

TIME EXPLAINS ITSELF

The March 10 edition of *Time* published a column entitled “Winners and Losers” that listed Pope John Paul II as a “loser” for condemning ads that “shock, titillate and tempt.” Next to a picture of the Pope, it said, “But will Calvin Klein listen?”

The league sent a letter to the magazine stating the following: “Why the Pope should be branded a loser for criticizing sleaze is not certain, but this much is: Calvin Klein listened when the Catholic League called for a boycott – he withdrew some of his most offensive ads.” We added, “So what makes you think that Klein, and others, might not listen to the Vatican?”

Amy Musher of the editorial office of *Time* said that “We regret any offense at finding the Vatican in the Losers column, for certainly none was intended.” She made it clear that “the Pope was not being ‘branded a loser’ for criticizing sleaze in advertising; we meant merely to suggest that, in terms of Calvin Klein’s past record (even though certain ads were withdrawn, after boycott threats), official condemnation may not be enough to prevent a recurrence of shocking or titillating ads.”

Musher said that the league’s letter was “circulated among the appropriate editors for their interest and attention.”

WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

CHECKED IN SAN DIEGO

Thank to the efforts of the league's San Diego chapter president, Carl Horst, the religious rights of a young Hispanic woman have been restored in the workplace. On February 12, Ash Wednesday, the woman had the ashes on her forehead forcibly removed by her supervisor at Silvergate Retirement Residence; her boss wiped her forehead clean with a dish cloth after she refused a request to remove the ashes herself.

In response to this incident, the league sought four outcomes: it wanted a public apology from Silvergate; disciplinary action against the offender; sensitivity training for Silvergate employees regarding religious liberty in the workplace; and a formal record of this incident placed in the personnel files of the woman. The league won on all four counts.

In a news release on this subject, the national office exclaimed that "It is unacceptable for someone to wipe the ashes from the forehead of a Catholic as it would be for him to yank the yarmulke from the head of a Jew." In a statement to the San Diego media, Horst argued that the offensive act "was unlawful and reveals an attitude towards Catholics which will not be tolerated."

From the beginning, no one at Silvergate denied that the offense had taken place. Nonetheless, there was initial resistance to the league's demands. But after public pressure was triggered by the league via the media, it soon became apparent that Silvergate had to yield.

An internal investigation by Silvergate revealed that the offense necessitated strong action. As a result, the guilty supervisor was fired. Then came a personal apology, followed by a public apology. The workshops we asked for were announced

to the staff and the woman's records were made to reflect what happened. The woman decided not to return to Silvergate, though she was given the opportunity to do so.

The chief administrator of Silvergate acted responsibly by saying, "I strongly disapprove of any discriminatory action based on an employee's religious beliefs. Our staff will receive the appropriate training regarding all Civil Liberty issues including those dealing with religious issues." He added, "A letter of apology has been sent to [name withheld to protect her privacy] in addition to this public apology and the necessary disciplinary actions have been taken regarding this matter based upon our findings to date."

League chapter president Horst was unyielding in his efforts to secure justice. He met with the woman and her family, communicated with Silvergate over the matter, discussed the incident with the media and let all parties know that the league would not rest until we won.

As always, the league's preference was to resolve this issue by mobilizing the court of public opinion, as opposed to entering a brief in court. But because of the gravity of this incident, Horst, an attorney, notified Silvergate that the league was prepared to enter both arenas.

The league is pleased with the action taken by the chief administrator of Silvergate and was only too happy to take the lead in resolving this case.

"NIGHT SINS" SINS AGAINST

CATHOLICS

On February 23 and 25, CBS aired a two-part movie, "Night Sins," starring Valerie Bertinelli. Based on a novel by Tami Hoag, the second part of the series portrayed a priest who passionately kisses a woman in church and a crazed deacon who assaults the priest and then commits suicide; we also learn that the deacon harbored the body of his wife and misled many altar boys.

