

# A NOBEL PRIZE FOR ANTI-CATHOLICISM

On October 9, the Swedish Academy awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature to Dario Fo, the Italian playwright who is most known for his attacks on the Roman Catholic Church. His most famous work, "Mistero Buffo" ("Comic Mystery"), was branded by the Vatican in 1977 as the "most blasphemous show in the history of television"; it is not surprising, then, that the Vatican expressed astonishment when it learned that Fo had been given the Nobel Prize.

William Donohue released the following statement on Fo's selection:

"I am well aware of the extent to which literature has become thoroughly politicized and debased in the West. Giving the Nobel Prize in Literature to an anti-Catholic bigot, and to a man who describes his own scatological work as 'grotesque,' settles the issue: the deans of literature enjoy celebrating what the common folk regard as trash.

"It is not accurate to maintain, as one Italian critic did, that this prize means that 'everything changes, even literature changes.' No, for that would suggest that the vector of change in the humanities has been on a course other than decline. Even more unbelievable is the comment by the Swedish Academy that Fo 'has opened our eyes to abuses and injustices.' That this can be said about a man whose defense of Stalinism is as well known as his hatred of Catholicism proves that the ladies and gentlemen who chose Fo have been blinded from reality for decades."

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# PETITIONS AND BOYCOTT STIR DISNEY

The Catholic League turned up the heat against those responsible for "Nothing Sacred" by flooding Disney with petitions and launching a boycott against the show's sponsors. The response to both drives was spectacular.

When the league asked its members to sign a petition against Disney for promoting the ABC show, "Nothing Sacred," they reacted with characteristic zeal. Hundreds of thousands of petitions were signed and delivered to Disney chairman Michael Eisner. In addition to Catholic League members, the petition was signed by bishops, priests, religious, nuns and those of other faiths. Entire parishes signed on, as did orders of nuns. Most touching were the sixth grade students from Holy Name School in Ebensburg, Pennsylvania; they each wrote their own letter to Mr. Eisner.

Getting to Eisner was one thing, but it was quite another when the league decided to warn prospective sponsors of the price they would pay for supporting "Nothing Sacred." In an ad that was paid for by league members in a special appeal, the Catholic League published a statement in *Advertising Age*, the flagship trade house publication in the advertising industry. The ad was published in the September 8 edition, just ten days before the show premiered; it is printed on p. 2.

The league sought the support of many other organizations in its boycott against the sponsors. Here is a list of those groups that signed the boycott at press time: American Catholic Lawyers Association; American Family Association; American Life League; Americans United for the Pope; Ancient Order of Hibernians (Division #4, New York County); Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation; Cardinal Newman Society; Catholic Answers, Inc.; Catholic Coalition of Westchester; Catholic

Defense League of Minnesota; Chinese Catholic Information Center; Concerned Women for America; Focus on the Family; League of Catholic Voters; Legatus; Jewish Action Alliance; Jews for Morality; Morality in Media; Muslim Coalition/Peace Press Association; Pro-Life Action League; Sons of Italy, Commission for Social Justice; Women for Faith and Family.

Just as we promised in the ad, the league would garner support from Protestant, Jewish and Muslim organizations, as well as from Catholic ones. It is now up to everyone to follow through with the boycott. A list of those advertisers who sponsored the premiere edition of “Nothing Sacred” appears on

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## **MOTHER TERESA, R.I.P.**

When the Catholic League learned of the death of Mother Teresa, it immediately issued the following comment to the media:

“In an age when superlatives are used with abandon to describe the contributions of public figures, it is testimony to Mother Teresa’s greatness that no sane person would deny her the status as the world’s most giving human being. She was a model for men and women, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. There was no human life, born or unborn, that she was not willing to sacrifice for and there was no human condition so debased that she did not seek to remedy. But perhaps most of all she will be remembered as someone who never sought the honor she so sincerely earned.”

As soon as Mother Teresa’s death was announced, Fox News Network called William Donohue to discuss her work. He made the point that in addition to her service to the poor, Mother Teresa was a principled and courageous woman who wasn’t afraid

to go against the grain. In particular, he cited her statement at the National Prayer Breakfast in 1994. In front of President Clinton and his wife, Mother Teresa called abortion “the greatest destroyer of peace in the world.”

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## **MEDIA BINGE OVER “NOTHING SACRED”; CLINTON ASKED TO REPLY**

When the Catholic League first registered its objections to the ABC show, “Nothing Sacred,” it had no idea that it would create such a whirlwind of publicity. Nor did it think that it would be asking President Clinton to make a statement regarding the show at a Rose Garden conference attended by league president William Donohue.

