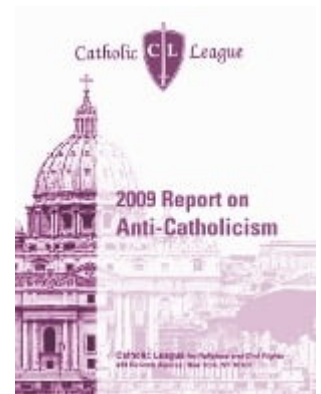


Executive Summary

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Every year in the Catholic League's history has its similarities and unique qualities. What made 2009 so different from past years was the extent to which government threatened the rights of Catholics and the Catholic Church. That it occurred at the local, state and federal levels made the onslaught all the more ominous.

Americans expect government to protect rights, not threaten them. But in the case of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, the government acted badly. We were back in court again in 2009, represented by the fine counsel from the Thomas More Law Center, seeking justice in a case that originated in 2006. That was the year this governmental body lashed out at the Catholic Church in a vicious and unconstitutional way: it sought to intimidate Catholics from exercising their religious liberty and free speech rights.

In 2006, the members of the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution labeling the Vatican a "foreign country" that was "meddling" in the affairs of San Franciscans. The accusation of "meddling" boiled down to one thing: the Catholic Church is opposed to gay and lesbian couples adopting children. Now anyone is free to disagree with this position, but it is indefensible for the agents of the state to call the teachings of a world religion "hateful," as well as "insensitive and ignorant," simply because it holds to a traditional

understanding of marriage. This is more than preposterous, it is downright dangerous.

The First Amendment does more than guard religious institutions from the encroachment of government, it makes it unconstitutional for government officials to create a hostile environment for the faithful. At the end of the year, our case went before a panel of eleven judges of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals; the en banc panel reviewed an earlier opinion rendered by three judges of the Ninth Circuit that upheld the resolution. That the courts even have to consider such a case is troubling enough, never mind the continued obstinacy of the Board of Supervisors.

At the state level, the most egregious violation of religious liberty took place in Connecticut. In March, two gay lawmakers sought to take over the administrative affairs of the Catholic Church. Bold as could be, the bigots decided that the state government had a right to strip pastors of their authority and rewrite Church strictures governing decision-making. No other religion was cited, making it plain that the kind of animus against Catholicism as witnessed in San Francisco was operative in Connecticut as well.

Fortunately, a coalition of Catholics prevailed. Led by Bridgeport Bishop William Lori, Connecticut bishops, priests, religious and lay people fought back, with assistance from the Catholic League. We called for the expulsion of the lawmakers, blanketed the media with news releases and did what we could to galvanize Catholic League members in the state. Pointedly, we branded this effort a "fascistic stunt." On July 1, the Ethics Office that had been triggered to investigate the Catholic Church dropped the matter altogether.

Before considering actions taken by the federal government, just consider what San Francisco and Connecticut officials sought to do. Their goal was to silence and cripple the Catholic Church. Had it been reversed—had the Catholic Church

condemned elected officials for “meddling” in the affairs of the Church for merely disagreeing with its teachings, or if it announced that it was going to take over the operations of a state government—there would have been a backlash the likes of which we have never seen. And there would have been lawsuits galore. It is quite disturbing that Catholics are still fighting for fundamental rights in 2009.

Leading the charge against the Catholic Church at the federal level is the Obama administration. Such hostility to matters Catholic has not been seen in Washington for a very long time. The president refused to speak at Georgetown University unless it agreed to put a drape over the Latin words for Jesus (he didn’t want IHS to appear in the background when he spoke); he chose several anti-Catholics to join his staff; and he worked hard for a health care bill that contained public funding for abortion and jeopardized the conscience rights of health care employees.

It could have been worse. Obama came to Washington pledging to sign the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), the most draconian piece of legislation ever targeted at the Catholic Church. FOCA would have forced the closing of Catholic hospitals. Why? Because it contained language that would have allowed the government to require Catholic hospitals, as a condition of receiving federal funds, to perform abortions. Obviously, the bishops made plain their opposition, and because they succeeded in stopping FOCA from being reintroduced, the Obama team decided to slip abortion funding in backdoor through the health care bill.

While it is entirely possible to be pro-abortion and not be anti-Catholic, the issue of abortion is taken so seriously by the Catholic Church that not to give this issue considerable coverage in this volume would clearly be delinquent. Moreover, there is evidence that anti-Catholicism marred the debate over health care. Amy Sullivan, for instance, said in the pages of *Time* magazine that “anti-Catholic sentiment and rhetoric is

already flying fast and loose in the pro-choice community"; she took the occasion to warn the bishops about making matters worse (as if the bishops were responsible for causing a bigoted response).

