

PAPAL TRIP TO HOLY LAND REIGNITES DEBATE ON PIUS XII

Pope John Paul II's historic trip to the Holy Land received very fair coverage by the media. While there were several columnists and TV and radio pundits who made patently unfair comments, most news reports were not tainted with bias. What the trip did, however, was reignite the debate on what Pope Pius XII did during the Holocaust.

One of the most unfair statements on the event came from the online magazine, *Slate*. A writer for the magazine, Jack Shafer, even went so far as to justify anti-Catholicism just days prior to the pope's visit. "If anti-Catholic bigotry exists in America," he said, "it might have something to do with the Catholic Church's past conduct. Just this weekend, His Holiness John Paul II conceded as much when he finally got around to apologizing to the world for 2000 years of Catholic wickedness."

The *New Republic* and the *Nation* also used the papal statement on reconciliation as a club to beat up on the Church. Leon Wieseltier said he could not accept the pope's apology and Katha Pollitt concluded that the papal "apology" was a sign of "how weak" the Church has become. In virtually all the critical commentary on the trip, it was the pope's refusal to condemn Pius XII that disturbed the pundits most of all.

Not given the coverage it deserved were the remarks of the pope at the Holocaust Memorial. Addressing Nazism, the Holy Father asked, "How could man have such utter contempt for man?" He answered, "Because he had reached the point of contempt for God. Only a godless ideology could plan and carry out the extermination of a whole people."

The papal trip to the Holy Land provided the Catholic League

with ample opportunity to defend both Pope John Paul II and Pius XII. In this regard, the media proved to be extremely fair, allowing William Donohue, Robert Lockwood and Patrick Scully a chance to balance some of the more negative commentary.

There is much in this issue on Pope Pius XII. What angered the league about the “60 Minutes” interview with John Cornwell was not simply the angle that program took, but the fact that it came on the day before the Holy Father set foot in the Holy Land.

QUOTABLE

NBC’s “Today Show” (3/21/00)

DR. DONOHUE: ...I think the Catholics have to own up to the fact that they didn’t do enough during the Holocaust. There is a grand collective act of contrition. On the other hand, you know, Catholics are not a punching bag. And there are some people who want to keep upping the ante. It’s like it’s never enough.

“HARDBALL with Chris Matthews” (3-21-00)

DR. DONOHUE: Let’s get a couple of things straight about Pius XII. He wrote an encyclical in 1937 for his predecessor which condemned Nazism long before a lot of people in the Jewish community were doing so, certainly in the Protestant community and in the Catholic community.

In 1941, he was commended by the New York Times as the lone voice breaking out of the silence in Europe for condemning what was going on. The New York Times again, on Christmas Day

of 1942, did the same thing.

When the war was over in 1945, here's a pope who was congratulated by virtually every single Jewish organization throughout the world. He was given all kinds of money from the World Jewish Congress. We know that in his own backyard in Italy, something like 85 percent of all the Jews survived as a direct consequence of what he did. Who do you think opened up the convents? Who opened up the monasteries? There were Jewish women who gave birth inside these monasteries.

EPILOGUE: HOUSE CHAPLAIN

On March 23, House Speaker Dennis Hastert named Father Daniel P. Coughlin the new House Chaplain. Father Coughlin is Vicar for Priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Our official response was as follows:

"The Catholic League is pleased to note that the House Chaplain selection process has come to an end. Over the past few months, we issued 14 new releases on this subject and granted scores of interviews to the media. We raised many serious questions about the treatment of Father Timothy O'Brien in the selection process and were dismayed by the way the Republicans handled this matter. But we have no interest in fighting this fight any longer and we commend House Speaker Dennis Hastert for bringing this chapter to an end.

"All along we have said that our only interest has been in assuring that the selection process be given strict scrutiny by Republicans and Democrats alike. We have never had any interest in the outcome, only the process. With this said, the Catholic League commends Rev. Wright for stepping aside and

Father Coughlin for his appointment as the first Catholic to ever hold the post of House Chaplain.”

Throughout this four-month ordeal, the Catholic League stood squarely behind Father O’Brien. We are proud we did so. When he tells the whole story, there will be few who wish they hadn’t taken our side from the get-go.

