

BLOCKBUSTER PROMOTES “PRIEST” FUELING ANTI-CATHOLICISM

The nation's largest video rental chain, Blockbuster, recently made the Disney-Miramax movie *Priest* available for distribution. Due to its anti-Catholic nature, the movie was the source of strong criticism from the Catholic League last year and was roundly scored by many others as well.

On May 25, 1995, Catholic League president William Donohue wrote a letter to Steve Berrard, the CEO of Blockbuster Entertainment, expressing his concern that “it would be disheartening to learn that Blockbuster decided to put *Priest* on its shelves.” He also asked “what kind of policy you have in making these determinations [of deciding which videos to select].” No reply was given to this letter.

The Catholic League made the following statement about this development:

“Blockbuster does not distribute every movie made, nor does it randomly select which videos to promote. We know this because Blockbuster refused to carry the anti-Christian movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. But apparently Blockbuster thinks there is a difference between an anti-Christian movie and one that is merely anti-Catholic. It would be most instructive if Blockbuster explained its reasoning.

“Tolerance for bigotry is intolerance and that is why Blockbuster errs in its decision to stock *Priest*. By fanning the flames of anti-Catholicism, Blockbuster calls into question its reputation as a family-friendly outlet and contributes to an already poisoned environment. It gleefully accepted the plaudits of many when it refused circulation of *The Last Temptation of Christ*. It will be interesting to see how Blockbuster reacts once the public discovers its new

double standard. We will be sure to inform the Catholic community of its duplicity.”

Dr. Donohue wrote another letter to Blockbuster CEO Steve Berrard asking him to explain why *The Last Temptation of Christ* was found unacceptable but *Priest* was. At press time, no response had been given.

CRÈCHES ADORN PUBLIC SQUARE; POST OFFICE BALKS

A front page story in *USA TODAY* got it right when it exclaimed, “From Lawrenceville, Ga., to New York City’s Central Park, religious displays are going up on public property as never before.” The reference to Central Park was the Catholic League’s nativity scene, placed in full public view across the street from the Plaza Hotel. The newspaper article cited the work of the Catholic League as contributing to the increased display of creches on public property during the 1995 Christmas season.

Progress was made in placing nativity scenes in public schools, libraries and parks, though not without a struggle in many instances. The Catholic League, for example, had to threaten a lawsuit against some school districts before creches were given equal treatment to menorahs. Working cooperatively with the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic League was able to monitor the display of creches on public property and respond whenever necessary. Given the success that Long Island Catholic League president Chuck Mansfield had in working with Don Neidhardt of the Knights of Columbus in 1995, the league plans to expand its work with the Knights in

1996 wherever Catholic League chapters exist.

What enabled the Catholic League to score so many victories was the 1995 Supreme Court decision in *Capital Square Review v. Pinette*. That ruling allowed for the Ku Klux Klan to display a cross on the grounds of the Ohio state capitol. As long as religious symbols were privately sponsored, the high court ruled, there was nothing the authorities could do to stop their display. Yet even the decision in *Pinette* was still resisted by many public officials and activist lawyers.

When word got out that the Catholic League had obtained permission from the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to display a creche in Central Park, the New York Civil Liberties Union immediately stated that it would not challenge the league in light of *Pinette*. But across the Hudson River in New Jersey, the state affiliate of the ACLU threatened to sue Jersey City for displaying a creche. Adding to the controversy was the perennial problem of confusing religious symbols with secular symbols. And no organization was more to blame in this regard than the U.S. Postal Service.

In 1994, the Catholic League protested the U.S. Postal Service regulation that allows for the display of menorahs, but creches, in post offices. The Post Office, the league contended, was in violation of a 1989 ruling, *Allegheny County v. ACLU, Greater Pittsburgh*. In that decision, it was ruled that a menorah was a religious symbol and that a Christmas tree was a secular symbol. In 1995, the league supported a complaint brought by a postal service employee, George Cornwall, against the U.S. Postal Service, but lost when it was ruled that Cornwall had no standing in the case. So this year the league tried a new tactic.

