


Executive Summary

Offenses against Catholicism tend to emanate from activist  organizations, the artistic community, commercial establishments, government and the media. Here's a sample drawn from each quarter.

In 1997, Oregon was home to one of the most unashamedly anti-Catholic campaigns in recent history. The battle over assisted suicide raged in Oregon with a fury, bringing the anti-Catholic bigots out of the closet in mass. It was not good enough to challenge the Catholic Church's position on the subject, no, the pro-assisted suicide crowd tried to intimidate the Church by questioning its right to speak. When groups like Don't Let Them Shove Their Religion Down Your Throat Committee surface, it's clear that more than honest disagreement is at stake.

Non-profit organizations are given a tax exempt status because they serve the public good. Occasionally, however, some non-profits, especially those that are activist organizations, do things that violate this trust. Such was the case in 1997 when the American Jewish Congress sought to censor Catholic League material from a conference on, of all things, prejudice.

In the spring of 1997, a Long Island group called the Bi-County Conference for Educators held a conference on "Reducing Prejudice: A Matter of Education." It was principally sponsored by the American Jewish Congress Center for Prejudice Reduction and the Suffolk Association for Jewish Educational Services. The Catholic League sought admission to the event but was rejected because the sponsors were allegedly taken aback by the offensive illustrations contained in our annual report.

Amidst the lying that the American Jewish Congress engaged in was a clear bias against the Catholic League. When pressed,

the AJCongress admitted that the league's materials were too pro-life and too pro-voucher to be included (no objections were raised against those organizations that distributed anti-voucher material). They also took offense that we recorded as an example of anti-Catholicism a protest by a Jewish patient in a Catholic hospital demanding that a crucifix be removed from his room (no other organization had its material scrutinized in such a manner). In short, the organizers of a conference on prejudice proved to be guilty of the very crime they claimed to counter.

It is a sad commentary on the artistic community that offenses against Catholicism continue to mount. Never, absolutely never, have we seen one prominent artist, from any part of the country, condemn his fellow artists for bashing Catholics. It would be unthinkable that artists would idly sit back while some mad member of their community lashed out at gays. Catholics, however, are a different story.

When we learned that a suburban Pittsburgh town was hosting an obscene play targeting Catholics, we protested. Fortunately, we also got the person who operates the playhouse to pull the most offensive parts from the play.

The play, "Once a Catholic," was allegedly about the awkwardness that Catholic schoolgirls felt in the 1950s as they discovered their sexuality. But it also included discussions of young men engaging in anal sex and sex with camels, comments on the pope having sex with prostitutes and remarks about the practice of Mary's husband, Joseph, who it was said liked to stir his tea with his penis. These parts, and more, were dropped after we objected (the woman who operated the playhouse was afraid of getting any more bad publicity).

Attacks on Our Blessed Mother are not uncommon in the art world. Last year's worst exhibition of this sort was the Goyer display at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

Robert Gober had a need to express himself by showing a phallic culvert pipe piercing Mary, the purpose of which, he boasted, was to deprive "the Virgin Mary of the womb from which Christ was born." It was defended by the museum's director, the *New York Times* and the *National Catholic Reporter*.

Like most Americans these days, Catholics are generally treated fairly on the job, thus requiring little assistance from the league. But problems still occur, the worst of which occurred at the Silvergate Retirement Residence in the San Diego area.

On Ash Wednesday, a young Catholic Hispanic woman went to work at Silvergate only to be told that she had to remove her ashes from her forehead. When she balked, her supervisor forcibly removed the ashes with a dirty dish towel. Once the Catholic League discovered what happened, we immediately went into action. Thanks to Carl Horst of our San Diego chapter, the offender was disciplined, an apology was granted and workshops on bias against Catholics were instituted for all Silvergate employees.

The teaching profession is no stranger to anti-Catholicism. Indeed, it may even be the worst offender. This is especially true of higher education; Catholic bashing takes place on our nation's campuses with an alacrity that is shocking.

We simply couldn't keep up with all the complaints we'd get if we advertised in student newspapers for students to alert us to anti-Catholic remarks made in the classroom. Professors who bash Catholics always take refuge under the banner of free speech. Yes, we know all about their rights and make no moves to stop them. But we have just as much a right to exercise our freedom of speech by expressing our moral outrage at what is being said. The real "censors," if the truth (another heresy on campus) be told, are those who want to silence the Catholic League from confronting them.

To give one example of Catholic bashing that was shown on TV, consider what happened before the game, and during half-time, of the Stanford-Notre Dame football game. Played in Palo Alto, the Stanford band parodied the Irish famine and staged a mock confrontation between a Catholic cardinal and the devil; the Irish were called "stinking drunks." Had it been Native Americans who were targeted, it is doubtful the slam would have been allowed. The league was pleased, however, that our request for a formal apology from the school, as well as sanctions against the students, was honored by Stanford president Gerhard Casper.