POSTSCRIPT ON BOB JONES

Most Catholics are aware that some Protestants still carry a deep-seated animus against their religion, and if ever there were any doubt, the Bob Jones University controversy removed them all.

It was the patriarch himself, Rev. Bob Jones, who commented in 1928 on the prospect of seeing a Catholic, Al Smith, in the White House. “I’d rather see a nigger as President” is how he put it. His son, Bob Jones II, was just like his father, calling the Catholic Church “the Mother of Harlots” and a “satanic counterfeit.”

Bob Jones III is another loyal son; it was he who decided to post “the Mother of Harlots” comment, and others like them, on the Bob Jones University website in 2000. Moreover, Jones decided in February to speak directly to this issue: “If there are those who wish to charge us with being anti-Catholicism [sic], we plead guilty.”

Oh, yes, Jones hastens to add that “we love the practicing Catholic.” There’s a catch, though. Jones and his followers are praying that the practicing Catholic “leave the false system that has enslaved his soul.” Otherwise, we’ll all go to hell.

This takes on special significance when we remember that on March 3, Bob Jones III announced that the school was dropping its ban on interracial dating. What this shows is that the university is more passionate about its anti-Catholicism than it's racism. We don't expect this will change anytime soon.

QUOTABLE

NBC's "Today Show" 2-28-00

MATT LAUER: So what would you say to Catholic voters who aren't quite ready to accept this apology?

DONOHUE: I'd have to ask them, what do they want? Do they want him to bend over and take a paddle right to his behind? I mean, at what point do you say enough is enough?

ABC's "World News Tonight with Peter Jennings" 3-6-00

DONOHUE: Well, McCain tried to exploit the issue. And now when Bush apologizes I think most Catholics feels like 'let's move on, we have had it with this issue.'

REPUBLICANS DOGGED BY HOUSE CHAPLAIN ISSUE

The controversy over the new House chaplain continues to dog the Republicans. Instead of taking steps to put this issue behind them, they have allowed it to fester.

The Catholic League has become increasingly incensed over Republican duplicity and efforts by conservatives to smear Father Timothy O'Brien. William Donohue has been in conversation with Father O'Brien from the beginning and has been surprised by the viciousness of the assault on his character.

Myths regarding Father O'Brien abound. Contrary to what has been said, he never lobbied for the job. Worse, one of those responsible for making this charge said that the alleged lobbying took place in February or March of 1999, yet Father O'Brien never learned that the House Chaplain post was open until June 25, 1999.

Those opposed to Father O'Brien have not stopped lobbying the Catholic League. Indeed, the lobbying intensified to the point where the league accused Republican operatives of crossing church-state lines.

Joe Eule, chief of staff for Republican Representative J.D. Hayworth of Arizona, told league director of communications Pat Scully that "You guys had better come around on this." As we pointed out to the media, if someone from the Church, or from the Catholic League, were to call a congressman's office and say that, we would never hear the end of it.

We also heard from former congressman Michael Patrick Flanagan of Illinois (he was "deputized" by House Speaker Dennis Hastert). He told us we had stepped into the "absolute major leagues of power politics," and we told him we didn't need any of his lectures.

To make things even more bizarre, House Majority Leader Dick Armey told reporters that he had no idea what religion Father O'Brien was when he voted. When we offered proof that this could not be true, his communications director said this was not what her boss meant.

ABC's "World News Tonight" did a segment on this subject

giving a fair portrayal of the league's work. Perhaps our favorite story was the one in the Newark *Star Ledger* by Paul Mulshine. He said that Hastert and Armev "are engaged in a shouting match" with Bill Donohue. "Sometimes league officials get carried away," Mulshine wrote, "but that's all the more reason that no politician in his right mind would get them started."

GORE ENDORSED IN CHURCH

Vice president Al Gore was endorsed on February 13 by Rev. Floyd Flake inside Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church in Queens, New York.

"I don't do endorsements from across the pulpit," said Rev. Flake, "because I never know who's out there watching the types of laws that govern separation of church and state." He then proceeded to endorse Gore anyway. "But I will say to you this morning, and you read it well: This should be the next President of the United States." Rev. Flake then put his arm around the vice president.

