

# TED TURNER MATTER ENDS

On February 17, Ted Turner apologized to the Catholic League for the bigoted comments he made about the pope and the Polish people. The league quickly accepted his apology but then sought his suspension from professional baseball. After all, we said, Marge Schott, the owner of the Cincinnati Redlegs, was suspended for making bigoted remarks about blacks and Jews.

The analogy between Turner and Schott, however, is not without problems. Schott was the sole owner of the Cincinnati team. It is Time Warner that owns the Atlanta Braves. While it is true that Turner is a large shareholder in Time Warner (he owns 11%), the analogy between him and Schott is not exact. Moreover, Time Warner also owns the Atlanta Hawks basketball team, yet no one has asked professional basketball to suspend Turner.

What has just been described represents the basis of a conversation between William Donohue and Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig. On May 3, Selig called Donohue after the Catholic League president called his office to press the issue further. After listening to Selig's account, Donohue said "fair is fair" and thus ended the matter.

Donohue was impressed with Selig's forthrightness and conceded that the Schott-Turner analogy was not as tight as previously believed; he also conceded the point about the Atlanta Hawks. Selig said his investigation would continue and pledged to stay in touch until it is completed.

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# DISNEY DUMPS “DOGMA”; MOVIE, AND PROTEST, PROCEED

In what will surely be remembered as one of the biggest victories in the history of the Catholic League, Disney CEO Michael Eisner bowed to pressure by putting the squeeze on Miramax co-chairman, Bob and Harvey Weinstein, effectively telling them that the Disney/Miramax label will not appear on the new anti-Catholic movie, “Dogma.” Miramax faxed its news release to the Catholic League on April 7.

Two days prior to this decision, the Catholic League had issued a news release entitled, “Disney/Miramax Poised to Anger Catholics Again.” What prompted the release was a story in *Premiere* magazine and the *New York Post* about the movie. In it, Independent Film Channel host John Pierson was quoted as saying, “The Catholic League probably will have a problem.” Just last December, in *Playboy*, it was said, “If members of the Catholic League don’t picket this one, they’re comatose.”

The league’s recent actions were antedated by a letter of July 17, 1998 from William Donohue to Michael Eisner. “From what I have learned,” Donohue said of the movie, “it looks as though Catholic sensibilities will be offended once again.” He then said, “Perhaps it is not too late for something to be done about this.” Eisner never replied.

The Catholic League has a copy of the script for “Dogma.” In the film, Joseph and Mary have sex and a descendant of theirs is a lapsed Catholic who works at an abortion clinic; it is said of Mary that “Believing a wife never humped her husband—that’s just gullibility”; God is played by Alanis Morissette, a singer known for her nude videos and songs about oral sex; the 13<sup>th</sup> apostle resembles Jerry Springer; and the Mass is compared to lousy sex.

It is no wonder that Ben Affleck, who stars in the movie, was recently quoted as saying, “these things, definitely, are meant to push buttons.” The Catholic League, of course, has a few buttons of its own to push, and we won’t hold back.

The latest propaganda is that writer/producer Kevin Smith is a “devout Catholic.” Nonsense. “I stuck it out as a Catholic for a long time,” he is quoted as saying, “but in the end—you know, it’s called the Celebration of the Mass, but it’s no party. No one’s having a good time.”

The Weinsteins have purchased the film rights to “Dogma” and are looking for a new distributor (no date has been set for the opening). We will fight them to the end, assembling a coalition of allies to do so. One thing is for sure—Disney has finally gotten the message.

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## **SAN FRANCISCO SHOWDOWN**

An anti-Catholic group, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, held a public celebration in San Francisco on Easter Sunday. It did so with the approval of city officials and over the objections of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, the Catholic League and Catholics for Truth and Justice; the latter is a local group of activists.

When the so-called Sisters asked the Department of Parking and Traffic for permission to close off some blocks on Easter Sunday, they were denied. But the Board of Supervisors unanimously overturned that decision.

The league’s objections centered on the group’s blatant attacks on the Eucharist. For example, they have previously held a “Condom Savior Mass” wherein condoms were distributed

as communion wafers. In 1987, during the pope's visit to the U.S., they held a public exorcism of the Holy Father. After being contacted by the Catholic League, Mayor Willie Brown publicly asked the Sisters to choose another day, but he also privately blasted us for our protest (the exchange he had with William Donohue is published in this issue).

