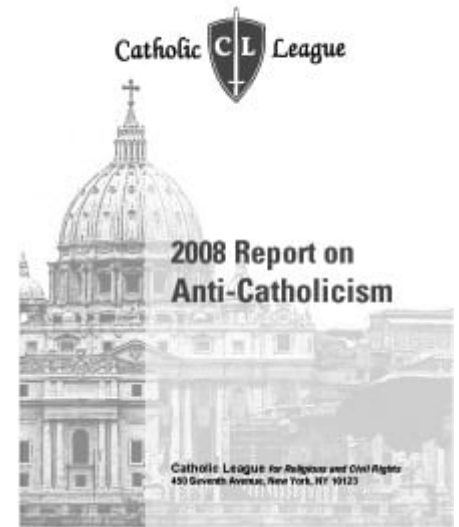


Executive Summary

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The most important Catholic event in the U.S. in 2008 was the papal visit that took place in April. Pope Benedict XVI not only brought joy and hope to the faithful, he swayed most of his skeptics. It was, by all accounts, a tremendous success, both in terms of publicity and evangelization. The goodwill that the Holy Father generated, among people of all religions, was incalculable.

While the Catholic League gave most in the media good marks, we also took note of the pope's detractors. Sadly, much of the unfair criticism lodged against the pope came from dissident Catholic groups. The National Coalition of American Nuns, the Women's Ordination Conference, Dignity, New Ways Ministry, Voice of the Faithful and Rainbow Sash all took cheap shots at the pope *before* he even landed in Washington, D.C. They were joined by sister organizations like the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), the professional victims' group, and Catholics for Choice, the anti-Catholic letterhead of an organization funded by the enemies of the Catholic Church.

All of these groups have an agenda, and none of it has anything to do with the best interests of the Church. They

find fault with the Church's teachings on priestly celibacy, criteria for the priesthood, sexuality and other issues, doing everything they can to discredit Catholicism. Though they received media coverage here and there, for the most part they were treated for what they are—yesterday's news.

In fact, the media were so professional overall that they angered a so-called progressive media watchdog group, Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR). It ran a story, "Pope Gets Pass on Church Abuse History," that was patently inaccurate. First of all, Pope Benedict was so forthcoming about discussing the sexual abuse scandal, over and over again, that it disarmed almost all of the Church's critics; he didn't get so much as a pass as he did admiration for his bluntness. Secondly, FAIR floated the idea that Cardinal Ratzinger, before he was named pope, attempted to cover up the scandal. As we pointed out, he did no such thing: he had nothing to do with the issue until *after* the scandal became a big story in 2002.

The number-one story for most Americans in 2008 was the presidential campaign and election. Our involvement was twofold: challenging Republican candidate John McCain on the endorsement he sought from Pastor John Hagee; and confronting his opponent, Democratic candidate Barack Obama, over his zealotry for abortion rights.

Pastor John Hagee and I started out as adversaries, but we ended as friends. In all my years as president of the Catholic League, never have I experienced a more sincere and contrite person than Hagee; the entire episode is recounted in the annual report. Hagee's past comments about the Catholic Church are what angered me over McCain's embrace, but I hasten to add that not only is our battle over, the outcome is something all Christians can be proud of: true reconciliation.

When Vatican officials contacted me with words of praise for bringing about a genuine turn of events, and when Hagee

himself greeted me with warmth in front of 7,000 of his supporters (as he did at his annual Christians United for Israel dinner), then it puts to rest any lingering hostilities.

The McCain camp could have handled this matter better; they felt the issue would just go away. But they didn't control the outcome—we had something to say about it. So when McCain officials called my office *informing* me of a conference call (one that would allegedly set me straight), I replied that it's always better to ask. Thus did the conversation end.

Our brawl with the Obama campaign focused mostly on the candidate's extreme position on abortion. He not only favored the Freedom of Choice Act—the most radical piece of pro-abortion legislation ever drafted—he refused to renounce his previous support for selective infanticide.

When Obama was in the Illinois state senate, he led the fight to deny health care to a baby born alive as a result of a botched abortion. The late New York State Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a supporter of *Roe v. Wade*, and former New York City Mayor Ed Koch, also an advocate of abortion rights, both drew the line at partial-birth abortion, saying it was too close to infanticide. Well, the bill Obama wanted wasn't close to infanticide—it sanctioned it in some cases.

As our name suggests, the Catholic League defends “religious and civil rights.” The first right, of course, is the right to be born. Obama's embrace of radical abortion laws was not something we could avoid, and we most certainly did not. We posted a special section on our website, “Obama and Infanticide,” that helped to educate the public on exactly what he had to say about the issue.