In December, the Catholic League wrote a letter to every Congressman who has anything to do with postal affairs. In the House, the league sent letters to every member of the Subcommittee on Postal Service of the Government Reform and

Oversight Committee. In the Senate, the league wrote to every member of the subcommittee on Post Office and Civil Service of the Government Affairs committee. The league is asking for assistance in this matter in getting the U.S. Postal Service to align its policies in accordance with ruling in *Allegheny County*. It has threatened to sue the Post Office if the legislative process does not yield a satisfactory result.

The *New York Times* did not make it any easier for school officials and civic leaders to understand the meaning of the law when it erroneously reported that the menorah is a secular symbol; it compounded matters when it quoted a rabbi who mistakenly labeled Santa Claus a religious symbol. Whether through ignorance or malice, the same problem appeared in many parts of the country, making it all the more difficult to secure full compliance with the law. But compared to previous Christmas seasons, it was clear that more creches were displayed on public property in 1995 than has been true for many years.

EUGENE, OREGON CASE MOVES FORWARD

An anti-Catholic exhibition that was rewarded by the government of Eugene, Oregon last fall has now attracted nationwide attention. The Catholic League has taken its case to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission.

It was on September 16, 1995 that a group called the "Rickies" staged an anti-Catholic march during the annual Eugene Celebration Parade. As reported in the last issue of *Catalyst*, the "Rickies" received a prize of \$200 for its antics. The

"Rickies" included 18 persons dressed in clerical garb and featured an offensive display on the steps of a Catholic church. The Catholic League asked Mayor Ruth Bascom to condemn this government-funded anti-Catholic bigotry, and took out an ad in the *Register-Guard* challenging her to act responsibly. Her response was to do nothing until the local Human Rights Commission ruled on the case.

The commission was scheduled to meet on November 21, but postponed the meeting until December 19. The Catholic League, sensing further uncooperation, then took the issue to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, supplying the Washington-based group with supporting documentation, which included a video of the march. Just before Christmas, the Catholic League was notified that the U.S. Civil Rights Commission had agreed to accept the case.

In a press release on the subject, the Catholic League stated that "Our patience has run out with Mayor Bascom. All we have ever asked for is a statement condemning government sanctioned anti-Catholic bigotry. We have never pressed for censorship, rather we have asked that the mayor censure the offending group. It is one thing for government to allow Catholic bashing exhibitions in a city sanctioned parade, quite another to reward such bigotry with government funds."

The league awaits further action from the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and is delighted with the reaction it has received from Catholics in the Eugene area.

Eugene, Oregon Rewards Anti-Catholic Exhibition

On September 16, the city of Eugene, Oregon, hosted the Eugene Celebration Parade. A panel of volunteer judges gave cash prizes to the top entries. Winning second prize (\$200) was a group called the "Rickies." Their exhibition included 18 people dressed as the Pope, bishops, priests and nuns. The title of their entry, "Pope Goes the Weekend," was a play on the theme "Pop Goes the Weekend." Books titled *Pope Fiction* were held by people dressed as monks and there was a man dressed as the Pope named George Ringo. In obvious reference to the Beatles rock stars George Harrison and Ringo Starr, "Pope George Ringo" rode atop a float wearing a papal tiara.

As the float passed St. Mary Catholic Church, some of the Rickies ran onto church steps and lifted their cassocks and habits in exaggerated bows and genuflections. Area Catholics were offended by this exhibition and a complaint was filed with the Human Rights Commission in Eugene. The Catholic League is supporting the complaint, filed originally by Michael Whitney of Springfield, Oregon. A ruling on the complaint had not been made when *Catalyst* went to print.