After the league took its protest to the media, two members of the City Supervisors reversed their vote, but it wasn't enough to stop the event. More than 7,000 anti-Catholic bigots took to the streets on Easter Sunday, holding a "Hunky Jesus" contest. The league hit them with an ad in the *San Francisco Chronicle* that sent everyone reeling (see inside for details).

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## **TED TURNER APOLOGY ACCEPTED; SUSPENSION FROM BASEBALL SOUGHT**

On February 16, TV-mogul Ted Turner made offensive anti-Catholic and anti-Polish remarks. The next day, the Catholic League issued a news release criticizing Turner for his comments. Turner apologized to us that same day, and on February 18, we accepted his apology. Presidential hopeful Gary Bauer also criticized Turner.

Turner made his remarks at a meeting of the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association. According to news reports, he drew laughter and applause with remarks about sex, the Ten Commandments and Pope John Paul II.

Turner, who has five children, commented that everyone should promise to have no more than one child (his wife Jane Fonda

has two of her own, plus one adopted child). At the conference, he dubbed the Ten Commandments “a little out of date,” adding that “If you’re only going to have 10 rules, I don’t know if prohibiting adultery should be one of them.” William Donohue’s comment on this remark, which was featured in *Newsweek*, was “perhaps someone ought to bring that up with Jane.”

Of the pope, Turner showed his idea of ethnic humor by lifting his foot toward the audience saying, “Ever seen a Polish mine detector?” He then said the pope should “get with it. Welcome to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

The response to the league’s news release was unbelievable, leaving Turner with no place to hide. Here is the statement we received from Turner Broadcasting System: “Mr. Turner regrets any offense his comments may have caused while in Washington, D.C. and extends his heartfelt apologies.” While this ended our feud with Turner, it wasn’t the end of the story.

In 1993, Marge Schott, owner of the Cincinnati Redlegs, was suspended from baseball for one year and fined \$25,000; she was also sent to sensitivity training workshops. The Catholic League thought it only fair, then, that Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig treat Turner the same way, and that is why we called for a one-year suspension. Tom Droleskey of Christ or Chaos had made an earlier plea for justice.

We are opposed to mind-control and therefore rejected the workshops idea. Moreover, we thought it was ludicrous to fine a billionaire \$25,000. But that didn’t stop us from advising that Turner be required to make a contribution to Catholic Charities.

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# ABORTION ALTERNATIVE DEFENDED

Germaine Greer, one of the world's leading feminists, stunned her English colleagues when she blasted feminists for trumpeting their "pro-abortion" politics. In her new book, *The Whole Woman Abortion*, Greer continues to argue the necessity of keeping abortion legal, but criticizes feminists for touting abortion as a victory for women. Greer is best known for her earlier work, *The Female Eunuch*, which was a radical feminist attack on men and marriage.

"A woman who is unable to protect her cervix from exposure to male hyperfertility is certainly not calling the shots," writes Greer. She faults those who take pride in presenting to irresponsible women the "right" to abortion. "The crowning insult is that this ordeal is represented to her as some kind of a privilege: her sad and onerous duty is garbed in the rhetoric of a civil right." Greer, now 60, blames her own infertility on an abortion she had while she was a student.

Best of all, Greer has publicly defended Cardinal Thomas Winning's program which pays pregnant women considering abortion for abandoning their plans. In the past two years, 50 babies have been born to such women, mostly unmarried teenagers; there are now 50 more on the way. This is what real choice means, Greer says.

By taking this first step, we hope that Greer, and others, may someday realize that abortion is never a good option for anyone.

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# **“CONDOM CHRISTMAS TREE” FAILS; CHRISTMAS BASHING CONTINUES**

Levi Strauss, the San Francisco-based apparel company, wanted to put up a giant Christmas tree in New York’s Central Park, adorned with thousands of condoms. But it ran into opposition from the Catholic League and lost.