Obama gave the pro-life community pause when he said during the campaign that if there was one vote he would take back, it would be his vote authorizing government intervention in the

Terri Schiavo case; that authorization, it is important to remember, was unanimously decided upon by the Senate. Just as startling was Obama's comment that he believes the Sermon on the Mount justifies his support for legal recognition of same-sex unions.

When the Obama campaign announced the formation of a Catholic National Advisory Council, we urged him "to dissolve it immediately." We took this position because of the 26 Catholic former or current public office holders listed as either National Co-Chairs (5), or as members of the National Leadership Committee (21), not one of whom agreed with the Catholic Church on all three of the following public policy issues: abortion, embryonic stem cell research and school vouchers.

Their record on abortion was abysmal. Of the two National Co-Chairs who had a NARAL (the radical pro-abortion group) tally, one agreed with the extremist group 65 percent of the time and the other agreed 100 percent of the time. Of the 20 members of the National Leadership Committee who had a NARAL scorecard, 17 earned a perfect 100 percent NARAL rating. Thus did we say that "Practicing Catholics have every right to be insulted by Obama's advisory group."

Most members of the Catholic advisory group sent me a letter defending their support for Obama. I wrote back immediately saying that "It is so nice to know that abortion 'presents a profound moral challenge.'" I also asked, "Is infanticide another profound moral challenge?" It did not help the Obama campaign when bishops weighed in chastising pro-abortion Catholic officials in their dioceses.

Matters worsened when Obama's running mate, Senator Joseph Biden, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, began reinterpreting Catholic teaching on abortion. Both tried to play theologian, and both were justly criticized for misrepresenting Catholic teaching on this subject. We were kind enough to send Pelosi a

copy of *Catholicism for Dummies*.

Voters in California passed a resolution on election day that effectively banned gay marriage. Proposition 8, as it was called, led to a series of ugly incidents triggered by radical gays. Besides tying up traffic and vandalizing houses and cars, those who supported the traditional understanding of marriage as being between a man and a woman were targeted with hate speech, and more. African Americans and Latino's were victimized, as were Catholics and Mormons. Swastikas were placed on Catholic churches and the Book of Mormon was set on fire in a Mormon chapel. A white substance, resembling anthrax, was sent to Catholics and Mormons. And gay extremists stormed an evangelical church.

Of all the issues the Catholic League faced in 2008, none was more disturbing than a series of Eucharist desecrations. And no one offended Catholics more than Professor Paul Z. Myers of the University of Minnesota's Morris campus.

After a student from the University of Central Florida was criticized by the Catholic League for walking out of Mass with a consecrated Host—he was protesting a school policy he objected to—Myers took the student's side and pledged to obtain the Eucharist and then desecrate it. On July 24, he made good on his pledge by driving a rusty nail through a Host, posting pictures of it on his Internet blog.

Protests to school officials got nowhere as the desecrations took place off campus. But as we pointed out at the time, had a professor insulted African Americans while working part-time at an off-campus comedy club, there would have been repercussions. The only step taken was a decision to sever the link between the university's website and Myers' blog. The hate mail we received for protesting Myers' behavior was as voluminous as it was sick.

Just as sick was a Myers copy-cat who posted over 40 videos

depicting the desecration of the Eucharist on the Internet site, *YouTube*. After a Catholic League protest, some restrictive measures were taken. If this wasn't enough, a play at Brown University trashed the Eucharist. It was open season on Jesus.

Bill Maher continued his non-stop assault on Catholicism in 2008 by lashing out several times on TV and in movies. After he mocked Transubstantiation early in the year, I said on TV that I would love to step into the ring with him in Madison Square Garden so I could "floor him." The comment was made in jest, but he kept repeating it all year, feigning victim status. His rant against the pope, made just before the Holy Father visited the U.S. in April, included a comment calling Pope Benedict XVI a Nazi. He apologized (sort of) after we went after him.

Maher's film, "Religulous," was a departure from his fixation on Catholicism: he ridiculed several religions. In anticipation of the movie, we listed a long list of his worst offenses. When "Religulous" opened, it was not as bad as we thought it might be, which is why we branded it more absurd than hateful. Absent from the movie was his usual tirade painting all priests as molesters. But in his season finale on "Real Time with Bill Maher," he got right back in the thick of it by smearing priests once again.

We normally don't get drawn into commenting on what happens at a party, but what occurred in January of 2008 was different. An ESPN anchorwoman, Dana Jacobson, got drunk at a "roast" in Atlantic City and went on a tear ripping the University of Notre Dame. She roared from the podium a string of "F" words, one that was aimed at Jesus. Initially, the sports network tried to downplay the incident, and while we never sought to get Jacobson fired—we understood the context—we wanted more than a lame statement. Finally, two apologies were granted and the anchorwoman was suspended. We considered it "case closed."