In response to this incident, Catholic League president William Donohue offered the following comment to the press:

"It is always distressing to learn of anti-Catholic bigotry, but it is doubly distressing to learn that public officials have done nothing to combat it or to denounce it. Eugene Mayor Ruth Bascom still refuses to condemn the Catholic bashing that took place in her city on September 16. Though the prizes came from parade entry fees, the celebration steering committee is a city-sanctioned group.

"Mayor Bascom doubts that what the 'Rickies' did was

intentional. The best she can offer is that we should 'be respectful of the deep roots of religious beliefs.' But that is a shallow and unsatisfactory remark. Having contacted her office, it seems plain that Mayor Bascom is prepared to let the matter rest. The Catholic League, however, is not.

"We will publish an open letter to Mayor Bascom in the *Register-Guard*, securing a half-page ad to register our concerns. It is hoped that this action will motivate the Mayor to make a forceful statement condemning anti-Catholicism, thus assuring Catholics everywhere that bigotry will not be tolerated in Eugene."

If necessary, the Catholic League will bring this case before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission.

Catholic League Quits LifeLine

In protest to what happened to Catholic Answers, the largest Catholic apologetic and evangelization organization in North America, the Catholic League has quit LifeLine, the Christian long distance telephone service that is managed by AmeriVision Communications. In effect, LifeLine told Catholic Answers that it was "too Catholic," and that is why the Catholic League has decided to quit the program.

The purpose of LifeLine is to provide Christians with an alternative to secular carriers of long distance telephone services while simultaneously supporting pro-life work and charitable programs. In addition, subscribers to LifeLine can give 10% back to their favorite ministry. Over the past year, the Catholic League has advertised LifeLine to its members and

as a result has reaped a small financial gain.

Here is what LifeLine told Catholic Answers: “The purpose of this letter is to *regretfully* inform you that because Catholic Answers exists to spread and defend the *Roman* Catholic Faith, Carl Thompson, LifeLines’ Vice President, has decided not to go forward with your account.”

William A. Donohue wrote the League’s response:

“It was your decision not to enlist Catholic Answers in your program because Catholic Answers defends the ‘*Roman* Catholic Faith’ (your curious emphasis, sir, not mine). Apparently, you know very little about the Catholic League, otherwise you would have denied us as well. Please be advised that we, too, defend the *Roman* Catholic Faith and, as such, are not worthy of inclusion in your ‘Christian’ program. Accordingly, I will urge our members to quit LifeLine immediately.

“Furthermore, it is my decision to inform every Catholic in the United States about this matter. Quite obviously, I will urge all those who belong to LifeLine to quit and all those who were thinking about becoming members not to. Indeed, I will go further: I will ask our Protestant friends to practice ecumenism by also quitting your organization.

“Perhaps you could be sued for false advertising, but my own tactic is to honestly advertise exactly what you have done.”

Media Treat Pope Fairly; Protesters Fail to Score

By all accounts, the visit of Pope John Paul II to the United

States was a smashing success. Media treatment of the papal visit was, with few exceptions, very fair. Protesters were few in number and without impact. From beginning to end, this papal visit proved to be the most triumphant of them all.

The only complaint that the Catholic League lodged against the media during the papal visit concerned the coverage of Catholic dissidents. The Catholic League did not object to media coverage of dissent within the Catholic community, but it did object when groups that are not Catholic were presented as such to the public. The League cited the October 5 edition of *NBC Nightly News* with Tom Brokaw as an example.

Brokaw provided a platform for Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) and Dignity. CFFC is an anti-Catholic front group run by Frances Kissling and has been labeled by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops as having “no affiliation, formal or otherwise, with the Catholic Church.” Dignity is an organization of gays and lesbians who claim to be Catholic while openly flouting Catholic doctrine. Unlike the gay Catholic group Courage, which is recognized by the Church (these are men and women who accept the Church’s teachings on homosexuality), Dignity is not listed in the *Official Catholic Directory*, precisely because it has no standing as a Catholic organization.