As media interest in the league’s protest grew, and as ABC itself struck back with a press conference responding to the league’s charges, it soon became apparent that this was an issue that wouldn’t die a quick death. Even Michael Eisner, the chairman of Disney (Disney owns ABC) attacked the league without provocation in an interview he did with *Business Week*.

The league was particularly pleased with the strong response from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Father Gregory Coiro, the Director of Media Relations for the archdiocese, was unequivocal in his criticisms of the show. Father Coiro also defended the league’s position before the media.

Unfortunately, a number of priests reviewed the pilot favorably. Worse, some of the writers for the series are priests. The league, of course, always presses its

independence by respectfully disagreeing with these assessments.

It was in late June that the league first learned of the fall show, "Nothing Sacred." We spotted a piece in *Entertainment Weekly* and were sent copies of advance reviews in various newspapers by our loyal members. *Entertainment Weekly* described the lead character, Father Ray, as an "irreverent priest who questions the existence of God, feels lust in his heart, and touches people's souls." The *Tampa Tribune* and the *Orange County Register* expressed similar thoughts.

We then tapped into ABC's website to see what they were saying; we also called the network and they faxed us over the promotional material. Here's is how ABC framed its remarks:

"It's tough being a priest in the '90s, just ask Father Ray (Kevin Anderson). In one morning alone, he has nearly been fired for advising a pregnant teenager to follow her own instincts. He has had to turn down a bribe in the confessional, even though he's desperate for money to keep his church afloat. His college flame has just walked back into his life and reignited old passions. And now his mentor is asking him to deliver a sermon proving the existence of God. How should he know if God exists?...he hasn't even read the book yet!"

On July 10, the league issued its first news release on the show, stating, in part, the following: "The last time Disney portrayed the Catholic clergy was in its Miramax production, 'Priest,' and now it appears that it is picking up where it left off by providing viewers with another sick look at priests."

On July 24, after watching the pilot to the program, William Donohue said that the show was "worse than expected"; here is what he said:

“There are two major objections to ‘Nothing Sacred’: a) the show promotes the most positive stereotype of Catholics who dissent from Church teachings while fostering the most negative stereotype of those who remain loyal to the Church and b) the show deliberately denigrates the official teachings of the Church by unfavorably contrasting them to the trendy positions of dissenting Catholics.

“The leading priest, Father Ray, comes from a dysfunctional family, thinks of his vocation as merely a job, admits that he isn’t sure of the existence of God, violates his duty as a confessor and rejects the Church’s teachings on sexuality. But he loves the homeless, ponders a love affair with an old flame and tells his adversaries to ‘go fax yourself.’ Quite naturally, those Catholics who accept the teachings of the Magisterium are portrayed as cold-hearted, selfish and tyrannical persons.

“It is amazing to hear Father Ray tell his parishioners that it’s time to ‘call a moratorium on the sins of the flesh’; he then says that the Church’s teachings on homosexuality, promiscuity, abortion and contraception can be ignored because the Bible says little or nothing about them. He boasts that he will no longer be a ‘sexual traffic cop’ and advises those who want such a priest to go elsewhere.

“This Disney/ABC show is nothing more than a political statement against the Catholic Church. The goal is to put a positive spin on Catholic priests who prefer Hollywood’s libertine vision of sexuality to the moral teachings of the Church. This propaganda is fodder for dissenting Catholics and anti-Catholic bigots alike. We hope that others will join with us in what is only the beginning of our protest.

“Disney/ABC would never put a positive spin on a priest who rejected the Church’s teachings on welfare reform, nuclear war, immigration and the death penalty, for to do so would be to undermine their own politics. On the other hand, if they

really believe that Father Ray is not offensive, then why not make him a black minister or a Jewish rabbi?"

The league's next step was to ask Michael Eisner to reveal the names of the five priests whom Eisner publicly said reviewed the pilot favorably. The response from Disney Vice President for Corporate Communications, John Dreyer, was to say, "I am sure that you will understand that we do not distribute the names, addresses or phone numbers of people with whom we consult."

It is interesting to note that when co-executive producer David Manson and another ABC official were to meet with Father Coiro, they declined the opportunity to do so once they learned that Donohue was going to attend. Manson said, "we are not prepared to meet with him."

Things came to a head when the White House called to invite Donohue to attend a Rose Garden speech on religious liberty that President Clinton was scheduled to make on August 14. Donohue agreed to go, but he also released a statement to the press announcing his latest strategy.