League president William Donohue saw the movie and sent the following statement to the media, as well as to CBS:

"Having just gotten back from California after meeting with many in the Hollywood industry, I was struck by the most recent attack on Catholicism. In 'Night Sins,' the viewer meets two Catholics—one a wayward priest and the other a mad deacon. As always, Catholics who are shown as loyal to the church are portrayed as suffering from some malady. Indeed, it is precisely because the deacon is depicted as 'obsessed' with Catholicism that he is portrayed as an evil disciplinarian.

"It was not for nothing that Valerie Bertinelli commented after the suicide of the deacon that it 'seems like they all have a secret life, hiding their sins.' The point, of course, is that all priests and deacons resemble the two characters depicted in the movie. Thus, Hollywood once again shows its penchant for attacking Catholicism by presenting Catholics whom no one would admire and then suggesting that most Catholics are as deviant as CBS would have us believe."

HOUSE OF BLUES PULLS LOGO AFTER CATHOLIC PROTEST

The famous nightclub chain, House of Blues, bowed to Catholic pressure by announcing that it will remove its logo and replace it with a new one. The logo had been the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a symbol that is deeply meaningful to Roman Catholics. But now, after a protest lodged by the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Chicago chapter of the Catholic League, the crown of thorns and drops of blood from the heart have all been removed. The new symbol is a heart with a rose.

House of Blues first opened in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1992. In 1994, the nightclub opened in New Orleans and West Hollywood. In 1996, the chain expanded to Atlanta during the Olympics and recently opened another club in Chicago. The chain is owned by Isaac Tigrett, co-founder of the Hard Rock Cafe. It should be known that the Hard Rock in Las Vegas withdrew a Catholic altar from its lounge after the Catholic League mobilized public pressure against the club.

When House of Blues sought a patent for its symbol from the U.S. Patent Office, it was refused registration. It was determined that the use of the Sacred Heart of Jesus "may disparage or bring into contempt or disrepute persons of the Roman Catholic faith."

The Atlanta chapter of the Catholic League, led by chapter president Richard Perry, worked with the Archdiocese of Atlanta in challenging the logo and supplied the Archdiocese of Chicago with the results of its work. The credit in Chicago goes to league chapter president Patrick Cremin: Cremin met with officials from the Archdiocese and was the subject of a front-page story in the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

The Catholic League was prepared to go to the press

immediately with a statement regarding this victory, but decided to postpone its news release upon learning of the death of Cardinal Bernardin, a strong supporter of the Catholic League's. Here is what the league's statement said once it was released:

"Cardinal Bernardin deserves tremendous credit for pursuing this issue. It was his leadership that brought Isaac Tigrett to his senses. The Catholic League was delighted to assist the Archdiocese of Chicago in this matter and is especially grateful to the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Chicago Board of Rabbis for registering their outrage over this misuse of a Catholic symbol. Thanks must also be given to Archbishop Donoghue of Atlanta for the invaluable work that his attorneys did on this subject.

"The misuse of religious symbols for crass commercial purposes is an abuse of power. While the motive behind such decisions is not always ascertainable, the effect of the harm done certainly is. Let the House of Blues become a profitable enterprise, but let it do so without disparaging the icons of the Catholic Church, or those of any other religion.

"It is a further tribute to His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Bernardin that during his final days he took on this battle and won."

MISUSE OF SACRED HEART DRAWS RESPONSE

Routledge, the distinguished publishing company, recently released a book on the late rock star, Elvis Presley, that

drew fire from the Catholic League. The league objected to the cover illustration: it featured Elvis as the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The book, *Elvis After Elvis: The Posthumous Career of a Living Legend*, has nothing to do with the cover design. What particularly upset the league was the decision to flag this illustration on the cover of the "Literary and Cultural Studies" flyer that was mailed to prospective readers.

In a letter of protest to Routledge president Colin Jones, league president William Donohue labeled the ad "offensive" and accused Routledge of taking "liberties with a symbol held sacred by Roman Catholics." Donohue closed his letter by saying "Editorial scrutiny surely involves judgments regarding portrayals that might offend various segments of the population. It is hoped that Catholics are added to that list of considerations."