The Catholic League released the following statement regarding media treatment of CFFC and Dignity: “The media do a great disservice to Catholics and non-Catholics alike when Catholics for a Free Choice and Dignity are presented as though they were genuine voices in the Catholic community. The effect of such misrepresentation is to promote dissent rather than to record it. As such, it is irresponsible for the media to allow itself to become willing accomplices to public deception. The term catholic means universal, but to be a Catholic is to acknowledge the authority of the magisterium of the Catholic Church. This is something that neither group accepts, the effect of which is to nullify their status as Catholic.”

Anti-Catholic bigotry was evident even before the arrival of the Holy Father in Newark, New Jersey. In the vicinity of Giants Stadium, a group called His Marvelous Light Ministries distributed copies of a booklet titled "Do You Really Know Who This Man Is?"; on the cover is an illustration of Pope John Paul II. The entire text is given to portraying the Pope as Satan. Speaking of the "revival of the papacy," the text says, "The beast is coming to life again and the world is giving power to the Papal beast." The gist of the publication is that the Pope is a blasphemous agent of Satan, if not Satan himself.

On the cover of the October 15 edition of *LGNY* (Lesbian & Gay New York) is an illustration of Cardinal O'Connor and Pope John Paul II kissing. The following headline statements appeared on the cover. "OH MARY! Revealed! *Real* Reason For Papal Visit!" "O'Connor & Pope's Secret *GAY LOVE!*" "Vatican Shocker! *Men in Dresses!*" "*TEARFUL ADMISSION: We Were WRONG About Homosexuality! And Abortion! AND Infallibility!*" Finally, there was this choice headline: "Their Urgent Warning: *THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE ARE F ALSE PROPHETS!*"

Both the size of the protests and the coverage afforded them by the media were meager. The Catholic League learned of a protest meeting at New York's Gay and Lesbian Community Center on September 26 and made arrangements to field a report on the proceedings. We were notified that three principal groups were organizing the protests: ACT-UP, American Atheists and NARAL (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League). Literature was passed out labeling the Pope as "The Foremost Symbol of Religious Superstition, Intolerance and Bigotry." In Baltimore, where the papal visit ended, literature was distributed that said, "Show 'His Silliness' that the United States is NOT part of the 'Holy Roman Empire of 1995.'" "

The protest that greeted the Pope at the United Nations was so bad that police officers complained that it was a waste of their time. Only about 15 protesters were present, most of

them from the American Atheists group. But there were several hundred protesters who marched up 6th Avenue on Saturday, October 7.

The march up 6th Avenue began at Bryant Park, located behind the New York Public Library. The groups included members from ACT-UP, People for the American Way, National Organization for Women, NARAL, Dignity, American Atheists, the ACLU and Planned Parenthood. They protested the Church's positions on women, homosexuality and abortion. Four members from ACT-UP were arrested when they broke away from the march and headed toward St. Patrick's Cathedral where the Pope was reciting the rosary.

The Lesbian and Gay Papal Visit Coalition (a front for ACT-UP) solicited the support of the New York Civil Liberties Union in an unsuccessful bid to petition the police to allow them greater access to a spot near St. Patrick's so that the Pope would hear their protest. A banner, however, was unfurled from a sixth floor balcony at Saks Fifth Avenue, overlooking the Cathedral. In obvious reply to the Catholic League's 1994 anti-condom posters that appeared in the subways ("Want to Know a Dirty Little Secret? CONDOMS DON'T SAVE LIVES"), the banner read, "Condoms Save Lives." The six who staged the event were immediately arrested.

Showgirls Offends Catholics

The United Artists movie, *Showgirls*, which opened on September 22, was justly criticized for its indecency, and that is why it received an NC-17 rating. But the movie also contains a scene where vulgar words and behavior are used in reference to Our Blessed Mother. Language such as "The F_____ g Virgin

Mary” is used and, in the same scene, a heavy set woman bares her breasts and makes a vulgar reference to the Virgin Mary while doing so.

The following is an excerpt of the League’s statement to the press regarding the movie.