Harry Knox. Kevin Jennings. Chai Feldblum. Dawn Johnsen. These are just some of the people with a history of hostility towards Catholicism that Obama found worthy of nominating. Knox is known for insulting the pope; Jennings previously funded an anti-Catholic group; Feldblum has a record of subordinating religious liberties to so-called sexual rights; and Johnsen once tried to strip the Catholic Church of its tax exempt status.

It is no wonder that when President Obama was picked to speak, and to receive an award, at the University of Notre Dame, it became a hot-button issue. Over 80 bishops issued statements opposing the graduation honors, and Notre Dame came under fire from many alumni, as well as from Catholics who long identified with the university as a beacon of Catholicism. The position of the Catholic League was not to oppose Obama speaking on campus, but to oppose honoring him.

There is a big section in this volume on the pope. That is not good news. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI made some decisions which some Catholics, as well as non-Catholics, took exception to, and that is all fine and good. What is not acceptable, however, is vitriol. There is a difference between robust disagreement and vile rhetoric, and this annual report contains many examples of the latter.

It is an indication of how incivility has trumped common courtesy in this country that so many obscene comments were made against the Holy Father in 2009. One of the trigger issues was the pope's outreach to the St. Pius X Society, a breakaway group of ultra-conservative Catholics. Among the members of this group is Richard Williamson, a bishop whom the Catholic League acknowledged held some "loopy and wholly

discredited views on the Holocaust.” Yes, the vetting process should have been stronger, but this did not justify the over-the-top remarks made against the pope.

Another issue which set off the alarms in anti-Catholic circles was the pope’s questioning of the utility of condoms. In some parts of America, this is tantamount to heresy. Many condom advocates wonder how any reasonable person can disagree with their belief that condoms protect against HIV/AIDS. Never mind that researchers like Harvard’s Edward C. Green have been able to show that “the best evidence we have supports the pope’s comments.” What works, according to Green, are behavioral matters such as faithfulness to one’s spouse and abstinence. No matter, in the eyes of Catholic bashers, the pope is responsible for Africans killing themselves by not wearing condoms.

Ripping the pope will always garner media attention, but when it’s a private person who is being savaged, the aggrieved needs an organization like the Catholic League to whip up public opinion. Such was the case of Larry Grard, a reporter for Maine’s *Morning Sentinel* for some 19 years. He was fired for e-mailing a letter to a gay activist with whom he disagreed; the activist said hate was endemic among those who oppose gay marriage, and Grard said it was the other side that generated the hate. Not only was Grard fired (he used his own personal e-mail account), so was his wife (she wrote a bimonthly column on cooking). We were happy to provide Grard with advice and legal contacts to fight back, and he certainly did. The year ended with the case unresolved.

When we began the year, we knew that “Angels & Demons,” the Ron Howard adaptation of Dan Brown’s book by that name, would be among the biggest issues for the Catholic League in 2009. Knowing how much publicity came our way when we went on the attack against the Brown-Howard film “The Da Vinci Code,” we knew full well that a booklet on “Angels & Demons” would provide similar results. We were right.

There is something unseemly about the Brown-Howard tag team. They know that what they are peddling about the Catholic Church is not mere propaganda, it is a string of lies made up out of whole cloth. Duplicitous all the way, when they are pressed to buttress their tales with historical evidence, they repair to their fall-back position—it is just fiction. But that's only when they are pressed: otherwise, they are content to pass their stuff off as if it were true.

When Brown and Howard maintain that “it is a historical fact” that the Illuminati were formed in the 1600s, they are lying through their teeth. They lie because they want to pitch Galileo—the ultimate bogeyman in anti-Catholic lore—as a member. But the fact is that the Illuminati didn't exist until 1776, almost 150 years after Galileo died.

If this were all that Brown-Howard did to hurt the Catholic Church, it would be no big deal. The real damage done by them was selling the pernicious and flat-out false notion that the Catholic Church is anti-science. Nothing could be further from the truth, but in the minds of those ill-disposed to Catholicism, it rings true.

Our case against Brown-Howard was sealed when a Canadian priest, dressed incognito, spent a few days with the film crew for “Angels & Demons.” As recounted in our booklet on the movie, Father Bernard O'Connor revealed just how convinced the crew was of the “wretchedness” of the Catholic Church. Speaking of Brown, one of the crew said, “Like most of us, he often says that he would do anything to demolish that detestable institution.” The evidence doesn't get much plainer than this.

