

COMPUSERVE PULLS DISPUTED FORUM FROM WEBSITE

CompuServe, one of the nation's leading computer companies, withdrew a disputed forum from its website after a protest by the Catholic League.

Thanks to league member Lisa Bastian of Cincinnati, Ohio, we got a tip that the CompuServe website featured a "Transgender Forum" that was laced with anti-Catholic commentary. All it took to find these remarks was to tap into the "What's New" section: up popped a quip about how the Vatican was "built on the site of the temple of a sect of transgendered priests."

The disputed section targeted the pope. He was cited as "acknowledging" this "historical fact," and was said to have apologized for Christian intolerance of transgendered people. Moreover, the statement said that "His Holiness confirms that henceforth only post-operative trans men would be allowed to become Cardinals."

Upon learning of this, William Donohue called Ann Bentley, the director of communications for CompuServe (the company is owned by American Online). She said that this was a "programming error," apologized for the mistake and said that the objectionable site had been taken down. But she also remarked how this was posted by one of their business partners and was meant to be "satirical." Donohue made the point that she wouldn't treat this as satire if some other group had been lambasted. She didn't dispute this. In any event, it appeared that the league's demands were satisfied.

Unfortunately, another phone call by Bastian to Donohue—alerting him that the statements had not been taken down—led to Donohue contacting Bentley again. He was told that the objectionable remarks were removed from the "What's New"

section, but that they would remain part of the "Transgender Forum" section. Bentley said she had no control over what people put on this forum.

Donohue pressed her by arguing that he wanted to put up a Klan Forum on her website, one that would target blacks and Jews. She balked, got his point and moved quickly to eliminate the "Transgender Forum" altogether.

This victory demonstrates what can happen when league members work in tandem with our office. It also shows the limits of what dialogue can accomplish and how successful old-fashioned pressure politics can be. Needless to say, it also points out the nonchalant attitude that many have toward anti-Catholicism, and the need for the Catholic League.