Jones maintained that "Routledge publishes progressive works in many disciplines and is well known for giving voice to authors who champion the tolerance of difference." He then admitted, "It is an unfortunate truth that this tolerance sometimes 'forgets' certain groups in our midst."

In a statement of candor, Jones added that "The Elvis book jacket can indeed be seen as too liberal a use of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We apologize for any offense this may have caused you, your colleagues, or indeed any of your Catholic fellows."

The league was pleased with the honesty of Jones' response.

SERRANO'S LAST STAND AT THE SMITHSONIAN

In the last issue of *Catalyst*, we printed a letter from Dr. Donohue to David Umansky, Communications Director of the Smithsonian Institution, protesting the institution's invitation to artist Andres Serrano to open Hispanic Heritage Month. Our objection centered on the anti-Catholic work of Serrano, specifically his contribution, "Piss Christ," which features a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine. It was the league's position that Serrano was unfit to be accorded the right to open Hispanic Heritage Month at the prestigious institution, located in our nation's capital.

In an unusually frank letter to Dr. Donohue, J. Dennis O'Connor, Provost of the Smithsonian, wrote to explain the Smithsonian's position and to convey to him the future of Andres Serrano's welcome at the institution.

O'Connor said to Dr. Donohue that "I share your concern," and then indicated that the Smithsonian "must be careful not to appear to be censoring free speech or restricting public debate." But he also said that the committee that selected Serrano "was aware of the earlier controversy surrounding Mr. Serrano's work." Accordingly, the committee "sought assurances from both him [Serrano] and his assistant that he would discuss his recent work, avoid his controversial series, and exchange views with other panelists." Serrano's "controversial series" includes exhibitions involving dead animals, brains, blood and urine.

Serrano initially agreed to abide by the Smithsonian's request, saying that he wanted to move beyond the controversies of the past. O'Connor states that "The employees [of the Smithsonian] would not have suggested inviting Mr. Serrano without believing that he would avoid showing his

controversial works that had offended so many in previous years and that he would present a program appropriate for a general invitation audience.”

But Serrano reneged on his commitment. Here is what O’Connor concluded: “Since this program’s occurrence, I have gathered a good deal of information about its background and actual development, and I believe that Mr. Serrano violated his understanding with the Hispanic Heritage Planning Committee. As a result, I would be extremely reluctant to consider such an invitation to him in the future, and have conveyed this judgment to the staff.”

The Catholic League regrets that Serrano was invited in the first place, and is hardly surprised that the artist violated his word. But we are nonetheless pleased with the position of the Smithsonian not to invite him ever again.

LEAGUE ATTACK ON SLEEPERS SUCCEEDS

The Catholic League attack on the Warner Bros. movie, *Sleepers*, garnered incredible media attention and received a warm reception on the part of journalists, reviewers and radio and TV talk show hosts.

The Catholic League’s press conference on the movie was a mob scene of reporters. The league contends that the movie, based on a book by that name, has no basis in fact and unfairly maligns Catholic institutions and priests. The reaction of the media was almost uniformly favorable to the Catholic League’s position.

Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* put it nicely when she wrote that while it's possible that the story is true, "It's also possible that Santa and the elves spend all year at the North Pole, making a list and checking it twice."

A woman reporter from ABC-TV in New York caught up with author Lorenzo Carcaterra at his home and asked him about the charges. The author not only refused to answer any questions, he slammed his front door on the reporter. And when the media called the publisher of the book and the producers and directors of the movie to debate Dr. Donohue, they all said no.

The Catholic League took the issue a notch higher by asking S.I. Newhouse, the president of Random House (the parent company of Ballantine Books, which published *Sleepers*) to conduct an independent investigation of this matter.

HOAX MOVIE, SLEEPERS, DEFAMES CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND PRIEST

The movie *Sleepers*, based on the book by Lorenzo Carcaterra, opened on October 18 to a protest by the Catholic League. The Propaganda Films movie (a Warner Brothers company) purports to be a true story about a New York Catholic school, Sacred Heart. However, virtually every independent person who has investigated the story has determined that the book and the movie are fictitious. The movie stars Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Bacon and Brad Pitt.