There was no excuse for what happened at New York's Carnegie Hall. For two nights, "Jerry Springer-The Opera" was featured. Vulgar beyond belief, the play was also blasphemous beyond belief. The crucifixion was mocked, the Eucharist trashed, the Virgin Mary was introduced as a woman who was "raped by an angel," and Jesus was portrayed as a fat, effeminate character; the Christ-figure also had his genitals fondled by Eve. The play ended by saying, "Nothing is wrong and nothing is right" and "there are no absolutes of good and evil." As we said at the time, "This is exactly what the Nazis said in their defense at Nuremberg."

Those in the artistic community are among the most pampered elites in American society. They are pampered because they think that somehow they have a right to public funding—without strings. They consider themselves above reproach and feel they are entitled to bash religious groups with impunity. Especially Roman Catholicism. This kind of arrogance was once again on display when two reviewers for the *New York Times* tried to put a positive face on the infamous Terrence McNally play, "Corpus Christi."

The Catholic League led a major protest against this play when it opened in mid-town Manhattan in 1998. The play, which depicts Jesus having sex with the apostles, was performed in New York again in 2008, but because it was in some no-name place in Greenwich Village, we ignored it this time around. Well, we tried to. Enter the *New York Times*.

One of the reviewers applauded the play as a "reverent spin on the Jesus story." "Reverent"? We said it makes us wonder what the reviewer might say if the play substituted Martin Luther King for Jesus. The other critic took a shot at the 1998 critics of the play (who might that be?), arguing that the protest was a "stark reminder of lingering homophobia." To which we said, "So when anti-Catholic homosexuals like McNally feature Jesus having oral sex with the boys, and Catholics object, it's not McNally who is the bigot—it's those

protesting Catholics.”

The good news is that in our media statement on this subject, we listed the e-mail address of *New York Times* public editor, Clark Hoyt. He did a story on the controversy that, at the very least, made plain our concerns. But it was evident, nonetheless, that the two reporters just didn’t get it.

It is not hard to fathom art students doing something to offend—certain groups, that is—but it is more difficult to understand when they are rewarded for doing so. Such was the case at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Some of what the Arts faculty deemed as representing “major pieces” was a series of paintings by Felipe Baeza. Those paintings showed a crucifix extended from a man’s rectum; others showed rosaries with a penis attached to them. Oh, yes, there was a naked man with an erection and a halo hovering above him. This is considered great art.

At another prestigious institution of higher education, the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), plans were hatched to show footage from an anti-Catholic movie, “Constantine’s Sword,” at a seminar on war and peace. James Carroll, an angry ex-priest, and the author of a book by that name, has spent a good part of his adult life trying to pin the Holocaust on the Catholic Church. We initially got into a scuffle with officials from the USAFA, but it didn’t take too long before our message got through: Carroll has an agenda—he is not a Church historian—and his goal is to poison the minds of the student body into thinking that Catholicism is inherently anti-Semitic. The decision not to show the footage was the right thing to do. It was also a sweet victory for the Catholic League.

The pope that Carroll has been trying to tarnish for decades, Pope Pius XII, was the subject of a Catholic League petition in 2008; we sought his beatification. No one, we have long maintained, did more to help Jews during the Holocaust than

Pius. We amassed over 15,000 signatures in three months and sent them to the Vatican.

When Iranian tyrant Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to New York in the fall, he and his supporters were greeted by a rally outside the Grand Hyatt Hotel. A slate of mostly Christian appeasers hosted a dinner for him, welcoming the anti-Jewish and anti-Christian dictator with open arms. I was happy to join my Jewish friends in condemning the event.

We ended the year with another round of battles over Christmas. It was apparent that a new strategy in the war on Christmas had emerged: instead of concentrating on banning nativity scenes on public property, attempts were made to turn December into Diversity Month. In many parts of the country, every conceivable racial, ethnic, religious and cultural tradition was chosen for celebration, the net effect of which was to dilute the special meaning of Christmas. We properly dubbed this phenomenon "contrived competition."

Every year the issues we face are different, though there is a common denominator: anti-Catholicism. America has other expressions of bigotry, but it has only one that is tolerated year after year by well-educated men and women. When we reach the point where other groups in society have succeeded in getting to—making the bigots pay a public price for their words and deeds, then we will have made the kind of progress that Catholic League founder Virgil Blum, S.J. sought. As this report details, we are not there yet.

Finally, if there was ever any doubt that the Catholic League is making its mark, such concerns were put to rest once and for all when Mary Honeyball attacked us. Honeyball is a member of the English Parliament, one whose comments on Catholicism would have merited inclusion in our annual report had she been a member of the U.S. Congress. No matter, after getting into a spat with Catholics in Parliament, she blew up saying such controversies reminded her of that "dangerous" American group,

the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. Yes, Madam Honeyball, we are a very dangerous organization. But only to those out to sunder Catholicism.

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