“*Showgirls* is not only a movie that is violent and sexually exploitative of women, it is a movie that insults the Catholic religion. The juxtaposition of inde- cency and blasphemy is nothing new, but the fact that this movie has already set the record for the most amount of money ever spent to promote an NC-17 rated film makes it all the more disturbing.

“It is bad enough that United Artists is determined to mainstream its filth into neighborhood theaters without also attacking Catholicism. This only goes to show that there are those in Hollywood who not only have no moral standards, they have no respect for religion-especially Catholicism-either. And the fact that screenwriter Joe Eszterhas has urged minors to acquire fake IDs to see the movie proves that their callous agenda includes the exploitation of children as well.

“The Catholic League urges parents to protest the showing of this movie in their neighborhood the- aters. If this blasphemous stag movie belongs anywhere, it belongs in back alley theaters normally associated with the 42nd Streets of America.”

Calvin Klein Ad Pulled After

League Protest

On August 28, Calvin Klein, Inc. announced that it was withdrawing a series of jean ads that featured young people in sexually suggestive poses. The Catholic League, which just ten days earlier had begun a campaign against Calvin Klein, was credited by the media as playing a major role in getting the company to pull its ads.

The uproar began when the *New York Daily News* ran a front page story on the jean ads on August 18. Catholic League president William Donohue was quoted as saying that the ads were the most “morally destitute” that Calvin Klein had ever produced. The ads, which Donohue branded as “soft core porn,” showed adolescent boys and girls in varying states of undress. The pictures were featured alongside New York City buses and on huge billboards in places like Times Square.

Nationally, the “back-to-school” ads were on display in such magazines as *Rolling Stone*, *Spin* and *Mademoiselle*. Those publications showed pictures of a boy in jockey-type underwear (his black fingernail polish yielded the intended androgynous look) and a girl on a ladder with her underwear exposed. “Kiddie-sexploitation” is how the *Daily News* dubbed it.

Once the story broke, the Catholic League was called upon by many television and radio shows, both nationally and locally, to comment on the ads. The NBC news-entertainment show, *Extra*, did a piece on the League’s response, as did the New York station of National Public Radio.

On August 22, at a press conference held at the behest of New York City Councilman Noach Dear, Catholic League vice president Bernadette Brady joined Councilman Dear in calling for a boycott of Calvin Klein; other organizations soon followed suit. Miss Brady was particularly incensed by those pictures that featured boys and girls wearing a cross. The use

of such imagery, she said, was to provide an air of legitimacy to what was an otherwise lewd ad. Councilman Dear, who is Jewish, also complained about the use of the cross.

When Calvin Klein, Inc. withdrew the ads, the company issued a full-page statement in the *New York Times*. It did not extend an apology, rather it said that it was “taken aback” by the strong public reaction, adding that the ads were “misunderstood by some.” In reply, the Catholic League stated, “It is precisely because the public understood the intended message of the ad that Calvin Klein, Inc. had to pull it.” Once the ad was pulled, Bernadette Brady joined Councilman Noach Dear again in a press conference, only this time it was to claim victory.

This was the second time that the Catholic League has succeeded in getting offensive ads removed from New York City buses (we were successful in getting the “Madonna” ad removed in September 1993). The League has been invited by the New York City Council to testify at an upcoming hearing on the need for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to write a more restrictive ad policy. It looks forward to doing so.

Catholic League TV Show Debuts

October 3 marks the debut of the Catholic League’s first television show. The program will air every Tuesday evening from 7:30 to 8:00 and will feature Catholic League president William Donohue as host. It will reach some 650,000 viewers on Long Island and has the potential of reaching upwards of our million viewers through syndication. The program will be

produced by Telicare, the cable station of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, and will be shown on channel 25.

The format will include guests of varying perspectives and religions. Donohue will begin each show with a brief summary of the latest incidents of Catholic bashing and what the Catholic League is doing about them. He expects the show will address many timely and controversial issues.

