

ABA Offends Christians

The cover story of the summer edition of *Human Rights*, the American Bar Association journal of the Section on Rights and Responsibilities, featured a discussion regarding the implications of hospital mergers between Catholic and secular institutions. But it was not the article that the Catholic League objected to (flawed though it was), rather it was the cover illustration. On the cover was an image of a pregnant woman lying on an operating table in a crucifix-like pose. Ready for an abortion, the woman's child was shown inside her body in a fetal position; her hands and legs were being held down by band-aids.

The Catholic League issued the following comment to the press:

"The cover of the summer edition of *Human Rights* would be considered disturbing had it appeared on the cover of any publication. But when it appears on the cover of a journal of the American Bar Association, it is doubly disturbing. Most offensive is the fact that the journal is published by the ABA's Section on Individual Rights and Responsibilities. Evidently, this ABA group thinks that amongst its rights is the right to abuse the rights of those with whom it disagrees. As such, it is clear that the term individual responsibility has no principled meaning for the ABA Section on Individual Rights and Responsibilities.

"We demand an apology from the ABA And we request that a panel discussion on what the ABA means by rights and responsibilities be held at its next convention."

Nazi Slur of Vatican Implicates Congressmen

The May fund-raising letter of the Washington-based Population Institute referred to the Holy See as the “anti-contraceptive gestapo.” The statement, made in reference to the Holy See’s teachings on marriage and the family, was designed to mobilize members against the Vatican’s position at the upcoming U.N. event in Beijing, the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Werner Fornos, president of The Population Institute, wrote the following: “The Vatican continues to undermine the advancements we’ve made in Cairo on issues of pregnancy prevention. The anti-contraceptive gestapo has vowed to double the number of its delegation to 28 and to turn once more to weaken the cause of reproductive rights.” Listed on the Advisory Committee are several sitting Congressmen. As noted in the *Washington Times*, former President George Bush quit the National Rifle Association because its director sent out a fund-raising letter referring to federal agents as “jackbooted thugs.”

In a news release on this subject, the Catholic League issued the following remarks:

“The Population Institute proves once again that some of the anti-natalist forces are unquestionably anti-Catholic. Not content, or able, to debate the issues on their merits, these activists seek to defame the Holy See and thereby discredit its influence. Members of The Population Institute who share its politics, but not its bigotry, should make a clear and decisive break with the organization.

“Following the lead of former President George Bush, who broke with the NRA over an irresponsible fund-raising letter, those public officials who currently serve on the Public Policy

Advisory Committee of The Population Institute should break with the organization. Accordingly, the Catholic League calls upon the following advisors to The Population Institute to resign immediately: Sen. Paul Simon, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, Sen. Barbara Boxer, Rep. Jim Leach, Rep. Robert Torricelli and Rep. Sam Gejdenson.

“Not to resign would be to give tacit support to anti-Catholicism. It would also show a lack of courage.”

The Catholic League wrote directly to each Congressman involved in this scandal. We're very grateful to Cardinal John O'Connor who cited the League's response in his weekly column of June 15 in *Catholic New York*.

CBS Show Slams Catholicism

The June 4 episode of the CBS show “The Wright Verdicts” was the most bigoted portrayal of Catholics and the Catholic Church to have appeared on any television program thus far in 1995. Every possible negative stereotype was used to convey the message that the Catholic Church is a despicable organization. Here is a partial list of the characterizations that were presented: a child abuse scandal and cover-up; sexism in the church; bishops as bullies; hypocritical and materialistic priests; alcoholic priests; the trivialization of papal infallibility; a nun accused of murdering a bishop; brutal nuns; guilt-ridden Catholic schools; a nun who had an abortion before entering the convent; “silly” birth control position; a bishop as “a shark in a Roman collar”; corruption in the church; dishonest donors; ridicule of the confessional seal; persecution of a homosexual priest.

