

BILL ALLOWS EXEMPTION

The outcome was in doubt but reason prevailed. A law governing child sexual abuse in Connecticut allowed for an exemption for allegations heard in the confessional.

In the first part of May, the Connecticut state House passed a bill that would require Catholic priests to report allegations of child sexual abuse disclosed in the confessional. But then the state Senate struck down this provision arguing that an exemption must be made for the confessional. The final fate of the bill was determined on May 8. The exemption was allowed.

The Catholic League entered the fray by calling on all legislators to provide for the exemption. "Not to do so," we said, "would be to allow the legitimate concerns over child sexual abuse to devolve into a church-state scandal of its own." We called attention to the fact that "it has long been respected that what is said between a penitent and a priest is no one else's business. That would certainly include agents of the state."

While we were happy with the final outcome, we were disturbed that the bill passed by the state House—the one that did not allow for an exemption for the confessional—was 144-2. Constitutional guarantees should not be suspended simply because of an ensuing scandal.

We also expressed our concerns over reports that an anti-Catholic tone was evident during the debate in the House. There is no excuse for bigotry.

POPE INTERVENES IN SCANDAL; MEDIA BLITZ HITS LEAGUE

On April 23-24, Pope John Paul II summoned U.S. cardinals to Rome indicating a real turning point in the sex abuse scandal that has rocked the Catholic Church. The Holy Father clearly understands the gravity of the problem and that is why he directly intervened in this matter.

Even before the cardinals met with the pope, some activists were anxiously seizing the moment to push their agenda. "Some are predicting that the Church in the U.S. will breakaway once and for all from Rome," we said, "while others are maintaining there will be an end to the ban on married priests and women's ordination." We countered saying "This kind of hyperventilation is not helpful and it sorely misunderstands the nature of the problem and what is likely to be done about it."

Indeed, we went further arguing that "The fundamental problem is a lack of discipline: misconduct with impunity has hurt the Church. There are some who say that a bishop cannot afford to lose a priest. It is high time to ask whether they can afford to keep some of them." Everyone now has their eyes fixed on Dallas when the bishops meet collectively on June 13, 14 and 15. It is at this meeting that necessary correctives will be determined.

The media repaired to the Catholic League for commentary in a way that was unprecedented. From the New York Times to the Los Angeles Times, as well as from newspapers from France and Australia, the Catholic League was tapped for its reaction. Virtually every television talk show contacted the league. To name just a few, we were called on by "The Today Show," "Hardball with Chris Matthews," "Hannity and Colmes," "Alan Keyes is Making Sense," "Wolf Blitzer Reports," "Your World

with Neil Cavuto,” “The Fox Report with Shepard Smith,” and “The NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw.” William Donohue was also interviewed for specials hosted by Peter Jennings of ABC and Garrick Utley of CNN.

We were mostly pleased by the news coverage but were unhappy with many columnists and cartoonists. Instead of focusing on those in the wrong, they took wide swipes at the Catholic Church. Thus did they promote a stereotypical view of priests. We will continue to defend the masses of priest who are good men while never defending the indefensible.

JUSTICE IN OKLAHOMA

An inappropriate joke about a Catholic priest is told at a function sponsored by the state of Oklahoma. A Catholic layman in attendance objects. Nothing is done. He contacts the Catholic League. An apology is forthcoming. Here's what happened.

At a “Partnership Series” substance abuse workshop, an instructor opened his seminar by telling an offensive joke about a Catholic priest who consumes alcohol and engages in sex. When a Catholic complained to the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, he got nowhere. He was told the matter would be investigated. When that didn't happen, he contacted us.

William Donohue wrote to the commissioner of this department, Dr. Terry Cline, lodging a complaint. He said he was troubled that “a presenter at a state seminar who identified himself as a representative of the state of Oklahoma, the U.S. military and the Episcopal Church would tell a

bigoted joke.” Donohue also mentioned that the complainant got no satisfaction from Cline’s office despite assurances he would.

Dr. Cline wrote to Dr. Donohue extending an apology for what happened. He also enclosed a letter of apology written by the offending instructor to the person who complained. As a result of this incident, Dr. Cline said “it is our intent to highlight the importance of cultural and religious sensitivity in all presentations through our letter of agreement with speakers.”

