comedian Bill Maher, an inveterate anti-Catholic, charged that Gibson was "anti-Semitic." Rabbi David Rosen of the American Jewish Committee also joined the debate when he said this is "a battle between the more traditional and the more liberal wings within the Catholic Church, and the relationship with the Jewish community has become a football in this fight."

One person in the Jewish community who is not sitting on the sidelines is Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). In *The Jewish Week*, he recently accused Gibson of being anti-Semitic. Foxman also attacked Gibson's father for saying that fewer than 6 million Jews died in the Holocaust (something many Jewish scholars concede).

Foxman was upset with Gibson's comment that the ADL and others would come after him had he not excised the passage from Matthew which reads, "His blood be on us and on our children." Foxman also objected to Gibson's comment to Peter Boyer in *The New Yorker* that "modern secular Judaism wants to blame the Holocaust on the Catholic Church." For Foxman, this amounts to "classic anti-Semitism."

The Catholic League immediately charged Foxman with seeking "to poison relations between Catholics and Jews." "Similarly,"

we offered, "it is no secret that extremely secular Jews have teamed up with profoundly alienated Catholics to blame the Catholic Church for the Holocaust. Quite frankly, most Catholics are fed up with the lies of Goldhagen and Cornwell."

What is particularly disturbing is to read that in the September 15 *New Yorker*, Foxman said, "Per se, I don't think that Mel Gibson is an anti-Semite." Yet in the September 18 edition of *The Jewish Week*, he said Gibson was anti-Semitic. After we blasted Foxman the same day for his irresponsible remark, he told AP on September 19, "I'm not ready to say he's [Gibson] an anti-Semite."

Keep your eyes on this one-it's an issue that will only intensify.

"HAIL MARY" BAR NIXED

There will be no "Hail Mary's Last Chance Sports and Spirits" bar in Rock Island, Illinois. Here's what happened.

Two entrepreneurs, Bruce Millage and Jeffrey Guthrie, recently purchased a building that housed a former synagogue in Rock Island. They planned to turn it into a sports bar by the name, "Hail Mary's Last Chance." Their intent was to borrow the famous football quip about a "Hail Mary" pass and use it as the name of their new bar. But area Catholics weren't amused.

Priests like Father James Ramer of St. Anne's in East Moline quickly complained, as did many area lay Catholics. Bishop Daniel Jenky of Peoria, Illinois made public his criticism. Then the Catholic League entered the fray.

William Donohue wrote to Jeff Guthrie explaining what the

Catholic League is all about. He then said, "What you and Mr. Millage are planning to do is disturbing, but perhaps it is not too late for you to reconsider." He ended by saying, "Please let me know what your plans are regarding this important matter as it will impact on my decision."

Just days after the letter was mailed, Donohue fielded a phone call from Bruce Millage. He said there was never any intent to offend Catholics, and that is why he and his partner have dropped the name "Hail Mary" from the bar's name. They are now running a contest to decide what would be an appropriate name.

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS POLITICIANS SCRATCH PLANS TO NIX CHURCH

Over Labor Day weekend, some members of the Winnebago County Board designed a plan to tear down a Catholic Church, St. Mary's Oratory, and replace it with a new county jail. The Catholic League jumped into the fray, as did Rockford Bishop Thomas Doran, and in no time the plan was scratched.

Here's what happened. On September 2, the day after Labor Day, Scott P. Richert contacted William Donohue alerting him to the plan. Richert is the executive editor of *Chronicles*, the flagship magazine of The Rockford Institute (Donohue has written for the publication under the auspices of its director, Thomas Fleming). On September 3, Donohue issued a news release on the subject and e-mailed every member of the Winnebago County Board expressing his concerns.

St. Mary's Oratory is not just another Catholic church. Built

in 1885, it is the second-oldest church in Rockford, Illinois and the only church in the nation to offer the Latin Mass exclusively twice daily. Moreover, it was fully restored as St. Mary's Shrine in 1997 by Bishop Doran and the Institute of Christ the King. Furthermore, attendance has exploded as hundreds of young people and their families make their way to the church on weekends.

On September 3, Donohue was interviewed by Chris Bowman on a local radio station, WNTA. Joining him on the broadcast was Bishop Doran. Both made the case that the officials were acting hastily and unfairly. Before they even got off the air, some of the officials whom Donohue had contacted were already contacting him saying they would not support razing St. Mary's.

On September 4, Donohue issued another news release. This time he said he was delighted with the response from county officials; they had met the night before and decided not to go ahead with the plan.