The denim manufacturer thought that its “condom Christmas tree” would be a fitting tribute to World AIDS Day on December 1, and sought to erect its tree near Wollman Skating Rink in Central Park. When the league learned of this, it immediately contacted the Makkos Organization, the private owners who operate the rink, and asked them to nix the plan; the league also contacted the media. With support from Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Makkos said no to Levi Strauss.

Meanwhile, as Fidel Castro was making Christmas an official holiday in Cuba, atheists in Cincinnati were seeking to challenge the constitutionality of a federal statute that declares Christmas to be a federal holiday. The difference seems to be that the pope hasn’t visited Cincinnati.

From coast to coast, there was a concerted effort to ban the public expression of religion. Led by the ACLU, American Atheists and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, attempts were made to bar crèches on public property and to alter Christmas concerts and festivities. Those efforts yielded mixed results.

The Catholic League received no opposition from anyone in erecting its crèches in Central Park and in Philadelphia’s Independence Park, and it was successful in its effort to have a crèche installed alongside a menorah in the Cortland Manor (NY) Community Center, but the outcome was different

elsewhere.

What the league found most objectionable was the privileging of Judaism that occurred in places like St. Ann (MO), Las Vegas (NV), Little Rock (AK) and Somerset (MA). In all four towns, those who challenged crèches on public property said they found no problem with menorah displays, thus exposing their agenda to engage in Christmas bashing (in Somerset, a crèche finally did appear).

Victories were recorded, however, in Port St. Lucie (FL), Marshfield (WI), Concord, (NH) and Pittsfield and Worcester (both of MA); Jersey City (NJ) continued its fight with the ACLU, and another battle waged in Eddy County (NM). The Supreme Court needs to end this madness by offering detailed guidance on the distinction between government accommodation of religion, which is legitimate, and government sponsorship, which is not.

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## **A QUIET VICTORY**

In mid-November, a Catholic League member contacted us about something unusual. A nationwide store, Wet Seals, Inc., with headquarters in Foothill Ranch, California, was selling women's panties with the face of Mary and baby Jesus on the front and back of the underwear. We secured a pair and then contacted the president of the company, Kathy Bronstein.

We are delighted to report that Ms. Bronstein was disturbed to learn of this item and ordered the panties removed from the shelves of her store just before Thanksgiving. When we learned that they were still being sold in one of her other stores, Contempo Casuals, we contacted her again. She cooperated further and had the disputed item removed once and for all.



It is a credit to Kathy Bronstein that she acted with dispatch to rectify this situation. It also goes to demonstrate that, contrary to what our critics say, the Catholic League does not always seek to go public every time it is offended.

We are not sure who was initially responsible for conceptualizing and making the panties. But we cannot believe that whoever did so didn't know exactly what he was doing. It is one thing to make a fashion statement wearing a cross, quite another to make panties with Madonna and Child emblazoned on them. We're glad we put this one to rest before the holidays, and we hope we won't see anything like this ever again.

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## **“ALLY McBEAL” OFFENDS; FOX WILL END ATTACKS**

The November 2 episode of the Fox TV show, “Ally McBeal,” featured a nun who sued the Church because she was dismissed for breaking her vow of celibacy. Throughout the show, repeated attacks were made on Catholic sacraments, teachings and practices. Here is a sample of the lines that were voiced.

Ally: “Nuns are not supposed to have sex except with other nuns.”

Nun: “A priest has sex with a boy, he gets transferred. Me they...At least my lover was of legal age for God's sake.”

Female Colleague: “Maybe I can talk them into rehiring her. I'm very good at flirting with clergy. At Communion, I always got the extra wafer.”

Nun: "If the sex is great, you can't be a nun."

Ally (in confessional): "I went to bed with a guy, partly because he had a uh, uh...It was uh big, big. God, I slept with it...him."

Priest: "I often hear that size doesn't matter. How was it?"

Ally: "It was great, unbelievable. You have no idea. I mean, I assume you don't. It was amazing. Am I forgiven?"

The Catholic League wasted no time issuing the following statement:

"The bigots are at work again. On the September 28 episode of 'Ally McBeal,' a cheap shot about priest pedophilia was made. That subject returns this week, only with much more in the way of offense. Now we have Father O'Reilly videotaping confessions about sex for his documentary, 'World's Naughtiest Confessions.' And, of course, we have nuns that are degraded and sexual comments that are designed to disparage.