RED CROSS APOLOGIZES FOR BAN ON RELIGIOUS SPEECH

On March 11, the Catholic League went on a tear against the American Red Cross. Four hours later we got what we wanted: a reversal of its newly minted policy banning religious speech at its functions and a much-deserved apology.

The pressure we put on the American Red Cross was enormous. We asked over 100 organizations to drop their support for the Red Cross because of the decision by the national headquarters to support one of its California chapters in prohibiting the singing of “God Bless America” and “America the Beautiful” at a Red Cross luncheon.

The problem began when the Red Cross Orange County Chapter in Santa Ana, California, banned students from Orange County High School of the Arts from singing the two patriotic songs at its March 10 event.

The American Red Cross issued a news release stating its support for censoring the students. It exclaimed its "sensitivity to religious diversity" by noting its "preference for a music program that would be inclusive and not offend different populations participating in this particular event." We branded this a gag rule.

William Donohue told the media that the reason he was calling for drastic action was the decision of the national headquarters to back the California chapter. He criticized the organization for adopting "the platform of political correctness by censoring the free speech of young men and women who want to honor God and country."

The campaign against the Red Cross had begun. We faxed our friends letters asking them "to send the Red Cross an unmistakable message by refusing to donate one more dime to the organization." Our request was sent to our allies in virtually every faith community. Donohue said, "The time to put an end to this anti-religious madness is now."

It didn't take long before the Red Cross got the message. It quickly issued an apology saying it had made a "mistake." We accepted the apology but rejected the notion that a "mistake" had been made. Indeed we said it was "intellectually dishonest" not to admit that it was "a calculated decision to punish religious speech."

We ended by wondering whether the organization would soon change its name. "Any group that has 'Cross' in its name is clearly being insensitive to religious diversity," we concluded.

SPITZER BACKS OFF

In the last edition of *Catalyst*, we reported on the efforts of New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer to try to close down crisis pregnancy centers throughout the state. On March 1, he announced that he had withdrawn his subpoenas.

Spitzer, who works closely with NARAL and other pro-abortion groups, targeted the abortion alternative centers for allegedly practicing medicine without a license, false advertising and the like. It smelled of a witch hunt from the beginning.

Evidently, Spitzer didn't count on the strong grassroots reaction he triggered. Pro-life groups became energized in a way no one predicted. Because the men and women working in the centers were largely Catholic, the Catholic League got involved.

William Donohue wrote a letter to everyone in the New York State Legislature asking them to put pressure on Spitzer. If laws have been broken, Donohue said, then Spitzer should get on with his prosecution. But if this is not the case, then he should drop his crusade.

The Catholic League worked cooperatively with James Manning, John Margand and Ellen Gavin. They, and many others, had the courage to lead the fight. We are happy that so many members wrote letters to Spitzer expressing their concerns. The message got through.

This is an election year and that certainly was not lost on Spitzer. His friends at NARAL lost this battle big. It is our hope that attorney generals in other states were watching.

YAHOO! ENDS BIAS

Following a complaint by the Catholic League, Yahoo!, the Internet portal, deleted biased entries against Catholics.

Until recently, when the word "Catholic" was typed in the search engine site, the second of the Category Matches had a listing called "Christian History > Catholic Inquisition." By clicking on that category, the listings of "Torture" and "Witch Hunts" appeared. But when the words "Protestant," "Judaism," or "Islam" were typed in, no negative episodes associated with these religions were listed. No other Internet portal showed an anti-Catholic bias.

Just as disturbing, when "Catholicism" was typed in, the first listing under Web Site Matches was "The Case Against Catholicism." It consisted mainly of the work of "Joseph McCabe's Rationalist Encyclopedia." More accurately, it included some of the most remarkably twisted interpretations of the history of the Catholic Church ever produced.

The second listing was called "Gay and Lesbian Catholicism"; it was replete with criticism of the Church's teachings on sexuality. No other religion had a gay section listed on Yahoo!

Nothing we objected to was outside the control of Yahoo! Though they took their time in making the necessary changes, we are happy to report that the offensive treatment of Catholicism has ended. This is an important victory because so many people use the Internet to access information. That's why it's important not to have biased information.

ANTI-CHRISTMAS ANIMUS EVIDENT NATIONWIDE

The culture war that has gripped the nation is nowhere more clearly evident than in the annual attempt to stamp out Christmas. Things got out-of-hand this year, in particular. Some thought the events of 9-11 would bring us together, but as the following examples demonstrate, there are some who are absolutely determined to divide us.