HBO is home to more anti-Catholic shows than any other TV station, and what happened in 2009 just added to its reputation. Bill Maher is the major reason why HBO leads the pack, so it was not surprising that his show was chosen by comedian Sarah Silverman to bash the pope. She began her

tirade by lamenting the problem of world hunger, but then quickly turned with a vengeance on the Catholic Church. Out of all the institutions in the world, she fingered the Catholic Church as the one that should divest all its holdings and give all the loot to the poor. After making a gratuitous shot at the Church for its "involvement" in the Holocaust, she ended with a vulgar comment about the pope. This wasn't humor—it was a crude and totally unprovoked hit job on Catholicism.

A few weeks later, HBO was the venue of another obscene shot: Larry David, the creator of "Seinfeld," was depicted urinating on a picture of Jesus. Naturally, we were chastised by defenders of David that it was done in jest. I had a chance to respond to this lame argument on "Fox and Friends" by suggesting, "Let him go and pee on the face of the president, and then let him explain to African-Americans that it was all in jest."

It wasn't HBO that was the source of the most egregious attack on the Catholic Church in 2009—it was Showtime. An episode of "Penn & Teller," I wrote at the time, "will go down in history as one of the ugliest assaults on Catholics, or any other group, ever to air on television." This was not an exaggeration.

From beginning to end, this was the most relentless Catholic bashing imaginable. The lies, coupled with obscenities of the most extreme sort, were enough to make any fair-minded non-Catholic wince, if not throw up. Because CBS owns Showtime, we targeted the broadcasting giant. Our campaign worked.

We raised the money to send over 1,000 copies of the DVD to every bishop in the nation, along with leading religious figures from every major faith group. We also posted a copy of the show on our website, encouraging members to see it for themselves. And, of course, we implored everyone to contact CBS.

There is no question CBS got the message. My conversations with a top CBS official convinced me of that. Every huge institution has an army of lawyers prepared to handle litigation, so it is not a big deal when they have to go to court. But no institution, no matter what its size, wants to have its reputation sullied in the court of public opinion. We knew this, and that is why we defiantly distributed and posted online copies of the video. The number of complaints lodged against CBS was considerable, and the prestigious nature of the complainants made our campaign all the more effective.

Penn & Teller may pose as comedians, but in the case of Penn Jillette, at least, his atheism and deep-seated hatred of the Catholic Church often flares. We live in a time when atheists are using every microphone available to vent their bigotry. No, not all atheists are angry or bigoted, but in the current climate there is no shortage of intellectuals, activists, pundits and entertainers who are. They even organized the first annual International Blasphemy Day in September.

The Center for Inquiry launched this effort, choosing the anniversary of the 2005 publication of the Danish cartoons that so inflamed the Muslim world as the inaugural day. Interestingly, the events of the day had nothing at all to do with expressing contempt for Islam. No, it was Christianity the atheists wanted to beat up on, especially Catholicism.

Atheists organized at Christmas to erect their childish signs and posters in public places, often alongside nativity scenes. Because they believe in nothing, and stand for nothing positive, they choose the Christmas season to showcase their brilliance. The Freedom from Religion Foundation and the American Humanist Association were the most active of the atheist groups. The biggest splash of the season, however, went to the animal rights phonies from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). Leaving aside the fact that they kill 95 percent of the animals in their care, PETA conducted a Christmas fundraiser by picturing a *Playboy* girl

naked, save for a large crucifix that barely covered her private parts.

We ended the year on a strong note when England's most well known advocate of atheism for kids, Philip Pullman, announced that there would be no more film adaptations of his trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. The movie version of his book, *The Golden Compass*, was met with a boycott by the Catholic League in 2007. It worked. Pullman wanted to see a movie based on the second and third volumes of his work, *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*, but New Line Cinema was scared off after our successful boycott.

Our protest was based on the conviction that even though the film was modified so as not to blatantly offend Catholics, the movie was still bait for the books; we didn't want parents to be fooled into buying the trilogy for their children. We also knew that each book in the series was more anti-Catholic than the previous one, making it all the more important that the first movie flop at the box office in the United States.

Pullman's condemnation of the Catholic League, which was widely quoted throughout Britain, put a smile on our face. When he accused me of "triumphalism," I couldn't resist saying, "The accusation is accurate. I am positively gloating."

Not everything we do is this satisfying, but fighting the good fight never fails to satisfy, and that is rewarding in and of itself.

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