Donohue concluded with the following remarks: "This is a textbook example of democracy in action. The Catholic League is contacted by Scott P. Richert of the Rockford Institute; I issue a news release and e-mail every member of the county board; Chris Bowman of WNTA interviews me; Rockford Bishop Thomas Doran joins the interview; and county officials scratch the plan."

This also shows what can happen when a bishop decides to engage the media. Bishop Doran has shown himself once again why he is one of our finest bishops in the nation.

CLOSURE IN BOSTON

On September 9, the Archdiocese of Boston agreed to pay \$85 million to settle the hundreds of lawsuits filed against it by persons saying they were abused by priests.

It took the leadership of Archbishop Sean O'Malley to bring closure to the scandal that he inherited. By working tirelessly with victims and their lawyers, he was able to seal an agreement that had escaped the reach of his predecessors.

Most of the money will come from mortgaging churches and other buildings in parishes scheduled to be closed. The insurance companies are not cooperating and it remains to be seen whether they ever will; the archdiocese may be forced to sue them. No matter, none of the money will come from parish funds or from Catholic Charities. Moreover, the Knights of Columbus helped the archdiocese avoid filing bankruptcy by lending \$38 million to cover daily expenses.

Now that the lawsuits have been settled, attention will turn to reform. But not everyone agrees what reforms are necessary.

For example, no sooner had the settlement been announced when Mary Jo Bane, a left-wing Harvard professor, wondered aloud about Archbishop O'Malley by commenting, "We don't know how he is going to be theologically." Thus did she suggest that perhaps the newly appointed archbishop might (she would say "should") deviate from established Church teachings.

In short, the scandal may be over but the crisis is not.

MEL GIBSON'S "THE PASSION" COMES UNDER FIRE

Actor Mel Gibson is spending \$25 million of his own money to finance a movie about the last 12 hours of Christ's life. "The Passion" will open during Lent next March or April. It has already come under fire for being allegedly anti-Semitic. Curiously, only those who have not seen the movie are making this charge.

Leading the fight against Mel Gibson has been a group of Catholic scholars and the ADL. None of them has seen the film, but this doesn't matter—they have condemned it for being anti-Semitic anyway. On what basis? On the basis of a stolen script.

The Catholic scholars are Sister Mary C. Boys of Union Theological Seminary; Philip Cunningham of Boston College; Eugene Fisher of the Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB); Paula Fredriksen of Boston University; and Rev. John T. Pawlikowski.

These scholars were mentioned in the press as being an official committee of the USCCB. Not only is this false—they are an ad hoc committee that has no official status—the USCCB had to issue an apology to Mel Gibson for their misdeeds.

On June 11, William Donohue debated Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Institute on MSNBC over the controversy surrounding Mel Gibson's film. Donohue defended Gibson and the New Testament's account of the death of Jesus. Gibson saw Donohue on TV and subsequently called to thank him.

On Sunday, July 6, Gibson met Donohue in the Catholic League's headquarters. He showed a VHS tape of the movie to Donohue, Father Philip Eichner, chairman of the league's board of

directors, and Bernadette Brady, vice president of the Catholic League. Gibson also joined the Catholic League. On July 22, Gibson showed the film to about 20 New Yorkers; at his invitation, Donohue saw it again, this time with Louis Giovino, the league's director of communications.

Gibson has allowed a select group of Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians and Jews to preview the movie. The reaction has been virtually unanimous: this is the most powerful portrayal of the life and death of Jesus ever made. And it is anything but anti-Semitic.

This is going to be a protracted battle and the Catholic League is going to play a major role. We are answering every unfair attack on Mel Gibson; we will yield to no one.

RELIGIOUS TEST FOR CATHOLICS

Over the summer, the Catholic League became very involved in the nomination of Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor for a seat on the federal court of appeals in Atlanta. The Catholic League contends that Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee have subjected him to a *de facto* religious test. Accordingly, William Donohue wrote to all 100 Senators asking them to reject this invidious litmus test.

Pryor is a Catholic who is strongly opposed to abortion. Senator Charles Schumer of New York did not hold back in questioning Pryor about his "deeply held beliefs." Indeed, he said Pryor's beliefs "are so deeply held that it's very hard to believe that they're not going to influence" him on the bench. This, of course, is code for questioning Pryor's deeply held religious convictions.

Senator Richard Durbin is a Catholic who sits on the Senate Judiciary Committee. He rejected the charge that the committee is opposed to Catholic nominations for the federal bench.

We responded by commenting,

“No one has ever said that the Senate Judiciary Committee is bigoted against *all* Catholic nominees for the federal bench. Indeed, to the extent that the nominees reject the Church’s teachings on abortion, as Senators Durbin, Kennedy and Leahy do, they will be welcomed. What has been said, by the Catholic League et al., is that a *de facto* religious test is being applied to Catholic candidates who accept the Church’s teachings on abortion.”