- Government officials in Las Vegas banned a display of the nativity scene at McCarran Airport and at the Fremont Street Experience downtown.
- In Kensington, Maryland, the Town Council unanimously voted to ban Santa Claus because two persons complained. Interestingly, Karen Libman, who led the fight against Santa, had earlier pushed for the display of a menorah on public property. After much publicity and turmoil, Santa was allowed to be displayed. University of Southern California law professor, Susan Estrich, defended the censorship of Santa on Fox News Channel's "Hannity and Colmes."
- In Minnesota, red poinsettias were banned by Ramsey County Manager Paul Kirkwood from the annual display in the county's St. Paul courthouse.
- All religious symbols were banned from display in buildings run by the Portland Housing Authority in Maine.
- The superintendent of schools in Silverton, Oregon, ordered all religious symbols removed from students' lockers.
- "Christmas" was deleted from school calendars all over America. In some cases, the Catholic League was able to get a pledge from the principal that this will not happen again.

- In Frederick County, Maryland, the principal banned Christmas cards from being given out because he said that those with a Christian message may not be a legally protected right.
- A fourth-grader in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, was forbidden to pass out Christmas cards.
- Wearing red and green scarves in a Christmas skit was enough to get two middle school students disciplined in Rochester, Minnesota.
- A teacher in Plymouth, Illinois, was admonished by her principal not to read a book about Christmas to her second-grade students.
- Icicle lights were banned from display by government officials in Northdale, Florida.
- A teacher at Sable Point Elementary School in Seminole County, Florida, was threatened with her job if she did not remove a pin that said, "Jesus is the Reason for the Season."
- Complaints reached gossip columnist Liz Smith to the effect that the nativity scene following the Christmas Spectacular at Radio City Music Hall was religious in nature.
- A school in Oyster Bay, Long Island, allowed Jewish religious songs at the holiday concert but prohibited Christian songs.
- Public housing officials in Vincennes, Indiana, banned all religious symbols from its complex.
- The ACLU threatened to sue St. Martin Parish Catholic churches in Louisiana because they put a nativity scene in a public park.
- The Melbourne Square Mall in Melbourne, Florida, allowed Jewish religious symbols but banned Christian ones. A local

rabbi defended the placement of the menorah saying it wasn't religious.

- The display of a Christmas tree led to an uproar on the campus of Bradley University.

- Officials who work for Wisconsin Governor Scott McCallum defended their decision to call the Christmas tree in the Wisconsin Capitol the "Holiday Tree."

- Menorahs were placed in student housing units at Harvard University without a word of protest. But there were no nativity scenes. Indeed, the display of Christmas trees became a contentious issue on campus. Some Jewish students complained that the Christmas tree was divisive. One compared it to "a Trojan horse," saying it opened the door to placing other offensive symbols on campus. He specifically mentioned the swastika. The Catholic League offered to buy nativity scenes if students were interested in displaying them but there were no takers.

- In Lebanon, Pennsylvania, Rabbi Louis Zivic of Beth Israel Synagogue complained that the Holiday Concert at Cedar Crest High School was too Christian in emphasis. As a result, school officials decided to no longer ask visitors to stand while the chorus sings the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's "Messiah." An official from the local chapter of the ADL, Gerrie Greene, agreed saying that it appears previous holiday concerts were "pervasively religious." Greene noted that the concert "was almost entirely of Christmas carols, most of which were sacred in nature." Progress was made, however, in one city. The policy that prohibited C-TRAN employees in Vancouver, Washington, from wearing religious symbols on their clothing or from having religious decorations in the workplace was lifted. The victory belongs to Catholic League member Douglas Wolverton.

SAYING “MERRY CHRISTMAS” MADE SAFE IN SEATTLE

Thanks to the Catholic League, employees in King County, Washington, were allowed to say “Merry Christmas” this year. But if the Seattle-area county executive Ron Sims had his way, the ban he instituted would still be in place.

Sims, who is a Baptist minister, issued a memo on November 14 mandating that King County employees use “religion-neutral” language when referring to the holidays. He said it was okay to say “Happy Holidays” and “Holiday Greetings.” But all references to Christmas were regarded as taboo.

