

Catholic Bashing, Elite Style

We get lots of calls left on our answering machine, most of which are run-of-the-mill-type messages. Some, however, are downright obscene. But whatever can be said of foul-mouthed bigots, the charge of cowardice or hypocrisy usually doesn't apply. The same is not true of the Catholic bashers who work at the ABA, Benetton and Calvin Klein. They not only insult Catholics, they seek to do so with impunity.

A few years back, the ABA strayed from its non-partisan tradition by formally committing the organization to the politics of abortion. Now the ABA is playing games again, and just like its first foray into partisan politics, the subject is abortion and Catholicism. Ever consistent, the ABA's affection for abortion rights is matched by its hostility to Catholicism.

It is one thing for the ABA to print an obtuse piece on the merger of Catholic and secular hospitals, quite another to inflame Catholics with a cover illustration of a pregnant woman "crucified" on an operating table. Evidently, the editors of *Human Rights* have a rather limited understanding of the rights of Catholics and an even poorer grasp of the responsibilities of a publisher. To make matters worse, however, the officials at the ABA are cowards as well.

When we asked the ABA for permission to reprint the cover illustration, we were denied. We were told instead to consult with the artist, a New York woman by the name of Victoria Kann. If she agreed, then we were free to reprint the cover. But, of course, she refused, making plain her objections to our objections to her offensive work.

Benetton is another master of hypocrisy. It actually goes out of its way to offend certain segments of society and then plays dumb when challenged. More disturbing is the effrontery

it displayed by criticizing the Calvin Klein jean ads for going "over the line." Benetton spokesman Peter Fressola said that the Klein ads were "very erotic and manipulative," adding that "I think they very much knew what they were doing." Of course they did, and so did Benetton when it released its Christ on the Cross, "Do You Play Alone," Asolo boot ad.

In an official statement on its ads for the 1995-1996 season, Benetton describes its "Christ/Asolo Boots" ad as depicting "A regular man whose performance in life made him larger than any man in history. When you play life and play alone, only a superior performance counts." Now are we to believe that Benetton didn't know what it was doing when it branded Jesus Christ a "regular man"? The addlebrained employees at Benetton certainly knew that this ad was "over the line," but like their competitors at Calvin Klein, and like their counterparts at the ABA, they prefer to shun all responsibility for their conduct.

Lots of reporters were surprised that the Calvin Klein ads were singled out for criticism. After all, they reasoned, why were these ads any different from all the others that offend these days? One reason was surely the age of the models. Nearly everyone objected to the sexploitation of kids, the lone exception being the ACLU.

Norm Siegel of the New York affiliate complained that groups like the Catholic League were chilling "cutting-edge sexual expression." I hope Norm's right, but I find it curious why an organization that purportedly objects only to attempts by the government to quell speech, and is allegedly committed to defending the free speech of private citizens (that would appear to include us), would sound the alarm of censorship. But then again internal consistency is not an attribute the ACLU ever possessed.

Another reason why the Calvin Klein ads created an uproar was the sheer ubiquity of the ads: they were plastered all over

New York City buses and were hung from huge billboards in heavily trafficked areas of the city. So much for the tired argument about “averting your eyes.” Not anymore we can’t.

To Camille Paglia, the Calvin Klein ads were the product of radical homosexuals. Paglia is a maverick lesbian writer who likes pornography. “Those images of vulnerable boys with their legs spread,” she explained, “that’s right out of the NAMBLA [North American Man-Boy Love Association] magazines that I get.” Commenting on who is behind the ads, Paglia offers, “It’s gay guys in the fashion industry pushing the pedophilia agenda.” Having seen the ads, I have no reason to doubt her insight.

The people who work at the ABA, Benetton and Calvin Klein are all very well educated. But it only goes to show that hate and greed can kill even the best of minds.