The Catholic League is incensed because the movie defames a Catholic school and a Catholic priest. *Sleepers* alleges that four youths from Sacred Heart, an elementary school in New

York's Hell's Kitchen, were sent to a reformatory school in the 1960s after a street prank injured an old man. It was in an upstate New York reform school that the boys were sexually assaulted by guards.

In the 1980s, two of the boys, now hit men, kill one of the guards in an act of revenge. One of the other two boys is an Assistant District Attorney who arranges to take the case so he can sabotage it, and the other is author Carcaterra who works at the *New York Daily News*. Carcaterra supposedly gets a priest from Sacred Heart to perjure himself before a jury by claiming that the two killers were with him at a basketball game the night of the murder.

The problem with this is that none of it is true. Attorneys William Callahan and Thomas Harvey have thoroughly investigated this matter and have found it baseless. Father Kevin J. Nelan, the pastor of Sacred Heart, and Father John P. Duffell, who worked at Sacred Heart at the time of the alleged crime, have both said it isn't true.

The truth is that the crime never happened, Carcaterra and the others were never sent to a reform school, and no priest ever perjured himself. School records show that Carcaterra missed no more than 20 days of school in all his years at Sacred Heart, making preposterous the claim that he spent time in reform school. It is also interesting that in Carcaterra's earlier book about his life, *A Safe Place*, he never mentions this alleged "true story."

Moreover, the Manhattan DA's office insists that no such incident ever took place and the New York Division for Youth denies that such a brutal reformatory ever existed. And no one from the neighborhood who still lives there ever recalls such a story.

Did Carcaterra make up his story from whole cloth? No, it appears that the book and movie are a composite drawn from

many sources, among which is the book *The Westies*, a story about a notorious Irish gang from Hell's Kitchen. By cutting and splicing, Carcaterra mended his tale together, selling it as though it were the real thing.

On October 16, 1995, Catholic League president William Donohue wrote to Peter Gethers, the editor of *Sleepers* at Ballantine Books (a division of Random House), stating that "this matter can be resolved rather quickly, providing you give a sworn affidavit stating that your account is true, and providing you are willing to make public the names of the priest and the Assistant District Attorney." No reply was forthcoming and Gethers never responded to Donohue's later request for a meeting to discuss the authenticity of the book.

The official position of the movie studio is that the names and locations of the true story have been altered. Nonetheless, the movie opens with the statement, "This is a true story." Screenwriter and director Barry Levinson has said that "Any one of the major elements could have happened. What is the need to know its exact authenticity?" But when a Catholic school and a Catholic priest are negatively portrayed—and then passed on as though it were true—the public has a right to know the "exact authenticity" of the claims.

Donohue and Callahan met in 1995 with a lawyer from the New York State Attorney General's office to discuss *Sleepers*. Though sympathetic, the lawyer did not believe that there was much that could be done legally.

Had the book been published as a novel, there would be no controversy. Even the *New York Times* has been suspicious, placing the book on its best-seller list by adding "The true story, the narrator **claims**, of four boys in a reformatory and the revenge they later take" (emphasis added). News reports by the *Times* also express suspicion about the book.

Crime authors have been particularly angry with author

Carcattera. Jack Olsen, the “Dean of True Crime,” has said that the book is a fraud and should be republished as a novel. Olsen was one of seven crime authors who signed a letter denouncing *Sleepers* as “fictitious.”

Book reviewers have also been wary. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt of the *New York Times* described portions of the book as “inauthentic,” “disturbingly inconsistent,” “indistinct,” and “impossibly imprecise.” *Time* said “Not since Joe McGinnis began dreaming up things that Senator Kennedy might have thought...has there been such an elastic and accommodating definition of nonfiction as Carcattera’s.” He labeled the book “preposterous” and riddled with “internal contradictions.”

