

CELEBRITY CRUISES IS A SINKING SHIP

Catholic League president Bill Donohue responds to comments made in defense of Celebrity Cruises' decision to discontinue its policy of having priests celebrate daily Mass:

On January 14, we criticized Celebrity Cruises for effectively stiffing Catholic priests and laypersons who were counting on daily Mass being celebrated on board this year. Since then, some have defended the new policy by distorting the truth of what actually occurred.

To be specific, it is a slight of hand to say, as Celebrity spokeswoman Liz Jakeway did, that the new policy is "built around our guests' feedback and their suggestion that we 'level the playing field.'" There was feedback alright, but it was hardly amicable. Quite the opposite: Celebrity acknowledged in its initial memo of December 14, 2009 that the new policy was written in response to "a great deal of negative feedback" pertaining to Catholic services. In the same memo, it says "We know that from time to time, there have been some negative comments from non-Catholic passengers, as Celebrity mentions in their note." In other words, Celebrity let bigotry—not parity—drive its new policy.

Similarly, one would never know the truth of what happened by reading Cathy Lynn Grossman's column in *USA Today*. She makes it sound as if Catholics had been cut a deal by Celebrity at the expense of others. She reports that some "were annoyed that Catholic clergy had ever been favored over other faiths that have daily or weekly prayers." But there was no favoritism: there is a profound difference between non-Catholic clergy not requesting daily religious services and their being denied by Celebrity.

If Celebrity and its cheering section can't defend the new policy on principle, then it should at least not play fast and loose with the facts. We understand the need for corporate damage control, but we have no tolerance for dishonesty.

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