

CHICAGO CLUB EXPLOITS CATHOLICISM

A new nightclub called Convent opened in Chicago on May 9. When it opened, it is was evident that the thematic element to the club was Catholicism and the treatment that it was accorded was decidedly irreverent. The club was adorned with Catholic imagery and the bartenders and waitresses were dressed in Catholic garb.

As part of its marketing strategy, Convent hosted a preview of the club on May 7. Patrick Cremin, the president of the Chicago chapter of the league, was in attendance and what he saw was disturbing. Accordingly, the national headquarters of the Catholic League asked the owners of the club to make certain modifications.

The Catholic League issued the following press release on the club:

“The Chicago nightclub Convent takes liberties with Catholicism that are purely indefensible. To exploit a world religion for the purpose of commercial gain is the kind of thing that no one from any religion would find acceptable. What the league is asking for is a modification of the most egregious examples of this exploitation.

“The Catholic League is asking the owners of the club to alter the dress code of its bartenders and waitresses; apparently some bartenders dress as priests and all of the waitresses dress in Catholic schoolgirl outfits. It is also asking that the mirrored crucifix in the Hell Room be removed and that such drinks as Holy Water and Confessionals be retitled.

“The Catholic League, with the assistance of the late Cardinal Bernardin, recently fought for the modification of an offensive logo sported by the House of Blues. We were pleased

with that outcome and we hope that the owners of Convent model themselves on the House of Blues by making reasonable changes. In the event cooperation is not shown, the league is prepared to make this a case of national significance."

The league was glad to see that the *Chicago Sun-Times* printed a fine editorial on the club. Here is part of what it said: "It is tempting to dismiss this as just another publicity stunt. We have been here before, last November, when the House of Blues appropriated a sacred Catholic symbol to advertise tunes and cheap booze. It outraged some Catholics and, inevitably, when the publicity cow was fully milked, the logo was changed." [Editor's note: league members will remember that it was the work of Cardinal Bernardin and the Catholic League that forced the House of Blues to change its logo.]

The editorial went on to say that "Catholics should be outraged by the Convent, as should people of all faiths and those who believe the spirituality of our fellow citizens should not be mocked. Jews and Muslims would be deeply offended if a temple or mosque were so belittled. Christianity is the majority religion in this democracy and no one would say it is not a subject for satire. But the Convent is not even pseudo-satire."

The league wrote to the sisters who own the club, Shar Mansukhani and Surita Mansukhani. They responded by denying most of the charges. It appears that after the league's protest, they removed some of the worst elements. But the tone of their letter, combined with some flip statements about Catholic schoolgirls, leave us to believe that they are not to be trusted.

Members can contact the sisters at Convent Night Club, 1529 W. Armitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622.