Sims explained that “we at King County want to ensure that any upcoming holiday celebration at the workplace is held in a *respectful, inclusive, and sensitive manner* that does not favor one religion over the other.” (His emphasis.) The following sentence, however, said that “Particularly in public areas, this means that any holiday recognition or celebration should be religion-neutral.”

William Donohue gave his advice in a news release that was picked up all over the country. He said the time had come for area Catholics to call the media, as well as the police, and then get arrested for saying, “Merry Christmas.” “What a show this would be,” Donohue said, “having dozens of Catholics being handcuffed by the cops for uttering what their boss regards as an obscenity.”

Donohue’s criticisms went to the heart of what has become a national problem: “The champions of diversity are the single greatest proponents of despotism in the United States today. Any expression that violates their crabbed vision of reality

is subject to censorship. Indeed, in the name of diversity they promote ideological uniformity. Similarly, in the name of inclusiveness, they exclude people of faith. The diversity despots are both a menace and a national disgrace.”

Because of the media pressure the Catholic League exerted, Sims was soon forced to reverse himself. But his attempt to say that he was misunderstood failed to convince anyone.

Sims said of his initial memo, “I believe its intent was to ask all of you to remember to be culturally sensitive...” Donohue replied, “Whenever someone says of his own words, ‘I believe its intent was,’ it is a sure bet he’s engaged in spin control. Sims knows exactly what he meant and what he meant was to censor the speech of county employees. But he got nailed and had to back off.”

eBAY PULLS TWO ITEMS

Within five days, eBay, the online auction house, withdrew two blasphemous and obscene items from its website following a complaint by the Catholic League.

The first item was called the “Weird Tattooed Jesus Statue!” It depicted Jesus with three eyes, vampire teeth and a dagger on his chest. The base was covered with roses and green painted skulls. It was pulled December 13.

The second item, “Catholic Priests F— Children,” was sponsored by Open Wound recording company and is the creation of the British band called The Grey Wolves. There was a sketch of naked boys and girls on the cover and a picture of a Catholic priest. The person who auctioned it was from Germany. It was pulled December 18.

In both instances, lawyers for eBay listened attentively to our complaint and proved to be eminently reasonable. Thousands of items are auctioned off on this site and no one can possibly police them all. But when someone gives us a tip about some obscene item that attacks Catholicism, we investigate and then lodge a protest. Thus far, eBay officials have moved quickly and affirmatively to deal with the problem.

Members will recall that in November our lead story was on eBay withdrawing a "Virgin Mary Immaculate Conception Condom." We will continue to monitor this website and react when necessary.

In short, we are just as determined to fight these bigots as they are to continue to fight.

IRS ASKED TO PROBE SAN FRANCISCO "SISTERS"

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has petitioned the Internal Revenue Service to revoke the tax-exempt status of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

The "Sisters" are a San Francisco-based gay group that dress as nuns, mock Catholicism and make small donations to AIDS-related charities. The league's position is that the "Sisters" have long been in violation of the law that allows non-profits a tax-exempt status.

The Catholic League has legally acquired documents filed by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence with the IRS that nominally commit the "Sisters" to certain legitimate goals. The problem is not what the group proclaims to be

doing—fundraising and education—but what it spends most of its time doing, namely Catholic bashing. It is ludicrous on the face of it for the “Sisters” to maintain that one of the major issues they address is “the role of religion in daily life.” Among their more disgusting habits is simulating sodomy while dressed as nuns, using a gas pump as a phallic symbol.

Over the past year, the league has compiled evidence of the group’s flagrantly anti-Catholic and patently indecent activities. Hence the decision to appeal to the IRS to strip the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence of its tax-exempt status.

William Donohue explained his reasoning to the media this way: “If a group of white anti-black bigots dressed up as Al Jolson and mocked African Americans, no one would excuse them because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to selective charities. If a group of anti-Semites were to dress as Shylock and mock Jews, no one would excuse them because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to selective charities. Similarly, we do not expect anyone—including the IRS—to excuse the Catholic-bashing the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence engage in because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to AIDS-related charities.”

The evidence we have amassed is thorough and persuasive and that is why the time has come for the government to stop the public funding of bigotry under the guise of charitable giving.

The IRS has a policy of not telling the complainant (us in this instance) the status of its investigation. We can only hope that our complaint is treated seriously and that justice is done.