

CATHOLIC CONVULSIONS

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The Catholic League is dubbed “pathetic” by Father Andrew Greeley and is called “semiparanoid” and “un-American” by David Carlin of *Commonweal*, a journal of liberal Catholic opinion. Both claim to be exercised about anti-Catholicism and yet neither has a good word to say about the one organization that has done more to combat it than any other. What explains such Catholic convulsions?

Not for a moment do I doubt that Greeley and Carlin have no tolerance for anti-Catholicism, but neither do I doubt that their sincerity stops short of defending the Church as it exists. The problem comes down to this: what Greeley and Carlin see in the Catholic League is an organization that defends the status quo, and that is the root cause of their animus against us. Their perception is accurate and their position is deplorable.

As our mission statement proclaims, the Catholic League defends individual Catholics and the institutional Church from defamation and discrimination. It does not reach into the past to defend the Church the way it was, nor does it extend itself into the future to defend the Church the way it might evolve. It is quite content with doing its job defending the Church of 1997.

But Greeley and Carlin will have none of it. To them, to defend the Catholic League is to defend today’s Church and, given their politics, that is not something they can stomach. So it is better to bash us even at the risk of giving succor to Catholic bashers.

There are no Greeley’s and Carlin’s in the ranks of African Americans and Jews and that is because the NAACP and ADL fight exclusively for the rights of their people. The league fights

for the Church, as well as for individuals, and that means that it defends the teachings of the Church. There's the rub for Greeley and Carlin: there are some teachings they strongly reject, hence they reject organizations that defend them.

Don't get me wrong. It is not impossible to protest both anti-Catholicism and the Catholic League. For example, I reject sexism *and* the National Organization for Women, but I do so because I disagree with NOW's agenda: for me, child abuse begins in the womb. But the league has no agenda other than a defense of Church.

If the Catholic League more typically defends the Church from attacks on the left than on the right, it is because that is where most of the attacks are coming from these days (the challenge to the Church's teachings on sexual ethics does not emanate from right-wing sources). And if that is a problem for Greeley and Carlin, then let them say so right out in the open.

I am especially taken by Carlin's worry that the Catholic League "may actually succeed" in driving anti-Catholicism "underground." He even goes so far as to say that the league's strategy acts as a deterrent to the kind of "explicit, head-on attack on Christianity" he seems to prefer. Is that what he tells blacks, to relax in combating racism and rejoice at the sight of the boys in their white sheets?

Carlin also worries, and no doubt Greeley does as well, that "there is something un-American in Donohue's attempt to silence critics of Catholicism by labeling them bigots." Now it would make sense for me to respond to this charge if only Carlin could provide just one example. But he can't.

For the record, as I have said over and over again, there is a profound difference between criticism on the one hand, and disdain, disparagement, contempt and insult on the other. We draw those distinctions all the time and those who claim we

don't ought to put up or shut up.

Moreover, we never question an offender's motives—what we respond to is an offense, whether intended or not. Naturally, we decide whether we've been offended, and we have no intention of e-mailing Father Greeley or Mr. Carlin to ask whether they've been offended.

Here's a challenge to Greeley and Carlin I'd like to make. Let them outline what a model Catholic anti-defamation organization ought to do and then let them see how much interest there is among their ideological allies about establishing one. Good luck and wake me when the game's over.

Meanwhile, we at the Catholic League will keep on doing exactly what we've been doing. And we'll do it with a smile. After all, winning is fun.