The Catholic League issued the following statement on the

show:

"Notwithstanding the fact that Klansmen would surely endorse the June 4 episode of 'The Wright Verdicts,' the hooded terrorists could not have made the show: they lack the sophistication of Dick Wolf, the show's creator and executive producer. Unlike Klansmen, Wolf wants to do more than just bash Catholics, he wants to project a vision of Catholicism that promotes his politics. That is why the feminist nun who previously had an abortion and is now unfairly accused of murdering the New York Archbishop is seen as compassionate. The homosexual priest is, of course, another victim, and he is also compassionate. But those who enforce the vicious rules of the church, namely the Archbishop and the Monsignor, are seen as evil (the latter is a pedophile who kills the Archbishop).

"Wolf, the creator and executive producer of the show, has a track record of bashing Catholics. In January 1991, Wolfs show, "Law and Order," featured pro-life Catholics who were either violent fanatics, sexually repressed or hypocrites. In November 1993, a "Law and Order" episode showed a detective complaining that his Catholic-practicing mother was a child abuser.

"It does not matter that the show will not return next season. Our problem is with CBS, Dick Wolf Films, Universal Television, MCA and Seagram, all of whom bear responsibility for the show. Now that Senator Bob Dole has made Hollywood a target of criticism, we will appeal to him, and to every other presidential candidate-including President Clinton-to address the anti-Catholicism that is evident in the industry. This show will be exhibit A."

New Yorker Offends Christians During Holy Week

The April cover of the *New Yorker* magazine showed a crucified Easter Bunny in a business suit superimposed on an IRS tax form. According to the artist, Art Spiegelman, the drawing was meant to show how conservatives view tax cuts as an “article of faith.”

When Catholic League president William Donohue was contacted at home by a reporter for the *New York Post* about this incident, he thought that the few critical comments he would offer would have no more effect than being cited once or twice in the next day’s paper. As it turned out, all the major TV and radio shows picked up on the subject immediately. Indeed, the Catholic League’s response was discussed on radio as far away as Australia.

“For the *New Yorker* to lambaste conservatives for treating tax cuts as a sacred entity is one thing,” the League said, “but it is quite another to play fast and loose with Christian symbols.” Taking note of its timing during Holy Week, the League also stated that the literary magazine “could have engaged in legitimate criticism of those pundits who treat tax cuts reverentially without simultaneously offending Christians. That it chose not to do so shows not only poor taste, it shows flat disregard for the sensibilities of Christians.”

The Catholic League is grateful for the unsolicited support that it received on this issue from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Trashing the religious symbols of any religion is an outrage, and it is particularly insulting when it happens at a time considered sacred by the offended party.

Disney Targeted By Resolution

On May 2, Catholic League member Paul McCarthy of Massachusetts submitted a resolution to be presented at the November meeting of the Walt Disney Company. McCarthy, who owns 22 shares of Disney stock, asked shareholders to ratify a resolution that calls for the establishment of a religious advisory committee. The resolution stated that films which express religious bigotry "could have a negative impact on the Disney operations because of consumer boycotts and stockholder divestiture."

The resolution came in light of the uproar surrounding the Disney-Miramax movie "Priest" in which the League called for a boycott of vacations to Disney World and Disneyland as well as all Disney products.

The resolution concluded by saying: "Therefore, be it resolved that the Board of Directors establish a committee to review current filmed entertainment policies. Said committee will consult with religious leaders of various faiths and develop guidelines to assist film production and distribution operations on ways to avoid religiously bigoted material. The guidelines formulated by this committee should be made available to all shareholders within six months of the completion of this meeting."

Dr. Donohue commented on the resolution, saying: "It is our hope that this will send a much needed wake-up call to Disney officials. Religious bigotry, like all forms of hate, not only foments ill-will, it corrodes the fiber of the social order...It would be more than regrettable-it would be a travesty-if Disney officials were to ignore the resolution altogether."

Catholic League Calls for Boycott of Disney

The movie "Priest," produced by the BBC and released by Miramax, a subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company, provoked the Catholic League to lead a storm of protest against the film and Disney (see "[Something Stinks in the Magic Kingdom: 'PRIEST'](#)" for an analysis of the movie). The movie is arguably the most anti-Catholic movie ever made; that, at least, is the position of film critic Michael Medved, the nation's leading authority on the subject of Hollywood and religion. Catholic League president William Donohue, and board member William Lindner previewed the movie before it was released to the public. They, too, were appalled by what they had seen.

