

CATHOLIC LEAGUE BACKS “JUSTICE SUNDAY”

On April 24, Family Research Council president Tony Perkins staged a major event in Louisville, Kentucky, “Justice Sunday.” Held at Highview Baptist Church, the program was an effort to rally pro-life Protestants against efforts to block people of faith from sitting on the federal bench.

Perkins was supported by Protestant leaders such as Rev. James Dobson, Dr. Al Mohler and Chuck Colson. William Donohue was the lone Catholic to speak at the event, though Perkins would later say, “your speech ‘stole the show.’” The event was shown on simulcast to 61 million households in 44 states.

In addition to Perkins, Dobson, Mohler, Colson and Donohue, the other speakers were Baptist Bishop Harry Jackson, Judge Charles Pickering and Senator Bill Frist; Dr. Frist and Chuck Colson appeared on video.

Dr. Frist spoke for everyone when he said that judges deserve “respect, not retaliation, no matter how they rule.” The goal of the event was to put pressure on the Senate to rewrite the filibuster rules that Democrats have used to block 10 of President Bush’s appeals court nominees. What the speakers demanded was a vote, up or down, and an end to the procrastination.

In a press release issued just two days before “Justice Sunday,” we explained why we supported the event: “For the past few years, the Catholic League has protested the way some Democrats have engaged in obstructionist strategies designed to stop committed Christians from being confirmed for circuit and district court positions. In addition to discussing this issue on radio and TV, we have had Catholic League officials attend congressional hearings on some of the targeted

nominees, and have written letters to all 100 senators outlining our position. Our position is this: Though there is no *de jure* discrimination against people of faith, there is *de facto* discrimination."

We then provided the following evidence: "For example, when Senator Schumer labeled a pro-life candidate for the federal judiciary a person with 'deeply held beliefs' on abortion, we all know what that means: it's code for deeply held *religious* beliefs."

We did not budge on this issue just because some of those opposing Catholic pro-life judges like Bill Pryor are themselves Catholic. "It does not matter that senators like Kennedy, Durbin and Leahy—all of whom are part of the problem—are Catholic," we said, "none accepts the teachings of the Catholic Church on abortion, and are thus quite capable of keeping those who do from being a federal judge."

Donohue also deflected the charge that we are calling these senators bigots: "So as not to be misunderstood, let me repeat what I've said before: the Catholic League believes there are no anti-Catholic senators. But that doesn't empty the issue—if Catholics who hold to the Church's position on abortion are repeatedly vetoed—the effect is clearly a form of *de facto* discrimination."

Moreover, Donohue did not shy from critics who said he should not take part in the program: "Some opponents of 'Justice Sunday' have said that Dr. Al Mohler has branded the Catholic religion 'a false religion.' He's obviously wrong, but then again he's a Southern Baptist and that's what they believe. As long as we're not called a satanic cult—a la Bob Jones University—I'm prepared to join hands in the culture war."

No sooner had our statement been released when the Family Research Council was on the phone inviting Donohue to join them for the event. The next day, Donohue flew to Louisville.

The following are excerpts from Donohue's speech that were quoted on TV and in newspapers:

- "They've set the bar so high on the abortion issue, we can't get any real Catholics over it."
- "Dr. Frist is absolutely right. Keep it civil. And what do they do? They say we're going to have a theocracy. They said the same thing when Bush got elected, we're going to have a theocratic state. What are we, the Taliban?"
- "We will be disobedient altar boys! We won't be told to shut up and give it over to the secular left! Who are they to say that I don't have a right to freedom of speech?"
- "We're not gonna shut up and be little altar boys. We have something to say."
- "They claim to be the high priests of tolerance, and yet they practice intolerance against us."
- "White or black, Protestant or Catholic, Orthodox Jew, we're fed up. We're on the same side. And if the secular left is worried, they should be worried."

An event staged to counter "Justice Sunday" was held the same day in Louisville. Jim Wallis, a leading liberal evangelical who edits *Sojourners* magazine, led the protesters. He accused those involved in "Justice Sunday" of instigating "a religious war."

The culture is surely changing. On pp. 8-9, we have a feature story on how some Jews are working with Christians to halt the moral decline of our culture. And in Louisville, it was clear that Catholics and evangelical Protestants are working together toward the same end. This fight isn't over by a long shot.