"We will take our case to Fox, which has already been inundated with complaints. Make no mistake: all of this—every bit of it—is intentional."

Our news release led to a tidal wave of media interest, hitting both the electronic and print media around the country; even international sources picked up the story. Fortunately, there was a happy ending.

The immediate response from the league was to ask Fox's Department of Standards whether there were any future shows of "Ally McBeal" that dealt with Catholicism and, if so, whether the content could be disclosed at this time. We were assured that no such shows were planned and, furthermore, that "it won't happen again." We plan to hold them to that.

There was one report that said Fox didn't make these concessions. Perhaps this was a face-saving effort. If not,

we'll do battle again.

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# FCC CONTACTED OVER "HISTERIA!"

It was bad enough that the show was classic Catholic-baiting. What made it worse was that it was an animated-history lesson for kids done to fulfill FCC requirements. We are speaking of an edition of the Warner Bros. show "Histeria!" that ran nationwide on October 31 and November 1.

In the show that we addressed, there was a portrayal of the Inquisition, "Convert or Die," that depicted a game show where the contestants are tied to a wheel and tortured for every wrong answer. The host of the show, a bishop, is called "Torquemada" by the prisoner-contestants.

In the show, the bishop gives the contestant 20 seconds to confess "the single most terrible heresy you've committed." We get answers like, "I ate meat on the day of abstinence," etc. The bishop informs him that the correct answer is "I have read books forbidden by the Catholic Church and am a big stinky heretic." He adds, "the next time you commit a mortal sin against the Church, don't be surprised if someone comes up to you and says....[interruption]—'Convert or Die.'"

Usually, our complaints just go to the offending network. But in this case, we went directly to the FCC. By its own admission, WB says that "Histeria!" is supposed to be an "original and hysterically amusing way" of "fulfilling the FCC educational programming requirement." We hope the FCC doesn't find anything "hysterically amusing" about our complaint.

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# RALLY AGAINST “CORPUS CHRISTI” A HIT; CRITICS PAN THE PLAY

On October 13, the night of the gala opening of “Corpus Christi,” the Catholic League led over 2,000 demonstrators in a spirited rally against the play. Joining Catholics at the rally were Protestants, Jews, Muslims and Buddhists.

“The protest began with a fiery speech from William A. Donohue, the president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights,” is how the *New York Times* characterized the rally. “Holding a bullhorn inside an area barricaded by the police,” the article said, “Mr. Donohue shouted criticisms at the opposition. ‘You are the real authoritarians at heart,’ he said. ‘We’re the ones that believe in tolerance, not you phonies.’”

A band of 300 counterdemonstrators was there to protest the Catholic League’s free speech and to defend the hate speech of playwright Terrence McNally. A Catholic News Service article incorrectly said that it was “a somewhat smaller group” than the Catholic League crowd (as the *Times* said, we “dwarfed” them); the same article incorrectly said that “hundreds of protesters” were at our rally (2,000 was the official police statistic).

The play was not only offensive, it was lousy theater. Fintan O’Toole of the *New York Daily News* entitled his review, “A Texas Chainsaw Massacre of the Bible,” commenting that it was “utterly devoid of moral seriousness or artistic integrity.” In the *New York Post*, Clive Barnes called the play “dull,” and

said it exemplified "boredom." In the same newspaper, Father Richard John Neuhaus blasted "Corpus Christi" for its "intellectual and moral incoherence," saying that the play can be viewed "as a comprehensive exercise in anti-Americanism."

David Lyons of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that "the problem" with the play is its "parasitic insubstantiality"; he added that the play deserves to be rebuked for its "fatheadedness." The *Washington Post* noted that "Self-pitying artists (Oscar Wilde, John Lennon et al.) have long had the habit of comparing themselves to Jesus, but this play plummets to a whole new level of grandiosity." And Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* remarked that "The excitement stops right after the metal detectors," a comment on the airport devices that the theater installed to ward off violence. Brantley characterized the writing as "lazy" and finished his piece by branding the play "flat and simpleminded."

All in all it proved to be a great victory for the Catholic League.