The movie opened on March 24 in New York and Los Angeles and was scheduled to open on April 14 nationwide. April 14 just happened to be Good Friday. Timing the opening to fall on Good Friday made it all but certain that the Catholic League would register a protest.

On March 23, the Catholic League held a press conference in the headquarters of the Archdiocese of New York. It was very well attended by the media; officials from Miramax were also there. Posted all over the wall that formed the backdrop to Dr. Donohue's presentation were the familiar Disney characters: Mickey Mouse, Minny Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, Snow White, the Dalmatians and, of course, various stars from the Lion King. On the table by the podium was a large stuffed version of the Lion King himself, Mufasa. Given this imagery, there was no mistaking the target of the League's attack.

Denied the right to speak at the Catholic League's press conference, Miramax representatives spoke to the media on the sidewalk in front of the Catholic Center; the next day they staged their own press conference at their headquarters in Manhattan. The media blitz that accompanied the Catholic League's press conference, coupled with a favorable response from the public, put pressure on Miramax to change its nationwide release date from Good Friday to April 19; it was slated to open in ten cities on April 7.

The Catholic League treated as "a positive step" the decision not to release the movie on Good Friday, but it also said that more concessions were needed. If Michael Eisner, chairman of Disney, could legally stop Miramax from distributing "Priest" nationwide, then that is what the League wanted. Short of that, the League demanded a public statement from Disney dissociating itself from the film, making clear its reasons for doing so. Disney, however, chose to do nothing. Returning a phone call for Mr. Eisner, John Dryer, Vice President of Corporate Communications for Disney, told Dr. Donohue that the reason Disney would not dissociate itself from the Miramax-distributed movie was because "the only association between Disney and Miramax is the one that you've created in the mind of the public." Dryer denied a rift between Disney and Miramax and said there was nothing to the rumor that Miramax was testing Disney's will by pledging to release a soft-porn movie, "Kids." Dr. Donohue informed Mr. Dryer that he was now free to live with the consequences of his decision.

Two days after the phone conversation, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that there was a growing conflict between Disney and Miramax over the movie "Kids," quoting a Disney spokesperson as saying that whatever policy Disney ascribes to "is by association their [Miramax's] policy." More embarrassing for Disney was the *Associated Press* story of April 3 which reported that Disney told Miramax that it must "sell 'Kids' or form a separate company to release it, reimbursing the \$3.5

million to Miramax." *Time* and *Newsweek* ran a similar story, demonstrating quite conclusively that Disney can get Miramax to do exactly what it wants, when it wants.

Disney's decision not to dissociate itself from the movie triggered another news release from the Catholic League. This time the League made specific its course of action. "Having stonewalled the Catholic League-and by extension many Catholics-we are embarking on a nationwide campaign aimed at Disney. We are calling for a boycott of all Disney products, a boycott of vacations to Disney World and Disneyland and a boycott of the Disney cable television channel. We are also asking the public to call Disney and tie up the lines by making a complaint." In the wake of this call for action, Disney's lines were so overloaded that their famous 1-800-W-DISNEY number was disconnected; other lines were similarly disabled.

The Catholic League said it would mobilize its members, asking them to sell their Disney stock and send postcards to Michael Eisner registering their outrage. Pledging to work with other organizations in this initiative, the League promised it would submit a resolution at the next Disney stockholders meeting. An expert in the field, Tom Strobhar, has agreed to write the resolution; having previously tackled K-Mart, Strobhar is just the man to do the job on Disney.

On April 10, the Catholic League went on the attack again, this time in the form of an ad placed on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* (click [here](#)). The ad is just one more example of the Catholic League's determination to reeducate the public as to the new status and the new face of the Walt Disney Company.

AP Responds to League Complaint

On March 10, the Associated Press (AP), in a story on a court ruling upholding a law barring doctors from engaging in assisted suicide, disclosed that federal appeals court judge John T. Noonan was a Catholic. Dr. Donohue sent a letter to AP executives asking, "Why does AP think it important for the public to learn of a judge's religion if he is a Catholic? Does AP find it necessary to disclose the religion of all judges, or just Catholic ones? I do not remember seeing Jewish judges identified as such. I wonder why."

