

CATHOLIC BAITING PUNDITS SCORE BUCHANAN

The rise in popularity of presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan has triggered a trail of Catholic baiting remarks from some of the nation's leading political pundits. On February 28, Catholic League president William Donohue spoke at the National Press Club in Washington, DC addressing this issue. Representatives from the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish were there to comment on how unfair some in the media have been in making Buchanan's religion the target of controversy.

Dr. Donohue stressed that the Catholic League was not in any way lending its support to Buchanan. Indeed, he said that if Buchanan happened to be a liberal Democrat, the Catholic League would respond exactly the same way. He then cited several instances where the media had unfairly invoked Buchanan's religion. Here is a sample of the issues he discussed.

The following comments all appeared in the latter part of February:

- On ABC's "Nightline," there is a thinly veiled attempt to establish a cause and effect relationship between Buchanan's Jesuit training and his alleged sympathy for bigotry. This show, which aired on February 23, was cited as the most offensive misuse of Buchanan's religious heritage.
- On NBC's the "McLaughlin Group," Newsweek columnist Eleanor Clift said of Buchanan that "He's even more giddy than when he kept the Uzzi and the rosary beads under that chair."
- On CNN's news with Wolf Blitzer, Mark Russell opined, "You've heard him say, 'When I take my hand off the

Bible, my friends, I will put Rottweilers and pit bulls on the Mexican border, and nuns into the public schools.' Or is it nuns on the Mexican border and Rottweilers in the public schools?"

- In articles that appeared on the same day in the New York Observer, one speaks of "Mr. Buchanan's nominal religion" and the other states that he is a "fervent member" of Roman Catholicism. It is also said that Buchanan is a "champion of the unborn, the orthodox and perhaps even the Latin mass."
- The New York Times, the Washington Post and Newsweek closely examine Buchanan's religion with an eye toward explaining his "fascistic" politics.
- Newsday on Long Island, the News in Stuart, Florida, and the Oregonian print cartoons that malign Buchanan by attacking his religion.

The Catholic League released the following comment to the media on this issue:

"This kind of commentary is despicable. Presidential candidates should be assessed on the basis of their views, not their religious background. If the same tactic had been used to discredit Arlen Specter, it would have been quickly branded anti-Semitic. Why this assault isn't labeled Catholic baiting is a telling statement on the media. The constant references to Buchanan's 'Jesuit' training, especially when coupled with critical statements about the candidate, is done not to educate but to inflame. The media should retire its red flags once and for all."

The media covered the press conference but did not give it the kind of attention that the issue merited, raising even more questions about the way reporters respond to Catholic baiting.