

CONFUSING RELIGION AND ETHNICITY

The *Statesmen Journal* of Salem, Oregon, recently ran a lengthy front-page story on a young Hispanic girl who was about to receive her First Holy Communion. Of course, the article had much more to say than simply report on the experiences of the young girl. Indeed, it quickly became apparent that the real purpose of the story was to blame Catholicism for the allegedly poor academic record of Hispanic youth.

On the front page, the story, which ran in the Sunday, May 18 edition, featured a color photo of the young girl in her Communion dress, along with eight other color photos of Catholic children, their parents and priests. What was disturbing about this “news” story was the way editorial remarks were interwoven in the piece.

We learned, for example, that First Holy Communion initiates Catholic children into “a culture of selflessness and devotion that, in some children, discourages individual striving.” The next sentence said it all: “The results can be disastrous to education.”

In reply, William Donohue challenged the assertion that the family-oriented nature of Catholic rituals had had a negative effect on the academic achievement and life chances of Hispanics. “But if this were so,” he said, “then how does one explain that a) non-Hispanic Catholics are second only to Jews in educational achievement and b) Hispanics who attend Catholic schools outperform their public school cohorts?”