The *Washington Post* charged that Carcattera is “trying to have it both ways—the urgency of reality plus the freedom of fiction.” Cox News Service headlined its review, “*Sleepers*’ So Phony It Ought To Be A Crime.” *Newsday* offered the following: “This is the stuff of countless entertaining Hollywood movies and paperback novels. Unfortunately, Carcattera convinced himself he could get away with the ruse.”

By the time this edition of *Catalyst* is printed, the Catholic League will have held a press conference to discuss the movie. We will report on subsequent events in the December *Catalyst*. In the meantime, please send Warner Brothers the enclosed postcard.

LEAGUE MAY SUE YONKERS SCHOOL BOARD

The Catholic League has pledged to sue the Yonkers School Board if it seeks to deny transportation to children attending

non-public schools. Initially, the school board voted to withdraw funds for transportation on fiscal grounds, stating that the cutbacks would trim \$970,000 from the budget. But when the Archdiocese of New York and the Catholic League announced that they would fight this decision in court, the school board said it would provide transportation for at least the first few weeks of the school year. Yonkers is a city just north of New York City.

The league cited New York State law, explaining that it explicitly requires that school districts which provide monies for transportation for public school students must do likewise for students who attend private and parochial schools. And it cited a 1986 federal court order that mandated desegregation in Yonkers: that ruling stated that the Yonkers school district must provide transportation for non-public school students.

The furor over this issue erupted in anti-Catholic bigotry when Lorraine Siegel, the PTA Council president, held a sign at a community meeting that read, "Public Schools Bus to Integrate. Catholic Schools Bus to Separate." Dr. Catherine Hickey, a Yonkers resident and the Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of New York, accurately said that it was "a wicked sign, inflammatory and bigoted." Her encounter with Siegel led the PTA leader to retire the sign.

The Catholic League issued the following news release on this matter:

"The decision by the Yonkers school board to deny transportation to students who attend private and parochial schools falls most heavily on Catholic schoolchildren, as they are the principal users of bus transportation to non-public schools. Therefore, the disparate impact that the Yonkers decision creates is suspect, both morally and legally.

"It was settled in 1947 by the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Everson*

v. Board of Education, that public monies for bus transportation for children attending parochial schools was constitutional. Moreover, New York State law and a federal court decision in 1986 settle the issue even further by requiring school districts like Yonkers to provide bus transportation for children attending Catholic schools.

“It is estimated that if the Catholic schools closed in Yonkers, it would add approximately \$50 million a year to the school budget. That alone ought to give the school board pause. But more important is the right that parents who send their children to Catholic schools have in being treated equitably.

“The Catholic League is prepared to take legal action to ensure that the rights of parents and children who use Catholic schools are protected. This is not a case the Yonkers school board can win.”

FARRAKHAN’S PASSPORT SHOULD BE REVOKED

The Catholic League was delighted with the decision by the U.S. Treasury Department to deny Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam leader, his request to secure an exemption from U.S. imposed sanctions making it illegal to accept funds from a terrorist nation. But the Catholic League now wants the State Department to honor the request by Rep. Peter King to deny Farrakhan a passport. It explained its reasoning as follows:

“Last winter the Catholic League requested the Internal Security Section of the Criminal Division of the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate whether Louis Farrakhan

had violated federal law by receiving funds from Libyan dictator Moammar Khadafy. The Justice Department responded by saying that it would commence an investigation and promised 'appropriate action' if it was determined that laws have been broken. It is good news that the Treasury Department has now denied Farrakhan the opportunity to receive the \$1 billion that Khadafy has pledged. But more needs to be done.

"Farrakhan has met with Khadafy to receive a \$250,000 humanitarian award, a gesture declared illegal by the federal government. Because of Farrakhan's bigoted attack on Jews and Catholics, it is unconscionable that the authorities have not taken more direct action by revoking Farrakhan's passport. The Catholic League believes that the Clinton administration must do more if it is to quell opposition from the Jewish and Catholic communities. We look for decisive action immediately."