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## **DONOHUE ATTENDS WHITE HOUSE ADDRESS**

At the invitation of the White House, William Donohue attended an address by President Clinton on religious liberty in the federal workplace. The following is Donohue's assessment of the speech that was released to the media:

"Overall, the President's executive order on the rights of religious expression in the federal workplace is a welcome

clarification of existing law. Regrettably, no Catholic was invited to participate in the drafting of this statement. What makes this even worse, is that since May, the White House has had no official appointed liaison to the Catholic community. Together, these two factors suggest that the voice of Catholics is not important for the White House to hear. This is mind-boggling given the fact that one in every four Americans is Catholic.

“If there is one area that the federal guidelines did not address, it is the right of Christians to have the identical rights that the Jewish community presently enjoys with regard to religious expression in U. S. post offices. To be specific, menorahs are erected every year in post offices across the country, yet no post office is permitted to display a crèche. This is troubling given the fact that the U. S. Supreme Court has declared menorahs to be every bit as religious as nativity scenes are. Therefore, while this executive order is appreciated, there is still room for much needed improvement.”

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## **CINNAMON “NUN BUN” ADS WITHDRAWN**

Following a protest by the Catholic League, Cinnabon, the national chain of food stores that sells cinnamon buns, recently withdrew all of its ads that featured a nun character. And Bongo Java, the creator of the cinnamon bun which resembles Mother Teresa, has halted production of its bun.

The Cinnabon ads featured an elderly stern-looking nun in a habit brandishing a ruler; she had rosary beads draped around



her neck. The ads were pulled June 15 from some 350 stores around the country.

After receiving several complaints from league members about the Cinnabon ad, Dr. Donohue wrote to the president of the company, Dennis Waldron, asking him to retire the offending ads. Waldron called Donohue and listened to his complaint, explaining that he would get back to him within a few days. He was courteous and concerned.

When they spoke next, Waldron pledged that the ads would all be withdrawn. In business for 12 years, Waldron said he had never experienced any type of bad publicity and was not about to start now. Donohue was impressed with Waldon's sincere and professional manner, as well as with his decision.

In the Bongo Java case, the league previously pressed the company to stop production of its cinnamon bun that bears a likeness to Mother Teresa; we also objected to the T-shirts, mugs, etc. The official word from Bongo Java, as determined by reading its web site statement and by phoning the company, is that production of the "Mother Teresa" bun has stopped. Yet the website still sells some of the items that the league found objectionable.

The league is pleased that Mother Teresa and her lawyers appealed to Bongo Java to stop production of the bun, as well as the other items. But much of the credit in this case must be given to Catholic League members themselves.

The April *Catalyst* ran a story about this issue and listed the name and address of someone to contact. Well, league members did just that: when we phoned the company, we were told that "tons of letters" were sent taking Bongo Java to task.

The league is delighted with the results in both cases and is especially delighted that its members played such a vital role in the Bongo Java case.

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# LEGAL SOFTWARE OUTLET CHANGES LOGO

A San Francisco-based legal support software company, Legal Summation, has agreed to accede to the Catholic League's request to change its logo from one that resembled the Sacred Heart of Jesus to one that bears no clear relationship.

The logo in question was a heart with the word "Summation" draped across it; flames emanated from the red and blue design. The league called to the company's attention the likeness of its logo to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and asked that it make modifications that would remove all similarities. The league also mentioned that it had fought successfully with the House of Blues to have the nightclub chain change its "Sacred Heart" logo.

Paul Thompson of Legal Summation called William Donohue to discuss the matter and was most considerate of the league's position. Indeed, Thompson made a decision on the spot to alter the logo.

On May 19, a letter from Legal Summation was sent to Donohue confirming Thompson's decision, saying that the company "has agreed to revise our tattoo motif to remove the flames that caused the artwork to be likened to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and hence cause offense." A copy of the new logo was sent to the league for confirmation and it was found acceptable.

We commend Mr. Thompson for his forthright understanding of the league's position and his willingness to alter his company's logo.

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# FARRAKHAN MALIGNS CATHOLICISM

On the April 13th edition of *Meet the Press*, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan made several disparaging comments about Catholics and the Catholic Church; he also defended his bigoted remarks about Jews.

Farrakhan did not dispute a comment that he previously made stating that Catholicism has been a white religion designed to oppress blacks. He also did not disagree with a remark made by one of his minions that the pope is a “cracker.” He even blamed the Catholic Church for slavery. When asked if his comments were anti-Catholic, Farrakhan retorted that the “Catholic Church should not fasten on our words [it should] fasten on our deeds.”