Dr. Donohue requested a copy of the AP policy on the matter. "In the event AP policy allows reporters to designate the religion of public persons in stories that have little, if anything, to do with religion, then we would like to see recent examples," said a press release issued by the League. "If there is no anti-Catholic bigotry to worry about, we expect full and immediate disclosure."

In response to Dr. Donohue's letter and the League's press release, Darrell Christian, AP's Managing Editor, wrote, "Our policy on religion, as it is on race, is to mention it when it's relevant and omit it when it's not. In the specific story, we did not establish, as we should have done, why his past writings and scholarship were relevant to the case at hand. I can see why that would lead you to think we (were) making an unfair point of his religion."

The League is satisfied with AP's quick response, and expects that it will not have to call attention to such errors in the future.

League Scores Against Florida's SUN-SENTINEL

On February 24, Fort Lauderdale's *Sun-Sentinel* yielded to pressure from the Catholic League by issuing an apology and a pledge not to run any more anti-Catholic ads. The League raised objections on February 23 regarding the February 9 publication of a four-page ad that had been paid for by a Seventh Day Adventist splinter group. It was one of the fastest victories in the League's history.

The ad accused the Catholic Church of seeking to create a New World Order and portrayed the Pope as a satanic force. The apocalyptic ad was replete with statements regarding "Earth's Final Warning," blaming the Catholic Church for ushering in the "Days of Darkness" and "Days of Peril." It tried to convey the preposterous message that Pope John Paul II and President Clinton were conspiring together to take command of the world.

By the time the Catholic League was informed of this incident, some of our members in the area, along with others, had already registered their complaints with the newspaper. But not even the Diocese of Palm Beach was able to bring the paper to its senses. Accordingly, the Catholic League contacted the radio and television stations in the area, the opposition newspaper, and the nation's major media outlets registering its outrage and its demands. We demanded nothing less than "an apology to Catholics and a pledge that no such ads will ever be accepted again." We added that "If this is not forthcoming, the Catholic League will launch a public ad campaign of its own, one that will directly target the *Sun-Sentinel*."

The news release also questioned whether the vice-president and director of marketing, Jim Smith, would have acceded to other groups that wanted to promote bigotry. We asked if the newspaper would publish ads submitted by the Ku Klux Klan or the American Nazi Party.

The Catholic League is pleased with the response of the *Sun-Sentinel* and is not interested in conducting a public ad campaign against the newspaper. But while this issue has been closed, the larger issue of anti-Catholic bigotry in South Florida is not. That is why we will be starting a chapter in the area.

Report On Anti-Catholicism Released

The Catholic League's *1994 Report on Anti-Catholicism* has just been published. It is the first time that the League has issued what it expects will be an annual publication.

The need for such a report is clear to all Catholic League members, even if it is not so clear to others. Listed in the report are approximately 200 of the most egregious incidents of Catholic-bashing that occurred in 1994. In addition to republishing several of the most offensive cartoons that were published last year, there are seven categories where offenses have been noted: activist organizations; the arts; commercial establishments; education; government; media; and the workplace.

The report does not purport to be an exhaustive study of the degree of anti-Catholicism that occurred in 1994. But it is an important barometer of what is happening nationwide. The

purpose of the report is to educate the public and influence decision-makers in government, education and the media.

The Catholic League is disturbed by the extent to which the nation's elites seem to show unending tolerance for some segments of society while forgoing such tolerance when the subject is the Catholic Church. While we want to resist the fashionable exercise of claiming victim status, we also want to be accorded the same degree of respect for our heritage that is presently given to others. It is our hope that this report will help to accomplish that goal.

The report is being distributed to all members of Congress, the White House, the Equal Opportunity Commission, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and to prominent members in the fields of the media and education.