Bigotry that stems from government is particularly odious. In this regard, the year 1997 saw the league unusually active in defending the rights of Catholic prison inmates. For example, the league was called upon to assist inmates who requested a dietary schedule that respected their religious rights: a number of correctional institutions throughout the nation continue to ill-serve Catholic inmates during the Lenten season. With our assistance, these abuses were usually remedied rather quickly.

Catholic inmates also got our help when they asked for equivalent religious services afforded inmates of other faiths. Sometimes the question was whether a correctional institution would hire a Catholic DRE to tend to Catholic prisoners. Whatever the issue, the league's central concern was that discrimination against Catholic inmates did not go unchecked.

The year 1997 was also the year that many members in Congress sought to fight Christian persecution abroad. The Catholic League eagerly supported these measures, most especially the Specter-Wolf bill. We also joined forces with other organizations in objecting to the Most Favored Nation status accorded China: the human rights record in China is so bad (particularly with regard to the treatment of the Catholic clergy) as to make a privileged trade status scandalous.

This annual report lists more offenses committed by the media than any other source in society. What we objected to covered everything from gratuitous asides made on sit-coms to vile, anti-Catholic attacks made by comedians. But if we had to choose the most offensive, blatantly anti-Catholic statement of the year, it would be the edition of Al Goldstein's *Screw* magazine that depicted Mother Teresa in an extremely vulgar and obscene way: an illustration of her made it look like she was having intercourse with a man portrayed as Jesus; a picture of her face was superimposed on the naked body of a woman who sat with her legs spread; and a cartoon of Mother Teresa showed her sitting on a toilet. This isn't just bigotry—it's Satanism.

Far from being anything like that was the ABC show, "Nothing Sacred." Though not anti-Catholic in the usual sense of the term, the show was offensive enough to merit serious attention.

Our objections centered on the manipulative use of the TV medium to promote the scurrilous idea that dissident Catholics are better Catholics than loyal Catholics. Never has TV offered a more politically-correct picture of a priest and never have we seen a more contrived and utterly depressing series about Catholicism. Throughout the series every attempt was made to relegate the teachings of the Magisterium to the bin of opinion while elevating discordant voices in the Church to that of the Gospel.

It was the Catholic League's unmasking of the ideological purpose of the show that angered our critics. We objected, in no uncertain terms, to a show that depicted dissident Catholics as caring and compassionate, painting traditional Catholics as cold-hearted and authoritarian. Bishops, of course, were uniformly treated with disdain. They have to be: they are upholding Church teachings, many of which, we learn, are downright cruel and oppressive.

Once started, the propaganda machine that Disney/ABC created could not be shut down. The show had ratings that were so bad that only a few programs on TV fared worse, the difference being that the other failed shows were axed while "Nothing Sacred" survived. This Disney/ABC policy of preferential treatment—subsidizing loser shows that carry trendy political messages—was done to try and best the Catholic League. However, the reality was that the league's protest resulted in a surge in membership while the show floundered, leaving behind a trail of ill-will, abandoned advertisers and unsigned syndicated contracts.

In 1996, a Sony CD called *O Come All Ye Faithful* was produced by the group Rock for Choice. All the proceeds from the Christmas CD were earmarked for pro-abortion causes. In early 1997, the Catholic League, as well as many other notable Catholic and Protestant organizations, objected to the album as an unjustifiable abuse of our sacred holiday. The response from Sony was of the "sorry-if-you-were-offended-but" type statement. We decided, then, to up the ante.

Instead of simply requesting Sony to retire the CD, we told them exactly what would happen if they did not cooperate. Just before Thanksgiving, on the eve of the Christmas shopping spree, we would place an op-ed page ad in the *New York Times* calling for a boycott of all Sony products. This would be a multidenominational effort, as well as a protest that would be joined by the pro-life community. We would arrange a press conference in front of Sony headquarters and generally pepper the company with bad publicity. Shortly after getting our letter, Sony dropped the album.

There is little question that progress is being made fighting against anti-Catholicism. Never before have we seen faster and more comprehensive responses to our concerns. Indeed, the term Catholic bashing, which we take great pride in mainstreaming into the American lexicon, is now as well-received by the media and the public as any other label. It must also be said

that we can never be sure just how successful we have become: much of what we do is preventative medicine and we have no way of measuring the number of Catholic bashing incidents that might have surfaced were it not for our presence.

Still, there is much work to be done. Few institutions are mocked and ridiculed more than the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, there is no shortage of the number of Christian bookstores that continue to carry anti-Catholic tracts, and there is no religion that has earned the enmity of secularists more than Catholicism. As long as there is a need to combat anti-Catholicism, there will be a need for the Catholic League.

Contrary to what our critics say, what we are doing is quintessentially American—we are flexing our First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and freedom of religion in a manner that is pure apple pie. So it does not matter that over the past year we have been called every name in the book. What matters is that we are resolute in our convictions and determined in our efforts. Most important, we will not be dissuaded by those whose professed allegiance to the First Amendment never seems to include us.

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President