For more on this, see [“NO CATHOLIC JUDGES NEED APPLY”](#)

OHIO VICTORY

When the Catholic League learned that bills were pending in Ohio that would require members of the clergy to report suspected cases of child abuse to the authorities, our concern was that the sanctity of the confessional not be compromised. At the end of the day there was nothing to worry about, but it didn’t start that way.

The bill that was introduced by Sen. Robert Spada explicitly protected the seal of the confessional. But there was another bill, introduced by Rep. Lance Mason, that did not initially allow for the priest-penitent privilege. This led William Donohue to write every member of the Ohio House expressing his misgivings over any bill that would sacrifice the confidentiality of the confessional.

“All across the nation we have asked state legislators not to

compromise the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation,” Donohue told the press. He indicated that “we have been very pleased with the results overall.” He emphasized that Ohio lawmakers should follow suit.

Donohue wrote to the lawmakers on the same day he issued the news release, June 5. On June 10, Rep. Mason called our office to say that he never meant to change the traditional status of the priest-penitent privilege. He even went so far as to say that he “would never do any harm” to what he called one of the “greatest institutions on earth.”

We publicly commended Rep. Mason for his quick and decisive statement of clarification. We also thanked him for his kind words regarding the Church.

BISHOPS MAKE PROGRESS; KEY COURT CASE WON

June was a critical month for the Catholic Church. The bishops met in St. Louis for their semiannual meeting, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on a case of significant importance to the Church. On both counts, there was good news for the Church.

At the bishops’ meeting, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago spoke plainly when he said of the sexual abuse scandal in the Church, “What we promised to do a year ago, we’ve done.” He added, “The facts are, the bishops have moved—and they’ve moved dramatically. To come along and say that nothing has been done is an outrageous statement. It’s totally unjust and doesn’t bear any relationship to the facts.”

The Catholic League agreed and issued the following statement:

“His Eminence’s remarks ring true. Abusive priests have either been removed from ministry or they have left the priesthood. Cooperation between local prosecutors and the dioceses has never been better. Indeed, those who say no progress has been made are the very same people for whom no amount of progress—short of a radical remaking of the Catholic Church—would ever be considered satisfactory.”

The resignation of Frank Keating as Chairman of the National Review Board was welcomed by the Catholic League. We labeled as inflammatory his remark that some bishops have acted like the Mafia, and so did his colleagues on the panel.

The other piece of good news was the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that ruled unconstitutional a California law that had retroactively changed the statute of limitations as it affects laws governing child molestation. “This now means the Church will properly be safeguarded from steeple-chasing lawyers and their Johnny-come-lately clients,” we said. The California law had been changed to accommodate alleged victims of clergy abuse dating back several decades.

During a TV debate William Donohue had with Frances Kissling, he was asked why the pope hadn’t been more aggressive getting rid of delinquent bishops. He responded, “I think he should have and I don’t know why. Nor do I know why he hasn’t excommunicated anti-Catholic bigots like Frances Kissling.”

In any event, much progress has been made. And with the appointment of Bishop Sean O’Malley as Archbishop of Boston, it definitely signals the tide has been turned.

VIDEO VIOLENCE

A new PC video game, "Postal 2," is selling out across the nation. The sequel to "Postal," the new action game allows the player to be "Postal Dude," a character who kills anything in sight. The player can blow a priest's head off with a shotgun and kick the bleeding head around the street like a soccer ball. It is also possible to wait in line for confession or kill everyone, including the priest, in the church.

□ Gays and lesbians can be killed (there is a "Fag Hunter" arcade), cops can be decapitated, Muslims can be shot, dogs can be set on fire and kittens can have their rectums blown to bits. It is also possible to urinate in a person's mouth and watch him vomit.

□ □ Weapons of choice are abundant: shovels, tazers, rotting cow heads, pistols, shotguns, gasoline cans, rocket launchers, napalm launchers, Molotov cocktails, grenades, rifles, scissors, etc.

In a statement to the media, we emphasized that our concern was with those kids, mostly young boys, who come from troubled homes. The effect of experiences like "Postal 2" may prove disastrous for them; the danger is it may anesthetize them to human suffering.

There is another disturbing aspect to this story. In a review of the video game in the *Arizona Republic* and in Gannett News Service, both media outlets made mention of the attack on gays. But neither mentioned the blood bath that awaits priests. How revealing. And how utterly predictable these days.