“60 Minutes” Rigs Show Against Catholic Church

On January 22, the CBS program “60 Minutes” aired a segment on the Catholic dissident group Call to Action. The segment covered a Call to Action conference held in Chicago in November, 1994, treating viewers to comments from the most alienated portions of the Catholic community. In the wake of the show, the headquarters of the Catholic League was deluged with phone calls and letters, all of which asked for League action. When it became apparent that the show was doctored to produce a certain result, the League made a formal organizational response.

At the time of the shooting of the Call to Action conference, “60 Minutes” executive producer Barry Lando was quoted as

saying that the segment would provide a look "at the state of the Catholic Church in the U.S. today." However, the show did nothing of the kind, focusing instead on a very small and unrepresentative portion of the Catholic community. Nowhere in the program was Call for Action depicted as the radical fringe, rather the members were politely, and incorrectly, called "cafeteria Catholics."

In the beginning of the show, reporter Mike Wallace asserted that "a growing number [of Catholics] have begun to question some of his [the pope's] teachings," suggesting that while Call to Action may not be the authentic voice of the Church, it was not a band of aging malcontents either. Yet because 50 percent of the members are over the age of 50, and most are women, the composition of Call to Action hardly mirrors the demographics of the Catholic population. And their extremist positions hardly square with the sentiments of the rank and file, yet none of this merited much attention from Mr. Wallace, a reporter widely acclaimed for his tough style. Indeed, he let the most inane comments go wholly uncontested.

It is significant that the program did not show any element in the Church that could plausibly be branded mainstream. Instead, it featured such bizarre groups as Rent A Priest, outfits that are as unknown to Catholics as non-Catholics. It also showed a few nuns protesting Church teachings in St. Peter's Square. Most telling, however, was the segment where a group of women, some of whom were nuns, were shown saying Mass and distributing Holy Communion.

The show constantly tried to cast the Pope as a stubborn Neanderthal fighting against the forces of enlightenment. Time after time the program referred to *his* teachings (meaning the Holy Father's), and not the *Church's* teachings, the effect of which was to personalize, and therefore delegitimize, the pope's authority. Another effect was to encourage the viewer to believe that one man stands in the way of much desired change, and that the change agents have been victimized by the

Vatican.

The lack of balance in the show was intentional. "60 Minutes" had access to a more informed and representative voice, and still decided not to air it. In point of fact, it had on tape an interview with two lay authorities on the Catholic Church (both of whom are members of the Catholic League's board of advisors), interviews that had been commissioned by "60 Minutes" for the express purpose of responding to the Call to Action segment. Harvard Law Professor Mary Ann Glendon and Ethics and Public Policy Center President George Weigel taped an interview with Mike Wallace in New York on December 4, 1994, but with-in a few days of the taping, Wallace called to tell them that their interview had been dropped because "the chemistry just wasn't right."

The Catholic League sent two letters to executive producer Barry Lando and issued the following press release on January 25:

"The entire Call to Action segment was, from beginning to end, an exercise in intellectual dishonesty and journalistic malpractice. The decision to give high profile to the Catholic Church's radical fringe was pure politics, and it is nothing short of outrageous that Barry Lando and Mike Wallace solicited, and then rejected, views that would have provided for some semblance of fairness. Allowing extremists an uncontested opportunity to rail against the Catholic Church distorts the sentiments of most Catholics and provides succor for bigots.

"There is a difference between reporting dissent, and promoting it. By refusing to air interviews with Mary Ann Glendon and George Weigel, '60 Minutes' made clear its preference, extending to the disaffected a platform that they have never earned within the Catholic community. It is not hard to orchestrate any result, not when there is a determined effort to manipulate and steer the outcome. This is propaganda

at work, not journalism.”

In a letter to the Catholic League, “60 Minutes” defended its position by saying that no one from the Catholic hierarchy agreed to be interviewed (for reasons readily understood by everyone but those at “60 Minutes”). However, Bishop John Myers of Peoria, Illinois did agree to go on the show, but only on the condition that he be guaranteed an unedited three to four minutes to reply to the Call to Action piece. He was turned down. Importantly, this was before Wallace asked Glendon and Weigel to appear, making inexcusable the refusal of “60 Minutes” to run their interview.

The bottom line is this: Call to Action got a a free ride, and the Catholic Church got a bum rap. Again.