Farrakhan then cited recent criminal acts committed by white Catholic men in Philadelphia, Bridgeport and Chicago as examples of Catholic behavior. He questioned how the Church could be “the bastion of love” when “all of this hate is coming towards us out of the Church.” He also charged that Pope Pius XII “looked the other way” during the Holocaust.

Farrakhan’s explosion occurred just days after he learned that Cardinal Bevilacqua refused to meet with him in Philadelphia. Farrakhan had sought a meeting with the Archbishop of Philadelphia, as well as with local Jewish leaders, and was turned down—for reasons evident to everyone but Farrakhan.

There was one interesting aspect to Farrakhan’s Philadelphia visit that did not get much attention: it was at the invitation of the mayor’s office that Farrakhan held a rally at Tindley Temple Methodist Church, a breach of separation of

church and state that somehow got by the watchful eye of the press.

Following Farrakhan's *Meet the Press* appearance, the league issued the following news release:

"It is no secret that Farrakhan is anti-Catholic, as well as anti-Jewish. On *Meet the Press*, he was given an opportunity to retract his bigoted remarks, but he chose not to do so. Indeed, he made several new anti-Catholic statements, the most of absurd of which was to blame all Catholics for the conduct of a few Catholic thugs.

"Farrakhan is a minister of hate and that is why it is good news to learn that Catholic and Jewish leaders are refusing to meet with him in Philadelphia this week. They should no more dialogue with Farrakhan than with the Imperial Wizards of the Ku Klux Klan."

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## BETHANY COLLEGE HOSTS ANTI-CATHOLIC PLAY

Bethany College, a Disciples of Christ institution located near Wheeling, West Virginia, recently hosted *Agnes of God*, a notoriously anti-Catholic play turned movie. The play was performed May 7 to May 10 on the Bethany campus. It was the senior project of a female student in the department of fine arts. Faculty members supervised the project and the completed work will be filed in the college library archives.

The Catholic League expressed its outrage to the president of the university and to the media in the Wheeling area. Here is the text of those remarks:

“It is always distressing to learn about anti-Catholicism on our nation’s campuses. But it is particularly disturbing to learn that a Christian college would actually sponsor bigotry against the Catholic Church. *Agnes of God*, which was released as a movie in 1985, has been branded as anti-Catholic by Hollywood critic Michael Medved. Movie critic Roger Ebert told his audience that the psychiatrist in the movie, played by Jane Fonda, ‘has a personal hatred of the Catholic Church.’

“The student who chose this movie, and the faculty who found it acceptable, obviously could have selected a script that was not offensive to Catholics. But, instead, they chose to do a play about a nun who murders her baby in the convent and flushes it down the toilet. This is a sad commentary on their thinking and it is an embarrassing statement about the Christian status of this Christian college.”

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## LEAGUE PROTESTS KLAN RALLY IN PITTSBURGH

On April 5, 50 members of the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan marched in downtown Pittsburgh, drawing public denunciation from the Catholic League. Some wore Nazi uniforms and organizers of the march declared it a victory for white supremacists. The league denounced the march and was particularly upset with the attempt by the Klan to appeal to Roman Catholics for support.

The league also objected to a bogus story in the Tribune-Review, a newspaper from the eastern Pittsburgh community of Greensburg, suggesting that the Klan has “dropped its anti-Catholic message.” This story, along with Klan propaganda, fed

the rumor that the Klan is now receptive to Catholics.

Bishop Donald Wuerl criticized the Klan rally and held a special Mass before the march. William Donohue addressed both the Klan's appeal and the story in the Tribune-Review in a news release; it is printed below.

"From its inception, the Klan has been viciously anti-Catholic, as well as anti-black and anti-Jewish. All the phony appeals to Catholics that are now being made can never change the Klan's notoriously anti-Catholic heritage. That is why it is important for all Catholics, and especially Catholic leaders, to denounce without equivocation the march in Pittsburgh.

"It is especially disturbing to read news reports, like the one that appeared in the Tribune-Review, that say that the Klan has dropped its anti-Catholic message. It has done nothing of the kind. Indeed, I personally contacted the sociologist who was cited in the story as the basis for this conclusion and she quickly branded the statements attributed to her as false. Professor Kathleen Blee, Director of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Pittsburgh, maintains that the Klan has not ceased to be anti-Catholic and nothing in her scholarship has ever suggested otherwise.

"Because the Klan is a paramilitary terrorist organization, it should be given no presumptive right to exist in a democratic nation. However, the authorities have seen fit to protect their right to march. This makes it all the more imperative for Catholics to reject the Klan's overtures by joining the scheduled counter-demonstration against them."