It is uncertain whether the show will ever reach a nationwide audience, but that is certainly something the Catholic League would like to happen. Much of the success of the Catholic League is directly related to its frequent use of media outlets to get its point across. Having a show of its own makes it all the more likely that the Catholic League's influence will grow.

The Catholic League looks forward to engaging friend and foe alike in robust debate. In the last issue of *Catalyst*, Donohue labeled the style of the Catholic League "responsibly aggressive." It is his expectation that the League's new television show will mirror that style.

Gay Parades Bash Catholics

This past June, Gay Pride Parades were held in several cities across the country. Unlike all other parades, these marches have a negative message to them. The target of abuse is the Catholic Church.

In San Francisco, a group called Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence mocked all Catholic clergy and religious, including the Pope. In Boston, a group of pro-life gays were so taunted and jeered at that Philip Arcidi, president of the Pro-Life

Alliance of Gays and Lesbians, said he had “never seen such hate exhibited at a gay or lesbian function.” And in New York, gays indulged in obscene behavior in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. It was in New York that the League mounted its greatest protest.

In the last edition of *Catalyst*, a letter from William Donohue to New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was published calling on the Mayor to move the starting point of the parade to a spot below St. Patrick’s Cathedral. As it turned out, the Mayor did not accede to the League’s demand. But the League’s pressure did lead to some concessions nonetheless.

Mayor Giuliani refused to march in the Gay Pride Parade as it passed in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, electing instead to join the march a few blocks south of the Cathedral.

Perhaps most significant, the Mayor announced that the police would crack down on lawlessness, warning gays that a repeat performance of last year’s outrageous displays would not be countenanced. The result was that the conduct of the parade’s participants was clearly better than the previous year, though still unacceptable by any standard.

The kind of pressure that the Catholic League brought to bear included contacting the White House, the New York State Attorney General’s office, the New York Police Commissioner and the police chief in charge of the parade. The League asked that observers be sent from the U.S. Department of Justice and the New York State Attorney General’s office, the purpose of which would be to monitor the parade for federal and state law violations. Word of the League’s action spread quickly through the New York community: every media opportunity the League had was used to convey its plan.

The Catholic-bashing element to the Gay Pride Parade was so evident that even the parade’s organizers never fully disavowed their intent. For example, when Janice Thorn, the

co-chairman of the parade's sponsors, Heritage of Pride, was asked to comment on the League's statement that her group had deliberately targeted St. Patrick's, she responded briskly, "That's an interesting idea."

When the parade began, St. Patrick's was sealed like a war zone. No one could get near it as the police barricaded the Cathedral and the sidewalk across the street. Marching in the parade were drag queens, cross-dressers on Rollerblades, the Butch/Femme Society, the sado-macho brigade in black leather and Men of Discipline. Though the North American Man/Boy Love Association did not march as a separate unit, the presence of the child molesters was noted in the program. Men in jock straps simulating oral sex in front of the Cathedral (while Sunday Mass was going on) were perhaps the most vulgar of them all.

The most flagrant anti-Catholicism came from Catholic Ladies for Choice. In this group, there were gays and lesbians dressed as nuns carrying coat hangers and lesbians dressed as nuns carrying tam-bourines. Most incredible was the gay man who wore a black bra and a black jock strap with a nun's veil on his head and a huge set of rosary beads around his otherwise naked body. There was also someone dressed as the Pope with a banner that read, "The Catholic Church, a history of murder, lies, censorship, oppression and hypocrisy." And, of course, there were the usual taunts while marchers processed past the Cathedral.

The Catholic League hired a professional photographer to take pictures of the parade as it passed in front of St. Patrick's. It is now making available to many leaders in government, education, business and the media a sample of the pictures.

Peter Powers, the aide closest to Mayor Giuliani, has agreed to meet with Dr. Donohue regarding the parade. The results of that meeting will be announced in a future edition of *Catalyst*.