The Catholic League said a double standard was at work. When Archbishop Justin Rigali of St. Louis recently implored Catholics to "elect those who respect the sacredness of life," he was roundly criticized. But there were no howls of protest screaming separation of church and state when Rev. Floyd Flake endorsed Vice President Al Gore from the pulpit. Was this because Rev. Flake isn't Catholic?

The next time someone tries to intimidate a Catholic priest from speaking out on contemporary moral issues, we said, this incident should be brought up. As for Gore, it would be interesting to know why his alleged interest in keeping church

and state separate allows him to oppose school vouchers but doesn't stop him from accepting endorsements in church. Or, for that matter, from accepting money in Buddhist temples.

HOUSE CHAPLAIN POST DEMANDS SCRUTINY

The quest for a new House chaplain began in June, 1999 when an 18-member committee of Republicans and Democrats sifted through almost 50 resumes. After interviewing 17 candidates, and selecting six as semifinalists, the top three names were submitted to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, House Majority Leader Dick Armey and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt; they were permitted to name any one of the finalists.

Their choice was Rev. Charles Wright, a Presbyterian minister. Rev. Wright placed third in the committee voting, however, the three that made the final selection claims not to have known about this. The committee's first choice was Rev. Timothy J. O'Brien, a Catholic priest and professor at Marquette University. Gephardt, a Democrat, voted for Father O'Brien; the two Republicans, Hastert and Armey, voted for Rev. Wright, citing his superior pastoral experience.

The Catholic League's initial response was to write to every member of the House asking them to reexamine this matter when it comes to him for a vote on January 27. Our concern was as follows:

"When Father Timothy O'Brien was vetoed as House chaplain, the central question left on the table was the reasoning that the House leaders employed when they rejected the overwhelming advice of their colleagues.

“To say that most members of the House would be more comfortable with a Protestant minister than with a Catholic priest—which is precisely what Dennis Hastert and Dick Armey are reported as saying—is to say that Catholic priests need not apply for this post. As Hastert and Armey know, never in the history of the U.S. has there been a Catholic priest chosen for House chaplain. This raises the question, If not now, when?”

What bothered the league most of all was the line of questions that the Republicans asked of Father O’Brien. Questions that probed whether a Catholic priest’s Roman collar might be seen as divisive by some congressmen were inappropriate, we insisted. So were questions that probed whether a single, celibate priest could adequately counsel family members.

After receiving the letter from the Catholic League, Rep. John Dingell called for the full disclosure of all the records relating to the selection of the new House Chaplain; the league publicly supported him in this effort.

A letter from Rep. Dick Armey to William Donohue relieved some of the league’s concerns, but still left other questions unanswered.

CANDIDATES ADDRESS RELIGION

The presidential campaign is off and running and already the Catholic League has entered the fray. In December, the league defended candidates from both parties on the subject of religion and politics.

Presidential candidates George W. Bush and Gary Bauer were defended by William Donohue when they both invoked the name of

Christ in a nationally-televised debate. In a news release, Donohue said that “it is dangerous to assume that the mere invocation of God’s name, or some recitation of faith, will lead us down a scary road where church and state will merge.” He labeled such tactics as “pure demagoguery, designed to intimidate those who believe in the public expression of religion.”

Donohue asked, “Would those who are upset with George W. Bush and Gary Bauer for citing Christ as the ‘political philosopher or thinker’ with whom they most identify with be just as upset had they answered Ayn Rand, the high Objectivist queen of atheism? Would those who have no problem marketing their anti-religion message in the public schools be just as upset had a candidate invoked the name of Hillel or Buddha?”

Donohue also praised Al Gore and George W. Bush for supporting faith-based social service institutions. “Those with an agenda to eradicate all vestiges of religion from the public square,” he said, were “the real threat to our freedoms.”

The league will continue to address such issues without aligning itself with either party.

Quotable:

After listening to William Donohue comment on the double standard that surrounds Catholicism and politics, Chris Matthews, on *Hardball* (MSNBC, Dec. 15) had this to say: “You know what you are, Bill? You are my gut talking.”